Finding Harmony

by aliciameade

Summary

A confessed regret. A rejection. A conversation that was meant to be private - overheard by the one person Chloe never wanted to hear it. But perhaps - perhaps - it was for the best. Where will the future lead Beca and Chloe? Only time will tell. (The tags might give that away lol #SpoilerAlert.)

Notes

Like everyone else, I was left mentally screaming about Beca and Chloe's unresolved tension after PP2. I had to write it down. It was going to be a one-shot, and then I...I don't know what happened.
After four years, she'd finally had the courage to confess her feelings to Beca. And Beca had turned her back on her. Literally.

Well, if Chloe was honest with herself, she only half confessed. More like one-quarter confessed. Or one-eighth confessed.

She groaned and covered her face with her hands, hiding even more so than she already was – in the less than appealing public restroom at the retreat site.

"Good job, Chloe. Just keep putting your foot in your mouth. That'll really sweep her off her feet."

Her self-pep talks – and self-chastising talks – were usually saved for bedtime when she was alone and no one could hear her. There was very little privacy at the retreat, and this would have to do.

"What did you think was going to happen? You were in a tent with eight other people. Did you really think she was gonna jump your bones then and there? Genius choice, choosing that moment. Really. You're such an idiot, Chloe."

The tears came next. They always came. She had never been happier and more miserable in her life. Just being in the same room with Beca gave her a natural high, the confidence to do anything, to take over the world if that is what she chose to set her mind to. The lone exception was the confidence to do the only thing she wanted: to cradle Beca's face in her hands and kiss her so passionately, so gently, so thoroughly that they would both forget how to keep themselves from floating off into space. When she closed her eyes and imagined it, she could feel it, could almost taste it. It kept her up at night as frequently as it helped her fall asleep contentedly.

But not tonight. Beca had been curled up next to her for hours, so close she caught the scent of the fruity floral shampoo Beca had used that morning, so close that she could feel the warmth of her body, could imagine tracing her fingertips along the length of her neck and the curve of her shoulder. So close, yet so far.

A noise made her jerk her head up, holding her breath. It sounded like a sniffle, but not her own. She waited a moment, and, hearing nothing, wiped the tears off her cheeks. She counted one hundred and twenty seconds of silence and exited the stall as normally as she could just in case she passed someone on their way in, but no one was there.
She headed back to the tent, following the dimly lit path. However, she couldn't crawl back in there and lie down next to Beca. Not now. Not only was she embarrassed by what she had confessed, she knew she wouldn't be able to fall back asleep. The thought of lying next to what she could never have was unbearable. Instead, she picked her way across an expanse of grass to a bench along the edge of the lake, facing east to watch the sun creep up over the horizon. It was early enough that the sky was still dark, but turning slowly from black to navy blue.

"Good morning."

A voice next to her made her jump.

"Sorry," Beca said with a quiet giggle before taking a seat on the bench, sideways facing Chloe.

The sky was tinted orange now, the sun peeking over the line of pine trees around the lake. She must have lost track of time.

"It's okay," Chloe said, working quickly to reassemble her jumbled thoughts, glancing at Beca. "I was kinda lost in the sunrise. Good morning."

"It's beautiful."

Chloe was looking straight ahead over the water, but she could see Beca in her peripheral vision. She wasn't looking at the sunrise. Chloe swallowed the lump in her throat and nodded. "Yeah."

"How long have you been out here? I woke up and you were gone. I waited a while but you didn't come back. I got worried."

Chloe smiled and looked at her hands in her lap, then glanced at Beca again. Gosh, she was adorable in the morning. Her sloppy bedtime ponytail was even sloppier and she still had sleepy eyes.

"I don't know," she said, answering Beca's question. "I woke up and couldn't get back to sleep, so I came out here."
"Was it the ground? I'm pretty sure I had a rock jamming into my shoulder blade all night," Beca said, arching her back and twisting her arm awkwardly to rub a spot on her back.

"No, just a lot on my mind. You want some help with that?"

"Nah, I'll be fine. It's almost time for breakfast. I'm going to hit the showers before they get too busy. Wanna join me?"

Chloe groaned internally. Beca's natural flirtatious nature made being in love with her the best and worst experience. "Sure. Right behind you."

The showers were still relatively quiet, which Chloe was grateful for. She didn't want to have to stand and wait in line with Beca and make small talk. Not that their conversations really qualified as small talk – they always had something to talk about, but she just didn't have it in her this morning.

She took her time in the shower, focusing on resetting her psyche and pulling herself out of the funk she fell into overnight. It wasn't easy, knowing that Beca was in the stall right next to her. She could even see her feet if she bent down a little. Not that she did that on purpose. But she had to shave, and that required she bend down, and if that meant she caught a glimpse of Beca's feet and legs in the shower…she was only human, after all. Besides, they'd seen each other naked in the shower before. What was an innocent little peek now?

Beca was humming, something Chloe didn't recognize - some new song from an underground artist who would be the next big thing in a year, probably. "You're not an idiot, you know."

Chloe froze, mid-swipe up her leg. Her heart was racing. She had been alone in that bathroom, she was sure of it. Or was she? Play dumb. Just play dumb. "Did you say something?" Her voice sounded tight.

"I said you're not an idiot."

"Um, thanks?" Good, keep playing dumb. She turned her face into the shower spray and cranked
up the hot water.

"Chloe."

She froze. The voice was behind her now, not to her right. And it was clear as a bell, not muted through the plastic wall.

"Hey."

She felt a hand on her shoulder and she glanced back. Yep, Beca was in her shower. Naked. *Eyes up, Chloe.* "I am nude," Chloe said, unsure if she wanted to disappear forever or turn around and grab Beca to pull her close. Confidence be damned; she wasn't confident right now.

"What, you can barge in on my shower – with your ex-boyfriend I might add, and when we were strangers – but I can't do the same?"

"Ah ha ha…touché." Chloe forced a laugh. "So…"

"You aren't an idiot."

"Thanks?" Was she moving closer? She was definitely moving closer.

"I'm sorry that I hurt your feelings."

Chloe didn't want to accept what seemed to be true, that Beca had heard her private conversation last night.

"What are you talking about?" She didn't even sound like herself. She felt tears on her cheeks and hoped that the shower disguised them.

"You're right. All the Bellas were in the tent with us. It wasn't the right time to talk about it. I wasn't sure what to do."
Chloe turned back to face the wall and shook her head. This wasn't happening. "I don't understand –"

She could sense her. Beca was right behind her. Chloe felt her heart prepare to leap out of her chest. She saw Beca's hand reach over her shoulder and grab the shampoo bottle out of the caddy on the wall and return it a moment later. Chloe held her breath, unsure of – and praying for – whatever would happen next.

And then it happened. She felt fingers on the back of her head, massaging, scrubbing. Lather dripped down her back. Part of her wanted to ask what was happening. A bigger part of her told that part to shut the hell up and not ask questions.

After what she knew was more than enough time for her hair to get clean – especially considering she had already washed it – she begrudgingly leaned forward to rinse it out. Whatever was going to happen, whether getting out or something else, she didn't need to be covered in shampoo lather.

She felt hands on her waist, fingers gripping gently, just enough to make themselves known. God, they felt good. Then she felt warmth against her back, more than that of the hot water. It ran from her shoulders to her hips…even a little lower than her hips. Arms slid around her waist and she realized the warmth against her back was Beca, pressed against her, and holding her close.

A wave of queasiness swept over her and she bit it back, knees weakening enough to make her throw a hand forward to the wall to steady herself.

"You're right that I wouldn't jump your bones then and there." Beca's chin was on her shoulder. She could feel lips grazing her ear as she spoke. "But I might right now." One of those arms around her waist had shifted. She felt a hand moving along her ribs, inching higher.

Chloe couldn't stop it – a laugh erupted from her mouth. She clapped a hand over it. *Idiot! You're ruining it.* The embrace disappeared and she felt a chill.

"Oh gosh, I'm – I'm sorry. I'm so sorry, I thought –"

Chloe took a breath and found the courage to turn around. Beca was hiding her face in her hands, backing up slowly.
"Stop." Chloe reached out and grabbed her arm before she was out of reach.

Beca slid her free hand to cover both eyes. "I'm a moron, this is so inappropriate of me. I understand if you want me to quit the Bellas. I'll move out of the house. I –"

"Bec. Look at me." She was still laughing.

Beca parted two fingers peek through them.

"You aren't a moron. And apparently, I'm not an idiot. But just…I can't believe I said 'jump my bones.' And I can't believe you repeated it. And now I can't stop laughing."

Beca's grimace of embarrassment was cracking into a smile, and soon they were both laughing.

"Who says 'jump my bones'?" Beca laughed.

Chloe finally managed to find a moment of peace, though Beca was near doubled over in hilarity. A nude Beca. A nude Beca who had joined her in the shower and pressed her nude self against her own nude back.

"Screw it," Chloe said under her breath before taking the two steps forward to get to Beca. One hand under Beca's chin, the other on her lower back, she pulled her upright and kissed her with every ounce of passion she had.

She squeak of surprise that vibrated in Beca's throat was the sexiest sound she'd ever heard. She wanted to find out what other sounds like that she made. But she wasn't aggressive, she didn't do anything more than hold Beca close and kiss her. And if it were the only thing to ever happen between them, it would be enough.

But then she felt arms around her neck and the angle of their kiss change. She was kissing her back. It was her turn to squeak in surprise, but it came out like a moan and before she realized what was happening, she was pinned against a wall and her tongue was tangled with Beca's. She let her hands drop to Beca's hips, jerking her closer before making the bold move to reach down and grab her backside firmly.
Beca broke their kiss just long enough to whisper, "Chloe," before closing the gap again.

Beca's hips were pressing into hers, shifting a little every few seconds. It was a constant reminder that they were both without a stitch of clothing. And also soaking wet. *In more ways than one. At least for me.*

The thought that Beca could be as turned on as she was right now made her arousal spike somehow higher. Her fingers ached to explore and discover. Using the wall for leverage, she spun them, Beca's back to the wall this time. She couldn't decide what to do next. She wanted to touch – no, to taste – every inch that Beca would allow. But to do that, she would have to stop kissing her, and that wasn't acceptable.

Touching would have to do for now. She ran her hands down Beca's arms, to her hips, behind her and as far down the backs of her thighs as she could reach without breaking their kiss, which annoyingly wasn't very far. She trailed them north again, backing up just enough. She didn't hesitate. She covered Beca's left breast with her hand.

Another sound from Beca – this one far, far sexier than the initial squeak. It was somewhere between a moan and a sigh and her back arched off the wall, pressing her chest into Chloe's palm.

Chloe had to break their kiss. She was getting lightheaded from lack of oxygen. She turned away and dropped her mouth to Beca's neck, sucking until she knew she'd left a mark. She felt Beca's hands on her waist, then stomach, and then both breasts. She bit down, trying to keep herself quiet, but she bit too hard and Beca reacted loudly. A little too loudly.

"Get a room! And hurry up, breakfast's ending soon."

They both froze, chests heaving.

"It's Ashley," Chloe whispered. She didn't know what to do. She didn't know if Ashley knew who was in the shower together.

"No, it's Jessica," Beca corrected. Her hands started teasing Chloe's breasts again, and Chloe let her head fall against Beca's shoulder. Their reverie had been broken, but neither wanted it to end.
"What do we do?" Chloe kept her voice low. "We can't both leave from the same stall. Someone will see."

Beca wiggled her shoulder, making Chloe lift her head. She found blue eyes locked on hers.

"You don't want people to know?"


Beca's head tilted, her hands dropping from Chloe's body. "You're right."

Chloe felt cold, instantly abandoned. "Please, it's not like that, I just –"

Beca smiled, and relief washed over Chloe. "It's okay. I agree with you. I'm going to crawl under the partition back to my stall and leave. We will finish this…" she paused to kiss Chloe. "And talk about this, later."

And then she was gone – as quickly and silently as she had appeared. She watched Beca leave her stall from the ankles down, and kick her feet into a pair of flip-flops after pulling on what she guessed was a pair of black Lycra pants.

"Oh hey, Jessica," she heard Beca say a few seconds later, and then silence following the slam of the door.

Chloe fell back against the wall. The only thing that kept her from crumpling to the floor was the threat of fungus from the public shower. Eesh. Hurriedly, she finished showering and got dressed.

She did her best to stay composed as she breezed through the dining hall; it was quite a feat, considering. She spotted Beca sitting with the other girls, Emily talking her ear off like usual. Beca glanced her way and they caught each other staring; Chloe smiled awkwardly and looked away, grabbing a few items from the breakfast options.

She joined the team, settling between Cynthia Rose and Stacie. She caught a bit of a glare from Cynthia Rose for separating them, but it was brief.
"Ooh, Beca, who made a meal out of your neck?"

Chloe stiffened and tried to act natural, taking a bite of her apple. Beca looked at her briefly, just long enough to convey a "What the fuck?"

"What do you mean?" Beca asked, feigning confusion. She felt around her neck as though looking for a wound.

"This is supposed to be Bellas-only, Beca," Stacie said. "If you have Jesse hidden away here somewhere it's only fair that I –"

Jesse. Chloe's stomach churned. She'd forgotten about that tiny detail when they were in the shower. Apparently, Beca had as well. "It was me," Chloe blurted.

All eyes were on her, none more intensely than Beca's.

"I guess I was too rough. I have strong hands."

"Wait, what?" Fat Amy said, clearly confused.

"Do I have bruises or something? I slept on a rock; Chloe was helping get the kink out of my neck."

"You do," Chloe said, grateful they were cooking up a believable explanation. *Yay improvisation!* "I'm sorry about that. I hope you feel better though."

"Yeah. Great," Beca said with a roll of her shoulders and head. "Still have a few kinks you could help me with though."

Chloe hid her blush behind a swig of juice.

"Well...this has been sufficiently awkward," Beca continued. She excused herself to fetch her
sneakers from the tent. She'd meet the group on the grass for their next activity.

Chloe felt an elbow in her side and heard Cynthia Rose's quiet chuckle. She refused to acknowledge it, but she knew at least one person was on to them.

The team-building and harmony-finding exercises Aubrey ran them through were equal parts annoying and fun. The fun aspect came from the fact that as leaders of the group, Chloe was repeatedly paired with Beca, or next to her in the line for whatever project they were assigned to.

It was also a fair part torturous. She knew the dam had broken, and from the way she'd catch Beca looking at her, she knew Beca felt the same way. They needed privacy to talk. And do other things.

The day felt endless, but eventually, the group was filing back into the tent for the night. Beca stepped in before Chloe, holding up the line as she reversed her sleeping bag, disrupting their pattern.

"I'm not sleeping with that rock in my back another night," she explained when those waiting complained about the hold-up. Chloe didn't mind. It meant Beca was bent over in front of her in tiny little running shorts.

Chloe's heart pounded. They would be side by side properly tonight. And it was Beca's doing. Chloe wiggled her way into her sleeping bag, forcing herself to stay on her back, staring at the lantern hanging from the ceiling of the tent.

It felt like ages until Lilly reached up and turned off the lantern. It was dark, though not completely silent as a few girls carried on their conversations, whispering and giggling quietly. Chloe ached to move her hand the two or three inches to her left to have some sort of contact with Beca.

Just as she made the decision to make the move, she felt a hand slide across her abdomen inside her sleeping bag. It was warm, and it was underneath her T-shirt in one smooth move. Her breath caught and she glanced to her left. Beca was on her side facing her, and though it was dark, Chloe's eyes had adjusted enough that she could make out her features. Beca was staring at her intently, lips slightly parted, breathing quickly.

Her heart was racing again, but for slightly different reasons. One of them being that her right
breast was being caressed.

She loved her Bellas but at that moment, she wanted nothing more than for all of them to vanish. Well, she wanted one thing more.

She shifted, doing her best to make it seem like a just-trying-to-get-comfortable shifting as she turned to her side to face Beca. She could see well now, and Beca was chewing on her lower lip, glancing back and forth between Chloe's eyes and mouth. Chloe wanted to climb on top of her and kiss her breathless, but it was impossible. At least tonight.

Instead, she snaked her right arm out from her sleeping bag and into Beca's, grateful that Beca flipping her bag had aligned the two zippers. She'd done that on purpose, no doubt, and Chloe was ever grateful. Her hand landed on Beca's hip, and she simply squeezed it, hoping to convey her desire. The tug on her breast told her 'message received.'

She had to bite back a groan, covering it with a cough and clearing of her throat. Beca's serious face broke into a grin, clearly pleased with the reaction.

Two could play that game.

Chloe moved her hand along the curve of Beca's back, not pausing along the way until her hand was on the back of Beca's bare thigh, fingers wedged firmly between her thighs, inches from unexplored territory.

It was Beca's turn to mask her reaction, opting for a fake yawn, which was accompanied by a shifting of her legs.

Chloe hesitated. There was a line to be crossed, and there was no going back once that happened. Granted, an argument could be made that they crossed that line when they were grinding naked against each other in the shower, but one graze against that sacred spot and everything would change.

Beca nodded and shifted her hips, seemingly reading Chloe's mind. The hand caressing her breasts disappeared and she felt it grasp her wrist and guide her hand, and the line was crossed. The thin nylon of Beca's shorts still separated them, but it didn't mute the warmth.
Chloe couldn't believe they were doing this. It wasn't how she had imagined it happening, and it wasn't how she wanted their first time to be, as thrilling as it was.

There was nothing wrong with some teasing, though, she thought as Beca's hand returned to her chest and grew bolder with its caresses, pinches, and overall journey.

She wiggled her fingers against Beca and watched her turn her face into her pillow, muffling the deep sigh she released. The excitement coursing through her veins made Chloe start to reconsider her earlier thought that they should just have a little fun teasing each other. The heat and hint of moisture she felt through Beca's shorts were quickly convincing her otherwise. A few calculated moves of her fingers and there could be nothing in her way.

Beca's hand was slowing down, coming to a stop just as fingertips slipped beneath the elastic band of Chloe's flannel pants. Chloe barely noticed. She was focused on Beca and driving her slowly crazy. She pressed and tickled and squeezed and stroked, all agonizingly slowly. The cheap nylon of their sleeping bags moving around would be audible if she moved too much. She had to avoid quickness or a rhythm or it would be obvious something was going on.

Beca was biting her pillow now, and staring at Chloe with so much intensity she felt as though she might crack in half.

Suddenly Beca's eyes snapped closed and Chloe felt her stiffen.

No. This wasn't how she wanted this to happen. She pulled her hand away from Beca, eliciting a gasp from the loss of contact. Beca's eyes were on her again, fiery, desperate. She had clearly been on the edge of climax before Chloe ripped it away from her.

"I'm sorry," Chloe mouthed silently.

Beca was breathing hard, taking deep breaths. Chloe rested her hand on Beca's hip, watching her calm down.

A few seconds later, Beca nodded, releasing a long, slow breath through pursed lips. She turned to her other side, backing up slightly, just enough for Chloe to get the hint and scoot forward a little, wrapping an arm around Beca's waist. She leaned forward and grazed her lips along Beca's neck, not risking a full kiss and the telltale smacking sound that would come with it. She trailed her lips to Beca's ear, nibbling it playfully.
"Not like this," she breathed, barely audible.

Beca nodded and hugged the arm around her waist.

Chloe didn't sleep a wink.

Another day passed – more activities and challenges, but none more challenging than overcoming the urge to pull Beca behind a tree and finish what they had started.

Thankfully, they were on the bus back to Barden before dinnertime. The retreat really had been helpful, and the group felt more cohesive than they had in a year. Chloe even managed to forget about the shower and the tent and jumping Beca's bones and simply have fun with her sisters as they talked excitedly about the upcoming World competition.

It wasn't until they were back at the house and she was sitting across from her in Beca's room legitimately discussing choreography for the competition that a pause in conversation made her realize they were finally alone. She paused and stared at Beca, waiting to catch her eye. When she did, the look on Beca's face reflected the same realization.

"We should talk," Beca said, setting aside her MacBook on her nightstand.

"Okay," Chloe said. She was suddenly nervous. "I should go first." She took a breath to start, but Beca interrupted her, leaving the bed. She watched her close her bedroom door. And lock it. With a smile.

"Let me go first," Beca said, rejoining Chloe on the bed, noticeably closer this time. They were facing each other, both sitting with their legs crossed. Chloe wanted to grab her and pull her into her lap. Instead, she folded her hands together and smiled.

"How long have you felt this way?"
Chloe shifted her gaze to the hands in her lap, a little embarrassed. She shrugged.

"How long?"

"Pretty much since we first met."

"Since you walked in on me in the shower?"

Chloe laughed. That moment had become an entertaining memory for both of them. She realized now how ridiculous it had been, but she knew talent when she heard it, and she wasn't going to let that voice slip away.

"Not exactly that moment, no. It was probably when you called Aubrey out on her refusal to change the setlist. No one would stand up to her. Even me. But you did. You weren't intimidated by her."

"I'm intimidated by you," Beca blurted.

Chloe was taken aback. "By me? Why would you be intimidated by me?"

"Because you were the leader of this group when I was still in high school. You have an amazing voice. All the girls look up to you. And you're really confident. I wish I had just half of your confidence."

"You don't need my confidence. I'm not always so sure of myself, you know. And you have drive. Motivation. You've been talking about being a big-time record producer since we met. I've been in college forever because I don't know what I want to do with my life. Here, I'm respected. Out there…I'm no one."

Beca was staring at her, eyes glistening with tears. "Chloe…"

"I'm sorry," Chloe said, shaking her head. "I didn't mean to open up this can of worms." She really didn't. She wanted this to be a pin-Beca-down-and-make-her-moan conversation, not a make-each-other-cry-from-honesty conversation.
"Don't be sorry," Beca said earnestly. "Please, don't ever apologize for telling me what you're feeling." She was tugging on Chloe's ankles, urging her to uncross her legs. A moment later, Beca was in her lap, holding Chloe's face between her hands.

Chloe nodded. She didn't realize she was crying until Beca was wiping her tears away. A moment later, she was being kissed, gently, so gently. Her cheeks, her lips, her chin, her neck, her ears, all peppered with feather-soft kisses. She let her eyes fall closed, allowing her other senses to heighten. Beca smelled amazing, that same fruity floral scent that followed her everywhere. Her breath was light against Chloe's skin. A tender kiss on her neck was growing a little firmer, warmer, wetter.

"You're not no one," Beca mumbled against her neck.

Chloe couldn't help but wrap her arms around Beca's waist, pulling her closer.

Beca's lips were at her ear again. "You're everything to me."

Chloe inhaled sharply. She was flooded with emotions from both ends of the spectrum. Torn between remaining frozen and taking action, she simply held onto Beca, pulling her closer, impossibly closer until she felt Beca leaning away. She leaned back until Chloe had no choice but to move with her and she was on top of her, hips settling comfortably between Beca's legs.

There was no urgency. Oh, there was desire. She was flooded with desire. But they were alone and open and honest and they didn't have to be sneaky or desperate or clumsy. She felt Beca cross her ankles behind her, playfully kicking into Chloe's backside, making her rock forward a little.

"I've been waiting for this moment for four years," Chloe said with a smile, brushing a lock of hair away from Beca's face.

"So have I," Beca replied. That fiery look of desire Chloe had seen in the tent was back in Beca's eyes. "Please…"

Chloe didn't need to be asked twice. Or even once – she cut off Beca's question with a kiss, the deep, passionate kiss she had been dreaming of giving her for what felt like a lifetime. She felt Beca's hands tangle in her hair, felt her ankles pressing against her, felt Beca pressing up against her. Their tongues teased and tangled, and Chloe's hand had made its way under Beca's shirt.
without Chloe even realizing. She didn't notice until a moan escaped from Beca between their kisses.

Chloe tilted her hips into Beca more firmly, the lack of direct contact both maddening and exhilarating. Beca's hands were on her back, grasping at the fabric of Chloe's shirt. Chloe twisted and lifted herself just enough to let her pull it over her head and off, immediately returning to the kisses that she was certain would lead to a blissful death.

"Chloe," Beca said, voice nearly a whimper.

Chloe pulled back, just enough so they could look at each other. Her hips were still moving, though, driving their arousal higher. "Hi," Chloe said with a smile.

"Hi," Beca giggled. She bit her lip and groaned a moment later, Chloe apparently hitting a spot just right – or coming painfully close to hitting it. "I…please…"

Chloe grinned. Beca was a writhing, horny mess beneath her and it was because she wanted this as much as Chloe did. "Can I touch you?"

The breath Beca released was somewhere between a laugh and a sob. "Pretty sure I'm going to die if you don't," Beca said, her hands working the buttons on her own shirt, quickly undoing them all, continuing straight down to the button and zipper on her jeans and reaching to undo Chloe's jeans, all in one hurried motion.

Chloe kissed her again, blindly reaching for her. Her hand found Beca's breast with ease, teasing the hardened tip between her fingers. Beca's hands were everywhere, her hair to her stomach to her back where she felt her wrestle with the clasp of her bra until it came free. Beca's hands were on her immediately. The sensation made Chloe's hips jerk harder than they were already moving, and Beca moaned.

*Enough teasing.* The urgency was back. She needed to feel Beca, to bring her to the brink and give her the ultimate pleasure. Abruptly, she pulled away, sitting back on her knees. Beca stared up at her, chest heaving, hair a mess, shirt open and askew. Beca pulled Chloe's loose bra down her arms. Chloe hadn't even realized it wasn't already gone. A moment later, Beca tossed her own shirt to the floor.

She grabbed the waistband of Beca's jeans and pulled, working them down easily with Beca's help.
"Wait," Beca said, stopping Chloe from lying down again. She sat up, her hands down the sides of Chloe's jeans, pushing them down.

Chloe got distracted, though. Beca's lips had found her breast.

"Take them off," Beca said a few seconds later. She'd backed off and was leaning back, supporting herself with her arms.

Chloe came-to and moved quickly, eager to get out of the restricting denim. She slid off the bed to push her jeans to the floor, taking her underwear with them in the process. She reached for Beca's next, whipping them down her legs. She climbed back onto the bed, crawling over Beca to settle next to her, legs intertwined, kissing, nipping at each other's lips, hands roaming over arms and legs and breasts.

Chloe knew they were avoiding the inevitable, drawing out the pleasure as long as possible. It was becoming painful to wait. Every inch of her body was throbbing. A glance at the clock next to the bed told her they'd been in bed for nearly two hours. No wonder she felt moments away from spontaneous combustion.

She trailed her fingers along Beca's inner thigh, and this time she didn't avoid it, and she didn't hesitate. Beca gasped and tilted her hips, pressing herself against Chloe's hand.

Chloe gasped, too. She'd waited so long to feel Beca under her fingers, moaning, writhing, wet with arousal. And it was actually happening.

A hand on the back of her head pulled her into a kiss and another hand on the back of her own, pressing, guiding, until she was inside, surrounded by warmth. Beca whimpered against her mouth and whispered her request, words Chloe had only imagined her saying during her most private fantasies.

"Anything you want," she answered, kissing her hard. "Anything you want."

She moved faster, doing everything she could to give Beca everything she wanted.
"Please don't stop," Beca pleaded, as though Chloe would ever stop – could ever stop.

Chloe shook her head, unable to speak as she watched Beca come undone. Her mouth fell open and she shuddered again and again before slowly calming.

Chloe collapsed next to her, arm giving out from holding herself up so long. They were both breathing hard.

"Oh my God," Beca said after a few minutes, her voice raw and shaky. "Chloe, I…that was…"

Chloe chuckled. A little flattery was always nice.

"Wow," Beca finished. She had turned a little to the side so they could see each other.

Chloe smiled. "I love you."

Beca's face froze, and it took Chloe a moment to realize what she had said. She hadn't meant to say it. It just came out. Fear washed over her, the heat coursing through her veins replaced with ice water. She felt tears welling in her eyes.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean…I don't know why…Bec, I'm sorry, I –"

Her frantic apologies were cut off by a kiss and she found herself on her back, Beca hovering over her on all fours, kissing her hard enough to press her head deep into the pillow. A hand between her legs made her groan. The heat was back tenfold. Fear of rejection was pushed to the back of her mind by the intense pleasure Beca was giving her.

It snuck up on her, and she cried out, thighs closing against Beca's hand, trapping her there as waves of ecstasy pulsed through her.

She opened her eyes a few minutes later. Beca was curled up with her, head on her chest, one leg wedged between Chloe's, arms tucked under Chloe's neck and shoulder. It was cuddling to the nth degree. She wrapped her arms around Beca; they felt heavy, full of lead.
The movement made Beca lift her head, and she propped herself up a little, having to un-cuddle a bit in the process. She was smiling. And her hair was an utter mess. And her lips were swollen from being kissed for two solid hours. She was absolutely beautiful.

Beca waggled her eyebrows at Chloe. "So, you were saying?"

Chloe groaned, covering her face with a hand. "If you could pretend I didn't say anything, that'd be great."

Beca tugged at her wrist to uncover her eyes. "What if I don't want to pretend?"

Chloe shrugged. She was trying her hardest to be nonchalant, but she was dying inside. This was either the best or worst moment of her life.

"Chloe, look at me."

Chloe tilted her chin so she could see her.

"I love you, too."

Chloe released the breath she was holding and felt the warmth of tears running down her temples to be absorbed by the pillow.

"Are you crying?" She felt Beca move and then she was looking straight up into those beautiful blue eyes. "Honey, why are you crying?"

That wasn't helping. She shook her head. She felt laughter bubbling inside her, tugging at the corners of her mouth until she was grinning, and giggling, and crying.

"Stop crying!" Beca laughed, catching the giggles. She poked at Chloe's stomach, making Chloe laugh even harder.
"I'm not crying!" Chloe lied. She was nearly sobbing, the pent-up emotions of four years finally allowed to be released. She was blissfully happy.

"Hey, you guys it's time for dinn-whoaaaa hello!"

Chloe sat up enough to see Fat Amy shield her eyes and spin around. Beca was scrambling for cover, which involved rolling off the bed to hide between it and the wall, pulling at the edge of the blanket to try to cover herself. Chloe clawed at the same blankets, desperately trying to get under them.

"I thought you locked the door!" Chloe whispered harshly, blankets up to her neck.

"Yeah, about that," Fat Amy answered. "You kinda didn't."

"Beca!"

"I did! I thought I did! Oh my God. Fat Amy, you can't just come in without knocking! The door is closed for a reason!"

"Uh, yeah, I did knock, but you guys were laughing and I guess you didn't hear me so I came in. Kinda regretting that decision now."

"Why are you still here?" Beca said, borderline screaming in her embarrassment and horror.

"Right, I'll see you guys later."

She finally left, but not before coming back up to add, "It's about time you two got it on. I don't think the rest of the Bellas could handle the sexual tension much longer." She winked and left, closing the door behind her.

Chloe fell back in bed, pulling the covers up completely over her head. Mortified. She was absolutely mortified. Beca showed up a second later, climbing into bed and under the covers and on top of Chloe. Chloe was thankful for one more layer to hide beneath.
"Why didn't you lock the door?" she groaned.

"I did! I know I did."

"Then how did she get in here?"

"Well, she has a key. It's her room, too."

Chloe pulled Beca down to her, hiding her face against her neck. "What do we do now?" she asked, voice muffled.

"Well, we can't stay here forever. As much as I wouldn't mind it," Beca said, kissing the top of Chloe's head. "The longer we wait, the worse it's going to get, so let's just go out and get this over with."

Chloe nodded stiffly and felt Beca slide out of her embrace. She sat up, letting Beca find the clothes they'd strewn about the room before they redressed in silence.

"Not exactly the afterglow I'd hoped for," Beca finally cracked, making Chloe smile as she got dressed. Beca was retying her hair. "Do I look presentable?"

"You look incredible," Chloe answered honestly. It was refreshing to feel free to tell Beca exactly what she thought. "What about me?"

"Your hair looks like you've been having sex for a few hours. But you're otherwise fine."

Chloe's hands went to her hair. Her curls were unruly enough, let alone after rolling around in bed having what was probably the most passionate sex she's ever had. "Do you have another tie? I'll just pull it back."

Beca pointed at the nightstand. "In the drawer."
Chloe pulled the drawer open and pulled out a stretchy band. There was a crushed purple velvet bag in the drawer as well. She recognized the logo.

"What do we have here?" she asked with a smile, holding the bag up by one of its drawstrings.

"Give me that," Beca said quickly, swiping it from her hand and stuffing it back into the drawer.

Chloe grinned at her. Beca had a vibrator – and a fancy one. She knew that's what it was because she had the same purple velvet bag in her own nightstand.

"A woman has needs," Beca said indignantly, tugging at her shirt to straighten it.

"Don't I know it," Chloe replied, quickly tying back her hair into a high ponytail. She hadn't forgotten about the inevitable conversation to be had with the Bellas, but at least she had a few moments of humor to hold onto.

"We should probably go," Beca said, turning for the door. She paused with her hand on the doorknob. "We're just going to tell them the truth, right?"

Chloe nodded, joining Beca at the door. She kept her hand against the door so Beca couldn't open it and kissed her. "Right."

Beca tugged the door open a few seconds later. They were greeted with a chorus of whistles and hoots and cheers.

"So now what?" Chloe asked five minutes later between bites of spaghetti.

The big revelation hadn't been more than Fat Amy making a crude joke and everyone agreeing that it was 'about time.'

Beca was next to her on one of the couches, her legs across Chloe's lap. It was their usual dinner position, but it was different, somehow more intimate now that they had confessed how they felt. It
was nice to be so close, to let her hand rest on Beca's knee and know it meant something more.

"Well…I need to talk to Jesse."

Chloe dropped her fork to her plate. She'd suddenly lost her appetite. It had been easy to forget that Beca had a boyfriend when Beca was biting her nipple. It was much less easy to forget during moments like this. Beca had been with Jesse for as long as Chloe had been in love with her. She knew it wasn't going to be a simple conversation.

She only hoped it was a conversation that ended in her favor.
Days passed. Chloe and Beca had put together a routine that the Bellas knew would bring home the title home to the USA. Chloe was scrambling for extra credit in Russian Lit.

Beca still had a boyfriend.

Sure, Beca had reciprocated her feelings. Twice in the last four days, in fact. If Chloe had her way, it would have been eight times in the last four days, but life kept getting in the way.

But really, she understood, and she couldn't be angry with Beca about it if she tried. Who was she to assume Beca would choose her over Jesse? Who was she to even ask her to make that choice? She didn't ask, or suggest, or even flirt anymore – and she'd been flirting with her for years. But if Beca showed up in her bed in the middle of the night, it would be rude to turn her away, right?

Chloe sighed and snapped her laptop closed, finished pouring her emotions into her digital journal for the day.

"Hey, Chlo!"

Chloe smiled. Right on cue! She spun in her desk chair to see Beca standing in the doorway of her room. "Hey," Chloe said with a wave. God, she's so cute with her whole femme punk emo thing.

"We're ordering pizza. What's your vote on toppings? Speak now or forever hold your peace. Mushrooms and green peppers?"

"Yep!"

"Do I know you, or do I know you?" Beca said, proud of herself.

"I've ordered those toppings on my pizza once a week every week for four years. Congratulations on finally remembering."
"Oh, fuck off," Beca said with a smile. Chloe saw her glance at the open suitcase and half-filled boxes on her bed. "You're just now packing?"

"I'm trying. I keep feeling like I'm forgetting something. It's hard figuring out what to pack for the trip and what to pack to move."

"Well, make sure you have enough clothes and your toothbrush and if you do forget anything, I'm sure one of us will have it."

"Yeah, true."

"Or, you know, there are probably stores in Copenhagen."

Chloe made a face. "Smart ass."

"Yeah but you love my ass, so."

"You know I do." Chloe caught herself. "I'm sorry."

Beca glanced over her shoulder and stepped into Chloe's room, closing the door behind her. "No, I'm sorry. I'm stringing you along, and it's really uncool of me."

Chloe huffed. That was an understatement. "It's okay. I get it."

Beca settled into her lap, one arm draped around Chloe's shoulders, the other toying with a button on Chloe's shirt.

"I can't help flirting with you, you know. You're just so attractive."

Chloe groaned, letting her head fall forward against Beca's shoulder. "Not fair."
"I know. I'm sorry." Beca might be apologizing, but she was also sliding her hand into Chloe's shirt, fingertips grazing the swell of her breast. "Let me make it up to you."

"Please stop," Chloe managed through gritted teeth. They were perhaps the most difficult words she had ever spoken.

Beca paused, and then withdrew her hand. Chloe felt her nod and she slipped off her lap. "You're right. I'm not making this any easier on you. I'm going to talk to Jesse soon. I promise. Between work and rehearsal and packing and the trip, I've seen him once, and it was at Burger King with Benji. Not really prime locale for breaking up."

Chloe's breath caught. Beca planned to break up with Jesse. She hadn't allowed herself to consider it as a possibility, in case that wasn't the decision, nor had Beca given her any clues as to her plans. "You're dumping him?"

"I thought that was obvious."

"No, not particularly," Chloe answered, pushing her hair back and holding it there, needing the tension against her scalp. "We didn't talk about it."

"Chloe. I love you. I want to be with you."

The words still gave her butterflies. They had only exchanged I love yous one other time since the first time. Chloe exhaled, at least three tons being lifted from her shoulders. "You don't know how happy that makes me."

Beca smiled, one of her cute lopsided smiles. "I'm supposed to see him on Wednesday."

Chloe nodded. Wednesday was two days away. Graduation was Sunday. They'd be on a plane to Denmark on Tuesday. Their new life – together – was just days away. She could wait two more days. What's two days after waiting four years? She tried not to appear overly joyful. She liked Jesse – after all, if Beca cared for him, he must be a decent guy. She didn't want him to get hurt, and it didn't feel right to celebrate his impending heartbreak.

But she wouldn't be losing any sleep over it.
"Come on," Beca said, tugging on Chloe's hand to get her on her feet. "Let's put in our pizza requests before we're too late."

On Wednesday, Chloe was nothing but a bundle of nerves. She checked her iPhone every few minutes in case Beca texted or called. While she sat on the porch, waiting for Beca to come home. It was nearly 10:00 PM and Beca had left to meet with Jesse for lunch. Jealousy gnawed at her stomach, worsened by the fact that she had been too nervous to eat all day. Flashes of what might have happened – be happening – played out in her mind.

An angry fight.

Or a tearful conversation.

Or one last night together.

Or the changing of a decision.

She heard the hissing brakes of the 10:04 bus down the street, out of sight, and she held her breath, just as she had done every twenty-five minutes for the last nine buses, hoping to see Beca coming up the sidewalk.

She could hear her before she could see her – the buckles on her boots and the bracelets on her wrist had come to have a Pavlov effect of sorts on Chloe. She stood up and then sat down, not wanting to seem too eager. Beca's head was down; she couldn't get a read on her emotions. She breezed right past her, digging for her keys in her bag.

"Hi," Chloe said quietly, doing her best to seem nonchalant, as though she hadn't been waiting for her to come home for an entire day.

Beca looked up, startled, obviously having zero idea that someone else was outside. Realizing it was Chloe, she dropped her bag in front of the door and made a beeline for her, climbing into her lap and pulling Chloe into a deep, desperate kiss.
Chloe held onto her for dear life.

"I need you," Beca said between frenzied kisses.

Chloe stole a glance at Beca. She was crying. Her eyeliner was smeared, mascara trails down her cheeks. Lust be damned – Beca was her best friend, and her best friend was upset.

Chloe threaded her fingers through Beca's hair, kissing her resolutely before pulling her back.

"What happened?" Chloe asked, working to ignore the fire burning inside her.

"It's over," Beca said, voice thick with tears.

Chloe had never considered the possibility that this situation could hurt Beca. But of course, it could – ending a four-year relationship wouldn't be easy regardless of circumstance. "I'm sorry." She was, she really was…at least a little bit. "Come on, it's getting late. I'll tuck you in."

Beca nodded and slid off Chloe's lap, wiping tears off her face. Chloe followed her into the house and up to her room, holding up a hand along the way to signal the girls to keep their mouths shut at the sight of their distraught friend.

Beca's messenger bag slid off her shoulder in the middle of her doorway. Chloe picked it up and set it on her chair. Beca plopped on her bed, tugging weakly at her boots. They wouldn't budge.

"Fucking boots, mother fucking…"

"Let me," Chloe interrupted, sliding her boots off one at a time.

"Thanks," Beca said flatly. She pushed herself to her feet, cursing under her breath and disappeared to the bathroom.
Chloe waited on Beca's bed after laying out shorts and a tank top for her and turning down the covers. She felt more than a little awkward. She was helping her best friend deal with her break-up so she could be her girlfriend. *Eesh.*

Not at all complicated.

A glance at her phone made her worry; Beca had been gone almost half an hour. But as soon as she stood up to go check on her, Beca re-appeared. The raccoon eyes and mascara rivers were gone – she looked as cute as always, but sadness muted her usual sparkle.

The pajamas laid out for her caught her eye and a hint of a smile graced her lips. "Thanks," Beca said. She started undressing and Chloe forced herself to avert her eyes, at least for a few seconds.

Beca climbed into bed a few seconds later and Chloe sat on the edge to tuck the covers around her. "How are you feeling?"

"Like an asshole," Beca answered. She wiggled her arm out from under the blanket and took Chloe's hand.

"I'm sorry I'm putting you through this," Chloe said honestly.

"You're not putting me through anything." Beca was playing with Chloe's fingers.

Chloe smiled, wanting to test the mood waters a little bit. "This situation is a little fucked up."

Beca snorted. "Seriously."

"You gonna be okay tonight?"

"Yeah," Beca said after a deep sigh. "I love you, you know."

Chloe released a shaky breath. She wasn't going to get tired of hearing that anytime soon. "I love you, too."
"Will you sleep with me tonight?"

Chloe raised an eyebrow. "Really?"

Beca squeezed her hand. "I mean just sleep. I need my best friend tonight."

"You got it, buddy." Chloe patted the bump under the covers, aiming for the general vicinity of Beca's knees to be as platonic as possible. "I'm going to go wash up and I'll be back, okay?"

"Okay."

Chloe was back a few minutes later, climbing in next to Beca. Amy was already in bed when she had returned.

"Okay, you two. No hanky panky while I'm in the room."

"Don't worry," Chloe said.

"Hey, Beca – jokes aside. You okay?"

"I'll be fine. Thanks, Amy. Wanna hit the lights?"

The room darkened, and a moment later Chloe felt Beca turn over and snuggle into her. She wrapped an arm around the girl's slight frame and held her close, doing her best to ignore the dull throbbing need.

Chloe would be lying if she said she wasn't disappointed that Beca didn't immediately dive into a relationship with her, or at least make out a little (not since the frenzied emotional kissing on the porch, but that didn't count). She understood, of course – it couldn't be easy to move on so quickly after being with the same person for so long. Being rational about it didn't make it any easier to
swallow, though.

She thought maybe over the weekend during the graduation festivities they would talk, or find time to fool around, but they were both busy with friends and family and last minute packing.

Tuesday was nothing but excitement. The Bellas were on their way to Copenhagen to compete in a World championship - like how fucking cool is that? Chloe had all but put her in-limbo relationship with Beca out of her mind.

She plopped into her seat on the jumbo jet – she and Beca had played rock-paper-scissors for the window seat and Chloe had won. She promised to trade halfway through the flight, though. Beca settled next to her, headphones hanging around her neck. She said she was looking forward to the uninterrupted time on the flight to work; her boss had promised to pass along the latest track she and Emily were working on together – to Katy Perry. It was, as Beca had called it, "A really big fucking deal." Chloe didn't disagree. She couldn't be more proud of her best friend…girlfriend…friend…whatever she was.

She had been reading, lost in her book and the music on her iPod – one of Beca's mixes that she had made specifically for Chloe last year – and she was startled when Beca flipped up the armrest between them and then disappeared toward the back of the plane. She returned a few minutes later with a couple flimsy airplane pillows and blankets.

Chloe pulled out an earbud. "Sleepy?"

"Something like that," Beca said, tossing a pillow and blanket at Chloe.

"Thanks," Chloe said with a laugh, tucking the pillow between her shoulder and the wall. She unfurled the blanket over her lap and went back to her book as Beca got situated. It was nice, not having the armrest between them anymore. Much roomier, and cozier.

Not a minute after she was situated, Chloe felt Beca's hand on her thigh under her blanket. She glanced to the right to see Beca staring at her playfully. It had been a few days since she'd seen that sparkle in her eyes and she had been anxiously waiting to see it again, but a plane over the Atlantic was the last place she expected it to resurface. Or maybe Beca had a thing for tempting fate. The majority of their intimate moments had been in less than private situations. The thought that Beca really might have a kink she wanted Chloe's 'help' with made her blood rush straight to her groin.

She raised an eyebrow at Beca and pulled her earbuds out again. "Yeah. It's intriguing. It's about these two people. You never quite know where they're at in their relationship. Lots of ups and downs, kind of a roller coaster ride. Not quite sure yet how it's going to end." Beca's hand definitely had a destination, and her breath caught when it was pressing between her legs.

"No? I hope it has a happy ending."

"Mm. Me, too," Chloe said, shifting in her seat. She turned her eyes back to her book, ready to play the game.

Beca sat back as well and opened her copy of SkyMall magazine.

It took approximately two minutes for Chloe to get hot enough to feel perspiration on her brow. She reached up and cracked open the air vent above her seat, glancing at Beca, who was smirking. She was teasing her, pushing, prodding, squeezing – as much as she could manage with Chloe's sweatpants in the way.

She turned to Beca and nodded at her lap. "I'm not trying to be demanding, but I'm going to be wearing these a few more hours and I'd prefer they're not wet the rest of this flight," she said, just loud enough to be heard.

Beca glanced at her, smirk growing until she bit her lip to stop it.

A moment later, Chloe gasped – Beca slipped her hand right down her sweats and was grazing her fingers over the flimsy piece of lace that did absolutely nothing to hide how turned on she was.

She had to put her book down – fake reading was going to be impossible. Maybe fake sleeping. She pulled the pillow up and tucked it between her ear and the plane, twisting her hips a little in the process, opening herself to Beca. She felt the tug of her panties being pulled to the side and then there was nothing between her aching heat and Beca's hand. She had nimble fingers that knew how to play Chloe like a piano, hitting all the right notes.

Chloe was panting, the heat being coaxed higher with every passing minute, but oh so slowly. It was all she could do to not kick her seat back and grind her hips and find a little of the friction
Beca was denying her. She was being so gentle; it was almost like she was doing it absentmindedly, as one would play with sand on a beach. As torturous as it was, she wasn't in a hurry for it to end. Sure, she wanted the intense pleasure that was being dangled juuuuuust out of her reach, but this was a different level of intense pleasure. Perhaps a higher one.

Then Beca was inside her, teasing, exploring lazily.

A moan escaped Chloe's lips and she felt Beca stop, a reminder that they were far from alone. She bit her lip and twitched her hips, a subtle hint to get on with it. And then Beca zeroed in on it, the swollen nerves begging for proper attention. She was being quick now, and finally using sweet, sweet pressure.

Chloe could feel it building – hell, it had been building for days.

"Flight attendant coming," Beca said.

Chloe knew what that meant – that meant to hurry the fuck up or Beca would have to pause what was becoming super obvious movements to anyone who would happen to look their way for more than a second.

*Jesus…fuck!* Chloe bit the back of her hand and turned her head into her pillow as she came, fighting the involuntary spasms to keep from kicking the seat in front of her.

"She'll take a Diet Coke. Regular for me…no, she's fine."

Chloe froze, waiting for a sign that it was safe to open her eyes or even move. She had no idea what physical state she was in. A few seconds later, Beca squeezed her thigh and withdrew her hand.

"Wakey wakey."

Chloe pried her eyes open, surprised at how dark the cabin had become. She sat up slowly, hyper-aware of how absolutely soaked she was. She turned to look at Beca, who was smiling at her with a finger between her teeth. She closed her lips around it and sucked, and Chloe nearly came again.
"Come on," Beca said a moment later, leaning forward to kiss her, just a quick peck. "Let's use the bathroom before the carts block the aisles." She flipped up their trays, grabbed her backpack from under the seat in front of her and headed to the back of the plane.

Chloe felt like she was moving in slow motion. She pushed the blanket to her feet and slid out of her seat. Her legs felt like jelly. She followed Beca down the aisle, her senses coming back to her as she walked. She was paranoid that every person she passed knew exactly what had just happened.

"Ladies first," Beca said, stepping aside to let Chloe pass. She handed Chloe her backpack in the process. "Middle zipper."

"Huh?" Chloe asked, but Beca just smiled. Chloe stepped into the tiny closet of a bathroom and set the backpack on the sink to unzip it. She laughed and pulled out a plastic bag with DRY UNDIES written on it in Sharpie. She opened it, and sure enough, a few pairs of her underwear were in there, along with a pair of her yoga pants.

"Sneaky," she said to herself.

She took care of things, opting to just trash the panties she'd been wearing. She'd noticed there was underwear in that bag that wasn't hers, and she wondered if Beca had also planned for Chloe to pay her back.

Finished, she stepped out, surprised that Beca wasn't waiting. She must have stepped into one of the other restrooms. She made her way back to their seats and took a moment to fold the blankets and tuck them on the floor with her own carry-on bag. She slid Beca's into place and took a seat.

Beca showed up a few seconds later, just in time for the flight attendants to get to their row with beverages and reheated trays of questionable food.

"So, wow," Chloe said once the attendants had moved on.

"Hmm?" Beca hummed, an innocent tone in her voice.

"You're dirty."
Beca tilted her head, as though considering the statement. "I told you I had a few kinks you could help me with."

Chloe laughed, having had the exact same thought earlier.

"What else aren't you telling me, Beca Mitchell?"

Beca shrugged as she picked at her dinner. "Guess you'll have to wait and see."

Chloe felt herself flush. "Are we talking, like, handcuffs or whips?"

"Why not both? Actually, I was thinking more along the lines of ball gags, leather, cat o' nine tails, that sort of thing."

*What.*

"Oh my God," Beca said, bursting out laughing. "I'm so kidding."

"Oh thank God," Chloe said with a sharp exhale. "I mean, no judgment if you –"

"I'm not into ball gags and whips."

"Okay," Chloe said, relieved. She finally paid attention to her 'dinner,' peeling the plastic off the top of the tray. It didn't seem too bad, considering. She tentatively tried the chicken.

"About the handcuffs, though…"

Chloe nearly choked. She waited for Beca to laugh it off again, but she was just eating. "Wait, seriously?"
Beca shrugged. "You don't think it's hot?"

"I…I don't know."

"You've never been, like, tied up before?"

What even is this conversation right now? "Well…no."

"Huh."

Chloe didn't know what she meant by "huh." It felt a tad judgmental and a tad ominous. The thought of Beca handcuffing her to a bed was hot. Really hot. Really fucking hot. She put her fork down to take a drink of ice cold soda.

"This might be presumptuous," Chloe said after taking a moment to eat, "but does all this mean what I think it means?"

Beca turned to her and smiled. "What do you think it means?"

"Argh! "Well, I just thought that maybe…since we haven't really talked about it…and we haven't…you know…"

Beca giggled.

"What?"

"You're cute when you get shy. It doesn't happen often."

Chloe huffed. "I'm not really sure what I'm supposed to say."

"You could say, 'Beca, will you be my girlfriend?'"
Chloe lit up, filled with butterflies. *Finally, FINALLY.* "Okay. Beca, will you be my girlfriend?"

Beca scrunched her face and hummed, pondering it.

"Hey!"

"Of course I will," Beca said, laughing. "Now say, 'Beca, I love you.'"

Chloe grinned. "Beca, I love you."

"I love you, too. Now say…wait, come here." Beca leaned in and Chloe mirrored her, Beca turning her head gently to whisper into her ear.

It made Chloe blush and her heart race. "I'm not saying that. But I will."

"Promise?"

"Promise."

When they had finished eating and the flight attendants had cleared everything away, she traded seats with Beca, who swiped the blanket Chloe had tucked under the seat and draped it across her lap. She sat back and waggled her eyebrows at Chloe.

Chloe felt her hand pulled under the blanket but feigned disinterest. "What?"

"You promised."
First tent, then plane, now club. They can't keep their hands off each other in my brain, thus they cannot here either. Also, mild drug use.

Copenhagen was a dream, despite the rain.

Their first night, the group ended up at a club of questionable theme. Even after spending an hour there, Chloe still had no idea if it was a gay club, or maybe a leather bar, or maybe it was ladies night? Eclectic Club, she would call it, since she had no idea how to pronounce the name on the sign above the entrance.

Beca was stuck to her like glue, and Chloe did not mind one bit. They had been dancing together most of the night and were both drenched in sweat, along with the rest of the club. Apparently, there was no air conditioning in the club or restrictions on capacity; it had to be at least 90º, and they had been jumping and waving their arms to some never-ending Euro EDM mix. Immediately after, the DJ spun Ginuwine's "Pony," only adding to Chloe's complete confusion about the club's genre.

She didn't care, though, because Beca had pulled her close and was grinding up on her to the slow jam beat of the song as if Chloe was the "pony."

Chloe pulled her closer and moved with her, one arm around her waist, one pulling her own hair up and away from her neck. It hadn't been meant as an invitation, but Beca's mouth was on her neck immediately.

Chloe's head was swimming - the four shots of tequila and half a joint she shared with Beca and some Danish girl in the bathroom were mostly to blame, but much of the credit was due to Beca's near refusal to keep her hands to herself.

Not that Chloe cared.
"That's fucking hot!"

Stacie had shown up next to them, and she had two dance partners - a preppy blonde girl behind her and a Sid Vicious wannabe in front of her; the three were giving Beca and Chloe a run for their money when it came to bumping and grinding on the dance floor.

Chloe blew a kiss at her and winked, reaching down to grab Beca's backside as she pressed her knee between her legs. Was she flirting with Stacie while grinding with Beca? *Maybe. But just because everyone is drunk and feeling good and having fun.*

"Who're your friends?" Chloe half-shouted to be heard over the thumping bass.

"Mr. and Mrs. Smith," Stacie answered. Chloe knew there was no way in hell those two people were married. But if Stacie wanted to have some anonymous fun, she wasn't going to judge.

Beca detached herself from Chloe's neck at the shouted conversation, turning to see who she was talking to. "Hey!" she said with a bright smile. Her hands were roaming Chloe's thighs and getting dangerously close to committing an act of public indecency.

"You guys are fucking hot together," was Stacie's greeting for Beca as well.

That was apparently a green light for Beca because half a second later, her hand was between Chloe's legs.

"Oh my God," Chloe gasped. Sure she was turned on - she'd been turned on since reciprocating Beca's "affection" on the airplane. But they were very much in public, and their friend Stacie was very much watching them.

"Now kiss her."

"Stacie, wha-" Chloe was cut off by Beca's tongue in her mouth. She was somewhat certain that tomorrow, assuming she remembered all this, she would feel awkward around Stacie, who pretty much just told Beca to fuck her on the dance floor while she watched. Tonight, though, as she stole brief glances at Stacie who had hands all over her and a punk rocker's tongue down her throat, she just didn't give a fuck.
They were young. They were free. They could be crazy if they wanted. She dropped her hair and threaded her fingers through Beca's, kissing her even more deeply. She felt like she could never possibly get enough of her - it was literally impossible to kiss her too much. They weren't even dancing anymore; they were simply devouring one another as the room around them burst into whoops and unified jumping as House of Pain's "Jump Around" started blasting.

They didn't stop until someone jumped backward right into them, knocking them into more people.

"Let's go home," Beca said, breathing hard. Her eyes were on fire. It made Chloe weak in the knees. She looked around for Stacie; her partners had traded places, and she had a pretty blonde feeling up her chest. Chloe waved her arms and got her attention, gestured between herself and Beca, pointed at the exit, pointed at Stacie, gave a thumbs up and an exaggerated shrug. *We're leaving. You okay?*

Stacie gave a thumbs up in return and turned back just in time to for preppy blonde's kiss.

Chloe grabbed Beca's hand and followed her through the sea of jumping, sweaty bodies to the exit. Her first inhale of the chilled, rain-fresh air felt like ecstasy.

Beca stopped and yanked Chloe's hand, pulling them together again and back into another heated make-out session. As much as Chloe wanted to stand there and kiss her all night, they had more important things to do.

"Take me home," was Chloe's request.

"As you wish," Beca said with a smile.

Chloe smiled back - two years ago, she had finally convinced Beca to sit down and watch *The Princess Bride* with her. The fact that Beca remembered its iconic, utterly romantic line and was using it on her…

"Come on." Chloe was the one leading the way back to the hotel this time, but Beca caught up after a few steps, only to have to stop for Chloe to remove her heels and carry them the rest of the way.
Back at the hotel, Chloe found herself slammed against the door of their room the moment it closed. Beca's hands and lips were everywhere at the same time; Chloe couldn't even process it. Their kisses were hungry, messy. Despite the fog in her brain, Chloe knew this was going to be an absurdly hot, sloppy night. There was no tenderness, no gentility. Of course, there was love, but right now...now it was animalistic, driven by pure need. They had a lot of lost time to make up for.

She was Beca's. Wholly and completely. And Beca was hers.

She countered Beca's aggression with her own, pushing Beca off her to stare her down before literally ripping Beca's sleeveless button-down shirt open.

"Hey!" Beca shrieked. "I love this shirt!"

"I'll buy you a new one." Chloe grabbed her and sank her teeth into Beca's shoulder, not hard, just enough to make her intentions clear. She walked forward and Beca stumbled backward, tripping over and stepping on shoes and bags they hadn't bothered putting away properly after getting ready for the club earlier.

She pushed forward until Beca's legs hit the bed, and then she gave her a shove; Beca fell back easily.

"You're so fucking hot when you take charge," Beca said with a wry smile. Her face and neck were flushed.

Chloe suddenly felt a little awkward, exposed. Dirty talk wasn't really something she did a lot of; not that she was virginal by any means, but she had never found it necessary. She didn't really know how to react, so she simply said, "Yeah?"

"Fuck yeah," Beca said, grinning. She made grabby hands at Chloe. "You're so far away!"

Chloe's mind buzzed. She looked down at Beca on their bed, topless and aroused and begging her to join her, and she didn't know how she ever got so lucky.

She reached down and grabbed the waistband of Beca's jeans, twisting them off her without bothering to unbutton them. Beca lifted and kicked to help expedite the process. She pushed her underwear down herself, letting Chloe pull them off her ankles and toss them to the side.
Chloe knew Beca knew exactly what was on her mind when she dropped to her knees at the foot of the bed and ran her hands up Beca's legs.

"Shit...Chloe..."

Chloe seized Beca's thighs and pulled her lower on the bed, closer until Beca's knees were over her shoulders.

She didn't bother to tease. They were both too far gone to need it. Her tongue was on Beca, and it was everything she had been fantasizing about for so long. She felt a hard pull on her hair and couldn't help but groan, feeling and tasting how good she was making Beca feel.

Beca was being loud. Really loud. She was grateful that the people staying in the rooms theirs shared walls with were fellow Bellas, and as far as she knew, they were all still at the club.

Another yank on her hair and then she was being pushed impossibly closer, felt a rush of heat, and Beca rocked beneath her, and Chloe knew she was gone.

She waited until Beca calmed down - not that she had much choice; she was basically trapped between Beca's thighs. Finally, she felt her relax and she climbed up onto the bed and over Beca, kissing her deeply, letting her taste herself on Chloe's lips.

Beca moaned and finally broke their kiss, still a bit winded. "God damn, Beale. Who knew you had that in you?"

Chloe chuckled and took a deep breath. If Beca could talk a little dirty, so could she. "I've been waiting four years to find out what you taste like."

She heard what she could only classify as a growl before she found herself flipped on her back, clothes being hastily stripped away, and then it was her turn to tangle her fingers into Beca's hair and pull her impossibly closer.

"Fuck, you're so wet," Beca mumbled.
Chloe's arousal spiked. *Maybe there's something to this whole dirty talk thing after all.* "Bec…"

It was the only word she got out before she lost all ability to form words.

When she reopened her eyes, Beca was hovering over her, only to drop down the moment they made eye contact and kiss her - this time, though, it was slow, languid, not quite so sloppy.

When they finally parted, Beca rolled off her and flopped next to her on the bed, both staring at the ceiling in a daze. Chloe fumbled for her hand and interlocked their fingers. They were both utterly spent.

"Did you know it was going to be this good?" Beca asked quietly.

Chloe turned her head to study Beca's face, surprised by the question. Beca had seemed pretty confident about the whole thing, but she seemed to be thinking hard now.

"What - like, sex?"

Beca shook her head. "I don't just mean sex. But that, too. I mean everything. Us."

Chloe rolled onto her side and propped her head on her fist so she could gaze down at Beca. "Honestly?"

"Obviously."

"I knew from the moment I saw you in the quad that we were going to be amazing. I just didn't know how or when."

"Really?"

"Bec - look at me."
Beca's gaze shifted to meet Chloe's.

"I saw you, and I knew you were meant to be in my life. Never once has that feeling wavered. You're it for me, Beca. Friends, girlfriends, whatever. I don't need anything else."

She watched Beca's face start to crumble and she kissed her before she could start crying. They'd gotten drunk together enough times for her to know that alcohol plus emotions plus Beca equaled hours of sobbing. She usually pulled Beca out of it with bad jokes or making a fool of herself in some way, but kissing her was far more enjoyable, and seemed to do the trick much more quickly. She heard Beca sigh and she pulled back, pleased to see the worry gone from her brow. They smiled at each other until Beca started giggling. Chloe grinned and clambered about the bed, trying to figure out where her jeans had landed.

"Whatcha doing?" Beca said, propping herself up half-way to watch.

"Hang on." Chloe finally spotted her jeans half-hanging on the chair. She had to get out of bed to reach them and when she did, she dug around in her pockets, finally pulling out what she had been looking for. "Ta-da!" she chimed, spinning around with the remaining half of the joint from the club between her teeth.

"Ohh, we shouldn't...we have to compete in two days."

Chloe shook her head. "You know what, who cares? We're gonna kick ass regardless. We're in fucking Denmark and we just graduated from college and besides, we already smoked the first half of it tonight. It'll chill us out before we go to sleep. Get up."

Beca hesitated before crawling out of bed. Chloe tossed her a bathrobe she'd found in the bathroom, wrapping herself in one as well. She pulled the sliding glass door open and stepped out onto their little balcony to lean against the railing, appreciating the lights of the city.

Beca showed up next to her a moment later and handed Chloe a lighter. Chloe sparked it and took a drag before handing it to Beca.

"You know," Beca said, her voice a little strained as she held her breath. "I never pegged you as being down to smoke up." She exhaled fully. "Or being into girls."
"No? Why not?"

Beca took another drag and blew a smoke ring.

"Impressive," Chloe said, accepting the rapidly disappearing joint back.

"Because you had a boyfriend when we met, and you're so pretty."

"Pretty girls can't like girls? You like girls."

Beca shook her head. "I don't mean it like that. I guess because you're such a hardass perfectionist slash social butterfly, you know? I thought you were straight-laced; the girl-next-door."

Chloe laughed. "I was banging the girl next door, not being her."

Beca arched an eyebrow.

"You're not the only one with a few secrets," Chloe said, blowing a smoke ring of her own, and another immediately after, nailing it right through the center of the first. She winked.

"Well, shit," Beca said, laughing.

Chloe took one more quick hit and handed it to Beca, waving her hand to indicate she should finish it. "I'm going to take a quick shower before bed; I feel gross. That club was so hot."

Beca nodded and took one last drag, looking out into the darkness. "Join you in a sec?" she asked before Chloe was too far to hear.

"Wouldn't have it any other way."
Chloe literally crawled out of bed the next morning. The only reason good enough was the knowledge that the hotel would stop serving breakfast soon.

"Beca."

A groan from somewhere under the covers.

"Wake up."

Another groan.

"Breakfast only goes 'til 10:00." Chloe yanked the covers down, making Beca immediately curl up and cover her eyes.

"So bright."

Chloe tossed Beca's sunglasses onto the bed, followed by enough clothes to be publicly acceptable and then got herself dressed. She smiled, watching Beca pull herself up and fight the battle of getting dressed without leaving the bed. She was a grump in the mornings as it was; add a touch of a hangover and the exhaustion that came with not going to sleep until five hours ago, and she was about as adorable as Grumpy Cat. Not that Chloe felt like a ray of sunshine this morning, but she was able to put on her perky face pretty easily nonetheless.

She left Beca to wage her war to brush her teeth. She was paused, inspecting her face in the mirror, when Beca shuffled in, mumbling to herself as she plopped on the toilet.

"Sorry, I'll step out," Chloe said, shocked that Beca was peeing in front of her.

"Pffft," Beca said, catching Chloe's wrist before she made it through the door and pointing her back to the sink with a shove.
"O...kay…" Chloe said, still kind of weirded out. This was definitely a new development.

Beca bumped her out of the way of the sink a moment later to wash her hands and shove her own toothbrush in her mouth. "Morning," she finally said with a scowl.

Chloe giggled at Beca's discombobulation. "Good morning, beautiful."

Beca rolled her eyes. "Yeah right. I look terrible."

"You're right, you do."

"Hey!"

Chloe held her hands up in mock self-defense, adding a little karate chop for good measure. It worked, and Beca finally cracked a smile.

"Come on, it's almost 10:00 and I don't want them to run out of waffles." Chloe left her to finish putting herself together, but not before swatting Beca's backside, earning a yelp of surprise.

Beca and Chloe rolled into the continental breakfast area with minutes to spare, and Chloe happily got her waffle. They joined a few of the other girls who were already eating. Beca was polite enough to push her sunglasses off her face and onto her head, but not without squinting and cursing under her breath before saying hello.

"Hey Jessica," Chloe asked after a bit. "Did Stacie make it home okay last night?"

"Ugh, yes."

"Ugh?"
"She brought those people back with her. They were so loud; I had to leave. Crashed with Flo and Lilly."

Chloe made a face. "Gross."

"That's a bit of the pot calling the kettle black, isn't it," Amy muttered to Emily, who blushed furiously and appeared extremely interested in her oatmeal. The other girls at the table snickered.

"What?" Chloe clearly wasn't in on whatever their inside joke was.

"Ya know, Red," Amy continued, "I'm surprised you came down for brekkie."

Beca leaned over and mumbled, "Just let it go," into Chloe's ear.

"Huh?" Chloe was completely lost, and Amy was grinning, clearly ready to burst over whatever it was. "I love breakfast food, why wouldn't I?"

"Didn't you get enough to eat last night?"

Beca groaned and dropped her sunglasses back onto her face and covered her ears.

Chloe felt the blood drain out of her face and pool in her feet. She and Beca had left the club relatively early - surely they were the only ones who were back at the hotel. Surely. "I'm sorry?"

"I'm surprised there's anything left of Beca, the way she was carrying on."

"What are you talking about?" Chloe was sure if she just kept playing dumb...

Beca groaned again. "Shut up, Chlo."

"You're just gonna walk right into this aren't ya?" Amy said to herself with a crack of her neck
before answering, "Basically the analogy I'm making here is that we know you were ea-

"Stop!" Beca shouted, jumping up from the table and startling everyone. "Yes, we had sex last night. I'm not even going to apologize that you could hear it, because you know what? It was fucking amazing."

Chloe wasn't sure if she wanted to crawl under the table and hide, die, or grab Beca and kiss her.

"Whoa, calm down, Shawshank," Amy said, eyes wide.

"I am calm!"

Emily laughed awkwardly. "It's cool, no one needs to apologize."

"Good. Because I'm not going to," Beca said sharply before taking a firm seat. She stabbed her fork into her scrambled eggs, making a terrible screeching noise against the plate. "You're all immature jerks."

"I'm so sorry, Beca," Emily said quickly. "We're happy for you guys, really. It's not funny anymore."

"It was never funny," Beca snapped.

Beca's refusal to accept the girls' jabs made Chloe feel oddly proud. And it was also a little bit funny. She giggled, and caught a side-eye from Beca, only making a bark of laughter slip out. She clamped a hand over her mouth and looked apologetically at her broody girlfriend.

"It's okay," Chloe said after getting her giggles under control. "If the tables were turned, we probably would be joking about it, too. Right, Bec?" Silence. Chloe elbowed her.

"Right, sure," Beca said with a tight smile.

"So...who's ready to kick some DSM booty tomorrow!" Chloe said with a fist pump, desperate to
change the topic, grateful when the rest of the girls cheered, sans grumpy Beca, who hooked her foot around Chloe's ankle under the table instead. She wasn't as tough as she always pretended to be.

The Bellas spent the afternoon rehearsing and the evening watching the first half of the groups to perform, sizing up their competition. They chose to have a quiet night in rather than another late party night, to save their voices and energy for what they all knew would be the performance of their lives. Everyone piled into Beca and Chloe's room with extra blankets and pillows from their own rooms.

"What are you doing, Chlo?" Beca asked, noticing Chloe fiddling with television cables and Beca's laptop.

"Oh, nothing," Chloe said, avoiding eye contact with Beca as she logged into her computer (she'd cracked Beca's password two years ago, and Beca was aware though never commented on it) and pulled up the media player application. She surreptitiously popped a disc into its drive and hopped back onto the bed, stealing the remote off the nightstand before Beca could reach it.

"Oh no, no no no!" Beca said with exasperation as the DVD menu for Dirty Dancing came on screen. The rest of the group squealed with delight.

"It's Dirty Dancing! I promise you will love it, babe."

"We'll see about that."

The group immediately fell into singing along and quoting almost every line of the classic movie, much to Beca's consternation. Chloe excused herself after a bit to use the restroom. She had to take an extra long time washing her hands having misjudged her timing.

When she heard the music start up, she threw open the bathroom door and swept through the room to grab Beca's hands and yank her off the bed quicker than she could protest, and pulled her into a sad excuse for a dance frame.

"Spaghetti arms! Can you give me some tension please?"
The girls were already dying of laughter - they knew exactly what was happening.

"Chloe, what are you doing?" Beca glanced at the TV over Chloe's shoulder and groaned, realizing they were mirroring Baby and Johnny.

She did her best to lead Beca around the room before abandoning her, dancing away, and falling to her knees, singing along with "Love is Strange" and copying the movie's choreography, earning an even louder chorus of whoops and whistles from the other girls

"Baaaaby, oh baaaaby..." She was crawling toward Beca, who was trying her best not to smile. "My sweet baby...you're the one."

She made her way back to Beca and wrapped her arms around her waist, tugging her down to join her on the floor where she could force Beca to sway with her as she nuzzled her neck.

The needle scratched across the vinyl record in the movie, bringing the song to an abrupt halt. The girls erupted into more cheers.

"You guys are so cute together!" Emily said with a squeal.

"Oh my God, what are you doing," Beca said, weakly trying to get out of Chloe's embrace, which only made Chloe hold her more tightly.

"Just dancing with my lover," Chloe said with a wink.

"Lover? Really?"

If Beca hadn't had that sparkle in her eye when she said it, Chloe would have been hurt. "Yes, you are my lovah."

"Now that we've established that..." Beca trailed off, wiggling out of Chloe's embrace to climb back onto the bed. Chloe laughed and joined her.
The quote-and-sing-along continued through the final big dance, most of the girls up and dancing to "I've Had the Time of My Life." Chloe even managed to get Beca on her feet again; it wasn't that Beca didn't want to dance, but that she didn't want to admit the movie was the reason for it, and Chloe knew it - and ignored it.

Much to her surprise, Beca lightened up by the second chorus - notably when Chloe ground her hips into her to "...and I owe it all to you" and Beca grabbed her hand and spun her out and back in, keeping their dance close.

The movie night devolved into a dance party, which was, by all accounts, counterproductive to their intent to save their voices and energy, but there was something to be said for a night of good, clean fun.

They finally called it quits when it was pushing 2:00 AM; they needed to be at the competition grounds by 12:00 PM.

"So, was that so bad?" Chloe asked Beca as they took turns at the sink getting ready for bed.

Beca shrugged. "It has a really good soundtrack."

"I will happily accept that positive critique and cherish it always."

To the surprise of everyone except the Bellas, they dominated the competition and returned home as World Champions.

For the first time in seven years, however, returning home for Chloe didn't equal returning to the Barden for another year. In fact, she didn't have a home to return to.

Her plans changed from staying in school another year to graduating so quickly, she hadn't had time to figure out where she was going to figuratively land.
That is, until she spent thirteen hours on a plane talking to Beca about their hopes and dreams.

They touched down in Atlanta long enough to deliver the trophy to the house, properly initiate Emily, have one last party, officially re-establish the Bellas with the ICCA, and pack out the rest of their belongings, and Chloe was back at the airport on a standby list for a flight to Los Angeles.

Beca had a confirmed seat and a meeting with an A&R representative from Capitol Records. In the most poetic of moments, they were still celebrating their win backstage in Copenhagen when Beca got the call; the label was impressed with what they had received from her boss and wanted to talk.

Things were getting very real, very fast.

Beca's boarding group was called and Chloe's name had yet to be called to fill a no-show's seat.

"Let me know when they get you on a flight, okay?" Beca said, gathering her belongings.

"Okay." Chloe was sad they weren't going to take this leg of their journey together.

"You have my address in case you need to take a cab from the airport?"

"In my phone." Chloe reached for Beca's hand, swinging it playfully. "Am I really doing this?"

"If it's what you want to do," Beca said as she adjusted her backpack on her shoulder. "I promised you I wouldn't pressure or judge you if you change your mind and stay here or move back home or...be an exotic dancer. Even though I selfishly hope you don't become an exotic dancer."

"Unless it's you I'm dancing for," Chloe said with a wink.

"Me and only me. I need to go, but let me know what's happening and I'll pick you up at LAX if I can." She bent down and gave Chloe a quick but thorough kiss before disappearing down the jetway.

Chloe sighed and propped her feet up on her bag and waited.
LAX

Two more oversold flights departed Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport before an airline agent finally called for "Passenger Beale, party of one" over the PA system. Chloe's heart raced as she checked in and walked down the jetway.

This was it.

She was pressing the reset button on her life. A new city. A new romance. A new career...whatever it would be.

She had been confident in her decision to move to Los Angeles with Beca at the time. It had been a long conversation filled with assurances from both sides that Chloe moving to Los Angeles with Beca didn't mean she was moving to Los Angeles with Beca; it just meant they were both relocating to the same city at the same time, and it made financial sense to be roommates. No pressure. No strings.

Spending so many hours alone in the airport in her adopted hometown, however, had eaten away at her resolve. She was fairly certain this was a terrible decision which would lead to the speedy demise of her relationship with Beca.

But it was too late - she was airborne. There was no turning back now.

Four hours later, she was on the Tarmac at LAX, seriously considering refusing to leave the plane and demand to be returned to Atlanta pronto.

Her phone vibrating in her hand to reveal a series of texts Beca had sent during the flight was the only thing that got her moving. That and the flight attendant insisting she deplane or he would be forced to call security.

Hey, I got tied up at IKEA. Grab a cab. Sorry.

I swear they intentionally designed this place so it's impossible to leave.

See you soon!
Chloe took a deep breath - and smiled.

It took more than an hour, but eventually, the taxi rolled up outside Beca's North Hollywood apartment. Chloe blew out a low whistle. It was a nice building in a nice neighborhood, and she knew it wasn't going to be cheap. Beca had assured her she didn't need to worry about paying rent until Chloe got settled, but she instantly felt guilty as she dragged her suitcase and bags up the stairs.

"You made it!"

Chloe looked up, surprised by Beca standing in the doorway. "Hey! Yeah, barely!"

"Barely? Here, let me help you." Beca grabbed the bag and purse off Chloe's shoulder and held the door open for her.

"Long story," Chloe said. "I'll tell you later. This place is pretty sweet, Bec. Give me a tour?"

"Yeah! Wait, I have to do something first."

"No prob-" Chloe squeaked, not ready for the kiss Beca planted on her. A second or two passed and Beca hadn't stepped back, so Chloe wrapped her arms around Beca's waist and lifted her up a tiny bit, squeezing a giggle out of her before setting her down.

"Okay, come on."

Beca led Chloe through her - their - apartment. It was as nice inside as Chloe had assumed it to be, based on the neighborhood, though it wasn't tacky or overly indulgent. It was still pretty empty, the only contents being the boxes Chloe recognized as what Beca had shipped from Atlanta, a couple big flat boxes from IKEA, and Beca's laptop and red Beats Pill speaker set up on the kitchen counter with Katy Perry blasting.
"Really?" Chloe teased, pointing at the playlist on Beca's screen as they passed.

"Shut up. I'm just trying to get a feel for what she likes. Here's the guest bathroom or whatever."

Chloe mmmed and followed Beca up the wrought iron spiral staircase in the corner of the kitchen. It led straight into the apartment's only bedroom, a thought that sent butterflies through Chloe's stomach.

"And here's where the magic happens," Beca joked. "Or, it will, once the bed gets delivered. It was supposed to be here an hour ago but they're running late and said it'll probably be closer to 9:00 tonight."

"We don't need a bed," Chloe semi-blurted, feeling a little over-eager. But screw it, why not?

Beca looked at her with a quirked eyebrow, pausing in her mid-Vanna White-esque presentation of their sizable closet. "Are you propositioning me?"

"No," Chloe said, feigning shyness.

"Chlo." Beca was grinning.

"What?" Chloe looked everywhere but at Beca, who she could see was advancing on her. She was staring at the ceiling when she felt lips on her neck. She let herself be leaned back against the wall and smiled. "Someone might catch us," she whispered.

"I locked the door."

Chloe felt fingertips trailing up her thighs and under the hem of her sundress. "You said that last time."

Beca laughed against her neck. "That was so embarrassing."

Chloe tilted her head as Beca took her time sucking on her pulse point. "So, let me get this
"straight," she said conversationally.

"Hmm?"

"You don't actually like to get caught - you just like the thought of potentially getting caught."

"Mhmm."

A touch of a thrill ran through her. That 'mhmm' sounded like possibilities to Chloe - exciting, risky, sexy possibilities.

Beca's hands were on her backside, squeezing a little playfully. "Are we going to christen this place or what?"

It pained Chloe to do it especially after being the one to start it, but she pushed Beca's hands away gently. "Yes, but I feel gross after spending all day in the airport and then a plane. I don't feel super sexy right now."

Beca scoffed but obliged her. "You're always super sexy."

Chloe felt herself blush a little. You've gotta get used to that! "Raincheck?"

"Sure. You wanna shower? Or are you hungry, or…?"

"Yeah, now that you mention it, I'm hungry. Do you mind if I just freshen up? I'll go grab my bag and -"

"Ah ah ah," Beca tutted and pointed toward the bathroom. "I'll go get it. Which one, the backpack?"

"The messenger bag."
Beca disappeared down the stairs. In the bathroom, Chloe heard the distinct sound of something hard connecting with metal followed by a string of curses. "Beca?"

The swearing got louder as heavy, slow steps thudded up the staircase. Beca reappeared a moment later, Chloe's bag on her shoulder as she clutched her elbow.

Chloe bit her lip, trying to hide the fact that she was laughing. "What happened?"

Beca handed her the bag. "Smashed my elbow on the railing and my arm went numb. I'm not used to the spiral thing yet."

"Awww," Chloe pouted. "Want me to kiss it and make it better?"

Beca straightened her arm and posture, visibly shaking it off. "No, I'm fine."

"Right, cuz you're so tough," Chloe teased with her pouty voice, reaching out to poke Beca's stomach, eliciting a squeal, laugh, and then an angry glare. She was wildly ticklish there, and Chloe knew it.

"Stop."

"If you're so tough, what are you scared of?" Chloe lunged forward again, aiming for her stomach but getting blocked by an excessively defensive move from Beca.

"Stop!" Beca laughed. "Chloe, no!" She shrieked at Chloe getting her hands past her defenses and immediately doubled over in an attempt to shield herself. She twisted and Chloe caught her from behind, not letting up her tickle attack. "Shit, how are you so strong?" she gasped between laughing and angry demands to be released.

Chloe finally let up when Beca's pleas began to border on tearful and wrapped her arms around her waist to pull her close. Beca was red in the face and breathless, hair completely disheveled. Chloe chuckled and kissed Beca's ear.

Chloe felt her stomach growl. "Okay, I'm actually kind of starving, can we go eat?" She moved to
release Beca, who flinched hard at the potential threat of more tickling. "Oh my gosh, I'm done," Chloe laughed, hugging Beca close again. As soon as Beca relaxed, she got her one last time, sending her into a fit of shrieks and laughter until Chloe caught a backhand across her chin during all the flailing.

"Okay okay, I promise, I'm done," Chloe laughed, holding her hands up in surrender.

Beca spun on her, clearly a mix of emotions - mostly anger, but softened just enough to not be one iota of threatening. "Hands off," she said, pointing at Chloe, still breathing hard from her ordeal.

Chloe clasped her hands behind her back and grinned. "Hands off."

"Hurry up so we can go," Beca huffed before disappearing.

Chloe laughed to herself as she freshened up, washing her face and reapplying make-up, tousling her hair to try to revive the curls gone limp from a day's travel, and spritzing a touch of perfume on her neck. She needed a proper shower, but right now, hunger was winning over vanity.

"Hey, Bec? Do you have quarters or something?"

"For what?" Beca shouted up the stairs.

"For the bus, I don't have a pass."

"You don't need a bus pass. Hurry up."

Chloe descended the staircase, taking care to avoid recreating Beca's funny bone incident. "Is the restaurant close? It's hot, I don't want to walk too far in these wedges."

"You won't have to walk far." Beca was waiting by the front door - she'd composed herself after the tickle attack - and swung her keys on a chain around her finger, wrapping it and unwrapping it absentmindedly as she stared at her fingernails, looking up when she noticed Chloe. "Hey,
beautiful. Ready?"

Chloe swallowed at the compliment, determined to stop letting them make her dizzy. "Yep!"

Beca held the door for her and locked up, bounding down the stairs as Chloe descended, more cautious in her wedges than Beca in her Converse. Chloe heard the chirp-chirp of a car alarm and had to look around for a moment to find Beca, spotting her leaning against a sparkling gunmetal grey Corvette; it still had dealer plates on it.

"Oh my gosh, Beca, is this yours?" Chloe said, hurrying over.

"Yep! Graduation present from my grandparents. Wanna take a ride?"

"Totes!" Chloe rushed to the passenger side, but Beca beat her to get the door for her. Chloe slid into the seat, relishing the new car scent of leather and vinyl. The protective plastic film was still covering the dash displays and her fingers itched to pull it off.

Beca showed up behind the wheel a few seconds later and pushed the button in the dash, the engine roaring to life. "It starts with a button, how cool is that?"

"So cool!" Chloe said clapping excitedly. She fiddled with her seat and vents and buckled up as Beca pulled away from the curb. "Did you know you were getting a car?"

"No! I had no idea. I mean, my grandma has been hinting about something for awhile, asking what kind of cars I like and stuff, but I really didn't expect a brand new one and not a fucking Corvette."

"It's a hot car."

"Hell yeah, it is." Beca was smiling as she stomped on the accelerator up a freeway on ramp.

They pulled into the parking lot of a Mexican restaurant ten minutes later and Chloe waited as Beca jogged around the car to open the door for her.
"Such a gentleman."

"You know it, toots."

"Toots?" Chloe laughed. The car chirped behind them.

"Baby? Hot stuff? Lil' mama? Maybe señorita?" Beca asked as she opened the door to the restaurant.

"I like 'hot stuff.'"

"You got it, toots."
An evening of quesadillas and margaritas kept Chloe's mind relatively occupied and off the thought picking at the back of her mind: What the hell was she going to do in LA?

"What do you think you're going to do now that you're here?"

_Dammit, Beca._ Chloe waved her hand dismissively. "Let's talk about you. What time is your meeting tomorrow?"

"10:00."

"So, what exactly is happening at this interview? Is it like a job interview?"

"Kind of," Beca said between popping chips and salsa into her mouth. "Basically they're going to throw some beats my way, or some lyrics, or a melody, and see what I can do on the fly."

Chloe lit up. "An audition!"

"Basically, yeah. But it's an interview."

"Then you have it in the bag; you really wowed me at your Bellas audition."

"You and I both know that it was my cleavage that wowed you at my Bellas audition," Beca said with a wry smile.

"No it wasn't," Chloe said, averting her eyes from the one place they wanted to go now that Beca had brought it up. "It was your effortless alto and ability to come up with something when you were so obviously unprepared."

"Now see, I'd believe that if it was Aubrey saying it."
"Oh hush." Chloe sipped her frozen strawberry margarita, smiling over the glass at Beca. "You're distracting me and we're supposed to be talking about tomorrow. Tell me more about this audition."

"Interview."

"Audition."

Beca rolled her eyes. "All I really know is that they want to see what I can do, get a sense of my ear for hooks and beats."

"Is Katy Perry going to be there?" Chloe asked excitedly.

"I think she's probably a little too busy to sit in on some new talent scouting thing."

"But what if she is? I mean, this is all to see about finding a new sound for her next album right? How cool would that be?"

Beca shrugged nonchalantly, but Chloe could see the thought made her at least a little excited. "I don't know. I'd rather she not see me improvise."

"Oh, Bec!" Chloe reached across the table and grabbed Beca's hand as it went for another tortilla chip. "You are amazing at improvising! I'm still not over you busting out 'Before He Cheats' at the riff-off."

"That was pretty sweet, right?"

"Yes! See? You just need to wear that swagger like a bulletproof vest and show those record execs what you can do."

"You like my swagger?"

"I love it. What happens when they like what they hear?"
"If they like what they hear."

"When," Chloe said confidently.

Beca huffed. "IF they like it, I have another interview with the head of A&R."

"And WHEN that person likes it?"

"When - IF - they do, I don't really know. It's probably going to get complicated really fast and I'm going to need to get a lawyer to help me."

"A lawyer!"

"Well, yeah. I mean, labels are notorious for screwing over artists. I'm a nobody, and I'm not going to let them think they can dupe me into signing away my rights and royalties because I'm just so eager to have a record deal."

Chloe ruminated on that for a minute. The journey Beca was embarking on was nothing to sniff at. She knew it was a big deal the moment Beca told her about the interview, but until the possibilities and complications that can with signing to a label came up, she hadn't thought about the gravity of it.

"This is a really big deal, Beca."

"No shit," Beca said with a laugh. "Only on the verge of making or breaking the career I've dreamt of my entire life. No biggie."

"Aw, babe," Chloe grabbed Beca's hands again. "You're going to make it. And even if it's not tomorrow, it'll be next week or next month or next year. But you will. It's literally impossible for you to not make it."

"I don't know about 'literally.' But I hope you're right."
Chloe smiled. "Literally."

"Whoops!" Chloe tripped up the front stairs and laughed at herself.

"You okay?" Beca said with a look over her shoulder as she unlocked the apartment.

"Yep. It's these wedges and these steps and it's dark."

"I think it's the margaritas and your brain, but sure," Beca said, laughing.

Chloe opted to take the rest of the stairs on all fours and used Beca for leverage to pull herself back to her feet. Using her lack of balance as an excuse, she shamelessly groped Beca in the doorway, "accidentally" pinning her to the doorframe.

"Oops, I slipped," she said with a giggle.

"You're drunk," Beca said.

"Barely. Just really tipsy." In actuality, Chloe barely had a buzz; after her second margarita, she switched to virgin drinks without Beca noticing. She didn't consider herself particularly shy around Beca, but tonight was special - their first night in their new home - and she wanted to have a little fun, spice things up a bit maybe, and she needed a mask to hide behind, at least until she was comfortable. "Now kiss me."

Beca hesitated, studying Chloe's face for a moment as if evaluating her mental state.

"Beca, just fucking kiss me."

Beca's eyes went wide at Chloe swearing - it meant she meant business. A moment later, Beca was kissing her, but sweetly, innocently, and rebuffing Chloe's attempts to deepen it.
"Hey," Chloe pouted.

"Cool your jets, homeslice. The delivery guys are supposed to be here any minute."

"Ooh! And then we'll have a bed!" Chloe pushed past Beca and pulled off her wedges, leaving them in the middle of the floor. "We have no chairs!" She twirled a little in the emptiness of the living room and opted to sit on one of the boxes.

"We have chairs," Beca said, pointing at another box leaning against the wall as she locked up with her other hand.

"But I can't fuck you on those." If Chloe could have taken a picture of Beca's face without spoiling the moment, she would have; it was priceless.

"What has gotten into you?" Beca asked as she pushed Chloe's shoes out of the path of the door with her foot.

Chloe crossed her ankles and kicked her feet out playfully, pointing her toes at Beca. "What, can't I just want to fuck my girlfriend in our new home?" The tips of Beca's ears were turning pink, and Chloe knew she was getting to her. She was busying herself with her bag as though looking for something; Chloe knew she wasn't looking for anything.

"Of course you can, just maybe not right this second."

Beca's attempt to cross the room outside of Chloe's reach failed and she was in her lap before she could react.

"Oops," Chloe said as she batted her eyelashes innocently - while not so innocently grabbing Beca's backside. She affected her best porn star voice and looked Beca in the eye. "I hope the deliveryman doesn't catch us."

Beca's face flushed, and Chloe knew she was done playing hard-to-get. She kissed her quickly, striking while the iron was hot, and this time she didn't fail at getting her tongue past Beca's lips. She reached for the button and fly on Beca's jeans and undid them quickly. "How much time do we
"They're supposed to call first. Shit, Chloe…"

Chloe wasn't being slow or graceful. Now was the time for hard and fast, and her hand was down the front of Beca's jeans as soon as they were unzipped. "Is your phone on vibrate?"

Beca shook her head.

"Are you sure?" Chloe could feel Beca's body wasn't ready for the onslaught of friction, and she eased up a little. "They could be calling right now, parked at the curb."

Beca whimpered and threaded her fingers through Chloe's hair. That little threat had done the trick.

"I think I hear your phone ringing."

Beca groaned and moved her hips faster.

Chloe didn't tell her that she really did hear Beca's phone ringing and the rumble of a Diesel engine outside.

"They're coming up the steps. I hear them talking."

"Chloe..." Beca whimpered.

"They're knocking on the door." A second later, Beca was clinging to her for dear life as her body rocked from pleasure coursing through her.

Chloe couldn't have timed it better if she had scheduled the delivery herself. The moment Beca relaxed, they really did knock on the door. Beca jumped and almost fell backwards off Chloe's lap, but Chloe caught her and pulled her back, redoubling her efforts in the restricting space of Beca's jeans.
Beca gasped, half pulling away and half pushing herself closer. "What are you doing?" She moaned when Chloe hit a spot just right.

"Shh, they'll hear you." Another knock at the door. "Just a minute!" Chloe called out.

Beca's head fell to Chloe's shoulder as her body shuddered a second time, her moans escaping as breathy sighs.

Chloe simply held her and kissed her hair, letting her come down from her high.

Another knock at the door.

"Coming!" Chloe shouted. "I should get that," she said, wiggling her shoulders a little to get Beca to lift her head. Chloe was caught off guard by the hard, steamy kiss she was met with.

"I fucking love you," Beca said when she finally broke the kiss.

Chloe grinned. "Well, my work here is done," she said as she reclaimed her hand and nudged Beca to her feet and zipped up her jeans. She was proud of herself when Beca wobbled, unsteady. Another knock at the door. "I better get that. And I love you, too."

Beca simply waved her hand dismissively and went to stand in the kitchen and lean against the counter, head in her hands. Chloe chuckled at her apparent unraveling and greeted the delivery men, pointedly avoiding the handshakes they offered.

"I think I'm gonna puke."

Beca was halfway to her car when she stopped, face pale.

"No, you're not," Chloe said reassuringly. She squeezed Beca's shoulders and kept her marching
forward. "It's just nerves."

"No, I'm not." Beca squared her shoulders and took another step before taking off in a run. "Yes I am."

Chloe caught up with her, hitting the brakes when a strangled, "Leave me alone!" came from Beca, heaving behind a tree on the boulevard.

"Oh, no! Babe…" Chloe didn't know what to do, torn between rushing to comfort Beca and respecting her wishes. So she just retrieved Beca's bag from where it had landed on the sidewalk and stood there, helpless and wringing her hands.

"Ugh," Beca said after a few more seconds as she leaned against the tree.

"Feel better?"

Beca nodded, the color starting to return to her face. "I'm going to run back in and brush my teeth."

Chloe waited for Beca at the bottom of the stairs. Poor Beca - she never got that nervous even before performing for the President or at the Worlds. In fact, Chloe couldn't remember a time when Beca was this nervous. She smiled when Beca returned, having put herself back together.

"What?" Beca said, taking her bag from Chloe.

"You're cute when you're nervous."

"Oh my God, you did not just say I'm cute when I'm puking in the gutter."

Chloe laughed. "Well not exactly. I've just never seen you so excited and anxious. It's not a side of you people usually get to see."

"Don't get too attached to it." Beca climbed into her car, letting Chloe close the door as she rolled down the window.
"Call me as soon as you're finished."

"I will. You're going to be okay on your own here today?"

"I'll be fine; I'm the last thing you need to worry about. Now go show them what I know you can do."

Beca nodded and took a deep breath. "Okay. I'll call you."

Chloe leaned through the window to kiss Beca's cheek. "I'll be waiting."

Chloe spent the morning trying to keep her mind occupied. It was almost too much, knowing that Beca was sitting in a room probably filled with record execs, mashing up hits on her laptop and laying down new beats with her drum machine and blowing everyone's mind.

The first thing she did was make the bed - their bed - which had been thoroughly christened more than once that night.

Next, she unpacked, best she could with only having a closet; the dresser was still in a box downstairs, so it mostly consisted of unpacking her toiletries in the bathroom.

She stared at the stark emptiness of the bedroom; even pulling the blinds wide open to flood it with natural light didn't make it seem less empty.

"Yep. Let's do this."

It took ten minutes, two broken nails, and a bruised knee but Chloe wrangled the disassembled dresser up the spiral staircase. Halfway up the stairs, she realized moving it was a job better for two people, but dammit, she was committed. Of course, after getting it upstairs, she couldn't even open the box without scissors, and there were none to be found, which lead to having to dig through three of Beca's boxes before finding a pair.
"Okay. Let's do this. Take two."

Three hours later and the bedroom was furnished not just with the bed, but a six-drawer dresser and a matching set of nightstands. She finished unpacking, claiming the top three drawers, the left half of the closet, and the right side of the bed; every time they shared a bed, Beca ended up to her left, so she decided it was a safe choice.

She hauled the rest of Beca's boxes up after slicing them open to figure out what needed to go upstairs versus stay downstairs. She hemmed and hawed a good ten minutes about whether or not it was too invasive to unpack Beca's stuff for her. Beca wasn't a fan of people messing with her stuff in general, though Chloe had noticed she mostly got a free pass every time she did it. The first time she knew she could get away with it was when she played with Beca's laptop until she cracked her password, and all Beca did was say, "How did you guess it?"

"You're not as mysterious as you think you are," had been Chloe's cool response as she tried to hide her reaction to the phrase Beca had set as her password, and Beca had smiled at her in a way that made Chloe's heart get stuck in her throat.

She checked her phone again - it was well past lunchtime and Beca hadn't contacted her since texting to let her know she was turning off her phone because "it was time." She had no idea how long this audition was supposed to take, but she hadn't expected it to be this long. Her own nerves were starting to get to her as she simply stood there, staring at her phone, willing it to ring or chime.

Silence.

"Just keep moving," she said to herself. She tossed her phone on the bed and gathered all the packaging materials from the furniture to haul it downstairs.

There were still IKEA boxes leaning against the walls - the illustrations on the sides reflecting their contents: a shelving unit, a table, chairs Chloe assumed matched the table, and an entertainment center.

Deciding to work in order of usefulness, Chloe dragged the chair boxes to the middle of the room and got to work.
"Chloe!"

She was screwing a leg onto the fourth chair when the front door flew open. She nearly jumped out of her skin. "Oh my gosh - Beca!" Chloe scrambled to her feet and rushed to greet Beca with a hug. "Why didn't you call? I've been waiting all day!"

"I've been calling - why aren't you answering?"

"No you haven't, I…" Chloe looked around the room for her phone. "I...I left my phone upstairs! Ughhh! I don't even know what time it is."

"Almost 3:00."

"Already? Wait what are we doing? What happened! Tell me everything." Chloe grabbed Beca's hand and pulled her to sit on one of the newly constructed chairs.

"Where should I start? This is awesome, by the way," Beca said, waving her hand Chloe's handiwork.

"Thanks. Start at the beginning."

Beca shared the details of her audition - interview - going back and explaining when Chloe asked what something meant when she dropped an industry term on her.

The first hour was essentially a panel job interview, asking Beca about her education, internship, and participation with the Bellas and her contribution to their repeat national titles and domination at Worlds, and the future of "Flashlight."

Then came the audition. Much to Beca's dismay, they had equipment set up for her to use, pre-loaded with generic tracks and songs from some of the label's new artists; her own gear was off limits. Not only did she have to figure out how to run the high-end equipment, she also had to mix everything from pop to rap.
"It was terrifying."

"Did they know you were terrified?"

"I don't think so; I mostly kept my head down and focused on what I was doing."

"So did they like it? Could you tell?"

"I only looked up once, at the end, and a couple of them were bobbing along."

"That's a good sign, right?"

Beca nodded. She was hiding a smile and Chloe knew it.

"Well?"

"And then they took me to lunch at Spago where they scheduled another interview with me for Friday."

"Beca!" Chloe launched herself out of her chair and into Beca's lap, hugging her tight. "That's amazing! I knew you could do it!"

Beca laughed. "Thanks!...Um, Chlo?"

"Hmm?"

"Please don't take this the wrong way, but you're all sweaty."

Chloe gasped. She'd completely forgotten about the state she must be in after spending half the day building furniture.
"Oh gosh, I'm a mess! I'm sorry." She scrambled off Beca's lap, looking down at herself in disgust.

"No no, it's okay, come here." Beca pulled her back into her lap. "What I meant to say is, why are you all sweaty?"

"Oh! I needed to work off some nervous energy so I worked on getting us settled."

"Three and a half chairs?"

Chloe shoved Beca's shoulder. "No, not just three and a half chairs. You'll see when you go upstairs."

"What are we waiting for? Show me." Beca stood up so quickly, she dumped Chloe on the floor.

"Hey!"

"Oops! Sorry!" Chloe knew an insincere apology when she heard one.

Beca barely made it two steps before Chloe got her hands around one of her ankles, yanking her down to the floor with a yelp. "You threw me on the ground!"

"You tripped me!" Beca was laughing and trying to shake her foot out of Chloe's grip with very little success.

"Because you threw me on the ground!" Chloe scrabbled over her and straddled her waist, trapping her. She cracked her knuckles and eyed Beca's midsection.

Beca shrieked, instantly bucking to try to throw Chloe off her. "No! No, please! I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry!"

Chloe mimed putting her hands away as though holstering pistols and bent down to kiss Beca. "Are
you going to come see my handiwork or what?"

Beca huffed, pushing her tousled hair out of her face. "What do you think I was trying to do?" She bucked again and Chloe climbed off her, both of them laughing.

"Race you?" Chloe suggested, already on her feet in a starting line stance.

"Hang on." Beca rolled over and pushed herself to her knees and up to her feet, dusting off her pants. "Okay go!"

Beca was already at the bottom of the stairs before Chloe realized she had taken off. She scrambled after her. "Hey, you cheated!"

She was on her heels up the staircase but didn't dare try any offensive maneuvers on the spiral that had already claimed its pounds of flesh from both girls. She caught up with her again at the doorway, easily catching her when Beca froze in her tracks in the doorway. She was about to grab her from behind and tickle her for cheating, but Beca looked genuinely moved. Instead, she wrapped her arms around Beca's waist and rested her chin on her shoulder.

"Chloe."

"Hmm?"

"It looks so nice."

"Come on." She nudged Beca forward so she could step around her and give her own Vanna White tour of the room.

The closet was full of their clothes, as was the dresser. The bed was made and the stuffed Grumpy Cat that Chloe had given Beca for her last birthday sat in the middle of it. All their toiletries and hair products and accessories were unpacked in the bathroom, Beca's on the left side of the sink and Chloe's on the right. The curtains Chloe sincerely hoped Beca had intended for the bedroom were installed (which was arguably the biggest battle of the morning, exceeded only by getting the boxed dresser up the stairs); a bouquet of fresh flowers sat on Beca's side of the bed from the grocery store four blocks away that Chloe had literally run to to make sure she made it home before Beca.
"I think we still need a few things, like something for our shoes, and you probably need a desk for your gear," Chloe said, circling back to Beca's side. "And I might need to re-think the closet-to-dresser ratio once the rest of my boxes show up next week." She was surprised when she turned to face Beca and see her misty-eyed. She gasped and framed Beca's face with her hands, holding her gently. "What's wrong? Do you hate it? I'm sorry, I thought the curtains were too small for the bay window, but I can take them down -"

Beca shook her head. "No. It's perfect. It's all perfect. I'm just a little taken aback."

"That's a good thing?" Chloe asked nervously.

Beca laughed, blinking back her tears. "Thank you for doing this."

Chloe relaxed and pulled Beca into an embrace. "Welcome home."
Chloe did her best to occupy her time with turning their apartment into a home. She tried to ignore the nagging guilt floating around her mind: Beca spent a pretty penny on the apartment and its furnishings, thanks to the small trust fund her father had set up to mature upon earning her degree. She would have done it whether or not you came, she reminded herself. And you didn't ask her for help. This entire arrangement was her idea.

Still. It was hard. She had no job and almost no savings. Her biggest contribution to their life together thus far had been assembling furniture and buying groceries.

Plus, she was older. Not that three years was a huge age difference, but it was enough to make her feel like she needed to get her shit together ASAP. Beca was on her way to a record producing deal. Chloe didn't even have a résumé.

The day Beca was out for her callback - second interview - she decided to buckle down and do something. It was much easier to be productive when Beca wasn't around to distract her with all her cute mannerisms and dry sarcasm and lingering touches and sexy piercings and...and she needed to focus. She pulled out her laptop - barely touched since she arrived - settled in the middle of the bed, and googled HOW TO WRITE A RÉSUMÉ.

Of course, she immediately hit a roadblock when the first tip on every website was to tailor the resume to the job being applied to and she had no idea what jobs she was going to look at.

Maybe dance instructor? Or maybe she could give voice lessons. She liked to cook...maybe she could learn to be a chef? That would mean more school. School is good - school is comfortable, familiar.

She missed Aubrey. Aubrey would know what to do. So she did the only thing she could make a decision to do. She called Aubrey.

"Chloe!"

"Hey, Bree!" Chloe said. She tried to sound chipper but she knew Aubrey would see right through it. And she did.
"What's wrong?"

Two words were all it took to reduce Chloe to tears. "...in LA...going to do...Beca...callback...all I know...a cappella...wrong decision?"

"Chloe slow down and breathe. I can't understand you."

Chloe took a deep breath and let it out slowly, counting to five. She had to do it more than once but eventually, the sobs stopped coming and she tried again, voice tight and wavering with emotion.

"What am I doing in Los Angeles, Bree?"

She heard Aubrey sigh on the other end of the line, but it wasn't one of her judgmental sighs - it was her sympathetic sigh. "We talked about this, and when we did, you were one hundred percent certain you were doing the right thing. You followed your heart."

Chloe nodded. "Yeah."

"And what does your heart tell you now?"

Chloe looked around the bedroom, Beca's clothes strewn about after her frenetic search for an outfit for her meeting; her own shirt and bra in the mix from distracting Beca from her interview anxiety with an impromptu and silly striptease; the photos that showed up sometime in the past few days tucked around the edges of the full-length mirror, which mostly featured the two of them together over the years. They were Beca's, photos Chloe didn't realize she even had; photos together at parties, and photos of Chloe teaching choreography to the rest of the Bellas from the vantage point of Beca's "DJ booth," and photos of their times studying together on the grass in the Barden quad, and photos from their trips to New York City, and photos from nights out in Atlanta, and photos from the retreat, and photos from Copenhagen, and photos of Chloe asleep in Beca's dorm room one of the many times she came up with an excuse to crash there for the night.

"That I want to be wherever Beca is."

"And that's where you are. So why are you upset?"
"Because I have no idea what I'm doing with my life!" Chloe moaned, falling backward on the bed in despair. Not at all dramatic.

"Number one," Aubrey started, "you have been out of school for less than two weeks, so stop acting like you've wasted away your life."

"But -"

"Number two," Aubrey interrupted, "you are an intelligent, educated, talented young woman who can do anything she sets her mind to."

"Bree -"

"Number three," Aubrey continued, "whatever is meant to happen will happen. You can't force it or predict it. Whatever IT is, do your best. And if you decide you hate it - change it. Nothing in life is permanent. Except death."

Chloe had to laugh at that. Leave it to Aubrey to break it down to something so simple. "That's it?"

"That's it. Just do what makes you happy."

"Beca makes me happy."

"Well, you can't do Beca for a living."

Chloe snorted.

"Oh, ew! You know that's not what I meant!"

"What do you think a gig like that would pay?"
"Chloe."

"I mean, I can't think of a more enjoyable job. She's very giving. She's also quite receptive."

"CHLOE. TMI."

Chloe laughed. "Sorry. You were saying?"

"Ugh." Chloe could almost hear her trying to shake the thought out of her brain. "What makes you happy? What can you see yourself doing five years from now?"

"All I've known is performing with the Bellas."

"And is that what you see yourself doing when you're thirty?"

Chloe thought about it. "No."

"What DO you see?"

She closed her eyes, searching. "I see...I see..."

"Don't force it. Just let it come to you."


"Stop thinking about Beca!"

"How did you...I wasn't!"
"You're so smitten; your breathing gets all airy and quick. I've noticed it for years. It's really cute. And really gross."

Chloe blushed. "Sorry."

"Now think. Visualize."


"What do you see?"

"I want to be a kindergarten teacher." Chloe inhaled sharply, hearing the words without realizing she said them.

"That sounds like the perfect job for Chloe Beale."

Chloe covered her mouth, trying not to start crying again. "It does, doesn't it? It's that simple?"

"Definitely."

"Thank you."

"Next time don't wait so long to ask me for help."

"Okay. Bree?"

"Hmm?"

"It's scary being an adult."
Aubrey didn't laugh, and Chloe was grateful. "Just remember what I said. The only thing guaranteed in life is death."

"Gee, that makes me feel a lot better."

"You're going to be okay, Chloe."

"I know."

"And you better let me know if Beca isn't treating you like the queen you are; I'll fly out there in a heartbeat to set her -"

"Aubrey!" Chloe said, laughing again. "She treats me right. But I appreciate you looking out."

"She better."

"Thanks, Bree."

"No need to thank me."

"But you just figured out my future for me!"

"You figured out your future. I only helped you see it."

Chloe smiled. She missed her friend. "Maybe you can fly out sometime anyway. Since Beca won't give you a reason."

"Just try to keep me away. As soon as peak season at The Lodge of Fallen Leaves is over, I'll be there. For now, I need to go, but you better call me before you get so close to a nervous breakdown next time. Or, you know, just to say hi."
"Okay. Miss you and love you."

"Love you too. Bye."

She stared at the ceiling. She felt infinitely better.

"Okay, Chloe. You know what you want. Now go get it."

Beca texted when she was on her way home. This meeting was much shorter than the first; she had only been gone a couple hours. The text was vague and void of anything to indicate how the meeting went.

Omw home.

Chloe resisted the urge to reply with ?, not wanting to tempt Beca to text back if she was driving. Instead, she saved her résumé document, made sure she bookmarked a few of the sites she was reading and went downstairs to wait on the couch that had shown up yesterday and nervously watch TV on the entertainment center she and Beca assembled together.

She heard keys in the door a short while later and launched herself off the couch to meet Beca at the door and greet her with a bear hug.

"Hi!"

Beca's arms flailed a little before wrapping around Chloe to return the embrace. "Hi."

Chloe released her and held her back at arm's length. Beca's face wasn't letting on to anything, stoic and emotionless. "Well?"

Beca shrugged and looked at the floor, frowning.
"Oh, sweetie," she pulled her back into a hug. "It'll be okay. Screw Capitol, there are a dozen more labels that will fight over you once they hear what you can do."

She felt Beca shake her head. "No, they won't."

"Of course they will! You're the most musically talented person I know!"

"No one's going to fight over me."

Chloe hugged her tighter. "Don't be silly. Yes, they will." It was killing her, hearing Beca so defeated.

"I'm not letting anyone else hear my music."

Chloe's heart was breaking. This wasn't Beca - if Beca was confident about one thing, it was her musical abilities, and now she had lost faith in them. "You have to! You have to get back on the horse when it bucks you off. I'll help you look up contact info for the right people and we can look at some new arrangements and -"

"I'd be in breach of contract if I gave my demos to another label."

"No you wouldn't, you don't owe them anything. You...wait...what?"

Beca reached into her bag and pulled out a folded piece of paper. She opened it and held it up for Chloe to read, smiling. "It's a letter of commitment from Capitol Records to engage me in negotiations to enter into a production contract."

"WHAT!" Chloe grabbed the paper from Beca, barely reading it before grabbing Beca for another hug. She did most of the jumping and squealing for them, Beca mostly just laughing. "You butt! You tricked me."

"I couldn't just come right out and say it. How boring would that be?"
Chloe swatted Beca's shoulder with the paper. "Meanie."

"Enough about me. How are you?"

"What do you mean, enough about you? This is a huge deal!"

"We can talk about it later," Beca said with a smile as she put down her bag and pulled off her boots, using Chloe for balance. "How was your morning?"

"It was really good. I have a plan."

"A plan? What kind of a plan?"

Chloe leaned in to whisper playfully in her ear, "I know what I want to be when I grow up."

Beca lit up. "You do! That's great! What is it?"

"A kindergarten teacher."

Beca shook her head and smiled. "Of course you do. I can't think of anything better. Except that exotic dancer gig."

"I haven't abandoned that idea completely yet." Chloe shook her hair back over her shoulders and looked squarely and seriously at Beca. "But I will have a very narrow clientele list."

Beca smirked and tucked the letter away in her bag. "So are we celebrating tonight or what?"

"Definitely."
"Good. Now come tell me about this teacher thing while I make us lunch."
To say Beca spent the next few weeks at a medium-to-hot level of frazzled would be an understatement. She spent half her day on the phone with an attorney friend of her father's and the other half reading and re-reading the contract the label couriered to the apartment. It was approximately thirty pages long and full of nothing but legal jargon like "indemnify" and "renege" and "heretofore." Chloe gave up reading it after the third page.

She was in her own state of frazzled, though her level was more mild than hot. Getting certified to teach wasn't particularly simple or cheap, and she didn't have any teacher friends to ask for advice. But ever since Beca received her offer, she felt a lot better about everything when it came to being an adult. Her girlfriend was about to ink a small but respectable record deal. Clearly, being dedicated and passionate was worth something as they proved time and again with national titles, and Chloe threw herself headfirst into the teaching world. She no longer felt the pressure of needing to pull her own weight, financially. She knew she would be able to soon, and she would be doing something she truly wanted to do.

"Hey, this one is called Fallen Oaks Elementary. Aubrey would appreciate that."

Chloe looked up, surprised to see Beca pointing at her own laptop next to Chloe's. She thought Beca was working on music, but her headphones were around her neck and she had one of the area school district websites open on her screen.

Chloe nudged her. "You're helping me look for a job?"

"Why wouldn't I? You know, I think you should look at private schools. Or like an arts-focused charter school. Somewhere that'll give you a little more freedom and support in the classroom as a new teacher without an education in education. I've heard terrible things about the California public school system."

Chloe realized she was staring at Beca, surprised by the knowledge. "How do you know all that?"

"My cousin is a teacher in Oakland. She's always posting on Facebook about the terrible things she deals with every day. Hey, maybe you could talk to her about all this."

Chloe lifted her arms up in a little cheer. "Why didn't you tell me you knew a teacher! Yes, please, I'd love to ask her some questions."
"Sorry, I didn't really think of it until just now. I eventually blocked her because she also likes to share gross Republican things."

Chloe halted her little victory raising of the roof. "Is she homophobic?"

"No, not at all. Her beef is with the government, not religious stuff. Different kind of gross Republican."

"Oh okay. Whew."

"Yeah, that wouldn't be awkward or anything. 'Hey, homophobic cuz, can you give my same-sex partner some career advice?' I wouldn't do that to you."

Chloe shook her head, feeling silly. "Of course you wouldn't." She paused a moment and made a face. "Same-sex partner?"

"Shut up. Let me send her a message right now before I forget. I'll get you her number and you two can schedule something."

Chloe took Beca's hand to shake it formally. "Thanks, partner."

Beca just rolled her eyes.

Chloe sat back and resumed her reading, stealing glances now and then at Beca's screen. She was alternating between the school website and Facebook, chatting with, Chloe assumed, her cousin. Ten minutes later, the cousin's number was saved in Chloe's phone.

"This is so exciting!" Chloe said as she curled her hair next to Beca in the bathroom. It was Beca's contract signing day, and Chloe was going with to cheer for her. Beca reminded her again and again that this wasn't some high-profile event like star athletes signing college scholarships or the next Justin Bieber signing a multimillion-dollar deal. Chloe rebuffed her self-belittling and
convinced her to allow her to tag along.

"It's really not," Beca said, carefully applying eyeliner, stopping, and cursing under her breath.

"You know it is. Don't try to convince me otherwise." Chloe glanced at her; her hands were trembling. "Here, let me," she said as she plucked the eyeliner out of Beca's fingers without acknowledging the obvious nerves.

Beca turned to face her and exhaled slowly, closing her eyes. "Thanks."

"Just one of the many perks of having a same-sex partner." She lifted the liner in time for Beca to react, earning a swat against her hip. She giggled and resumed working, both of them silent for the minute or two.

"There. Beautiful." She gave Beca a quick kiss before she opened her eyes.

Beca looked in the mirror, evaluating Chloe's work. "Thanks, babe."

Chloe grinned. She just couldn't get used to the pet names, and every time Beca dropped one on her, her heart leaped from her chest. After dreaming about it so long, convincing herself all this was real and Beca was hers and she was Beca's and this was normal was an uphill battle.

"You look nice," Beca said as they walked to the car, holding the door for Chloe.

"Thank you. So do you."

Chloe was the far more dressed up of the two - opting for a white halter top sundress, strappy heels, and a side-swept hairstyle held in place by a few well-hidden clips.

Beca was in black jeans, a dark red v-neck tee, a black denim vest, the new biker style boots she'd bought over the weekend, an assortment of bangles - basically her everyday wear, Chloe thought. The only difference was her hair, which fell in loose waves over her shoulders with a zig-zag side part, a change from her usual. Chloe thought she was absolutely gorgeous. Of course, she always thought that.
The drive was quiet. Beca was visibly nervous and despite Chloe's earlier attempts to rationalize the fact that the deal was done, this was just a formality and nothing would change, Beca was still jittery, jaw clenched tight and all but refusing to engage in conversation. Chloe settled for quietly singing along - by herself - to the radio.

Beca grabbed her hand as they checked in at the front desk. Her face was pale, but not as green as the morning of her first interview, and her palm was clammy. Chloe found it absolutely endearing. She gave it a squeeze as they handed over their IDs to be scanned, receiving temporary badges in return. She clipped it on the strap of her dress, disappointed that it took away from her put-togetherness.

"21st floor," the receptionist said with a smile that said she was far too busy to deal with anything more than necessary, made evident by her immediate answering of a phone and proceeding to ignore them or provide any additional direction. Chloe wondered if, in a few years, or months, the receptionist would treat them better. Once Beca became a huge success.

"Bec...where?" She shook her arm a little, snapping her back to focus.

"What? Oh, over here." Beca led them to a bank of elevators, swiping their badges to be let through turnstiles and into an open elevator car.

More silence as they ascended past floor after floor. Chloe finally had to break it.

"I'm so proud of you."

Beca blushed hard, and Chloe sensed she was on the verge of nervous tears and shifted her tone quickly. "You're such a badass little hottie. I can't believe I'm banging the next Pharrell."

Beca laughed a little and blew out a long breath just as the elevator slowed to a stop and opened. Chloe squeezed her hand and followed Beca off the elevator and down a hall to a glass-walled conference room. She watched Beca compose herself as they walked, a tight but real smile on her face by the time they got to the open door.

A few people milled around in the room, nibbling off a fruit and cheese plate in the corner.
"There she is!" said a young, handsome man with a five o'clock shadow, seated at the table, who stood up as they entered. "Beca, come in, let me introduce you to a few members of your team."

"Hi," Beca said; Chloe could hear the nerves in her voice, and Beca cleared her throat to try again as she shook the man's hand, dropping Chloe's in the process. "Hey!" Better. "Chloe, this is Jimmy Watz. He's the head of A&R. Jimmy, this is Chloe Beale."

Chloe shook his offered hand, fighting the urge to finish Beca's sentence with 'her partner.' She was starting to get disappointed that she hadn't been given any title whatsoever when Beca finished, "My girlfriend."

"Girlfriend?" Jimmy asked, eyes bright as he turned the handshake into a hand kiss. "Is that so?"

"Nice to meet you," Chloe said, a little creeped out by his sudden piqued interest. The guy reminded her of Cal in Titanic.

"The feeling is very mutual," he replied with a smile. She felt like she was being sized up, like when she caught a guy checking her out at a club, but this was...more invasive. She fought a shiver and grabbed Beca's hand again, squeezing it hard.

"So - how does this work?" Beca asked, gesturing at the table, apparently oblivious to Chloe's icked-outedness.

Jimmy clapped his hands. "Ah yes! It's simple really. A few signatures and some photos for possible later press use." Jimmy's eyes fell on Chloe again and she looked away. "Make yourselves comfortable. Beca, grab that middle seat in front of the paperwork. We're just waiting on a few more people."

Chloe bee-lined for the table, wanting to get away from Jimmy ASAP. She sat to Beca's left for the time being, assuming she would have to move when the bigwigs showed up for the photo-op.

The others in the room took turns greeting Beca - some she seemed to know already, others introduced themselves and included half their discography in the process. If Chloe had a broom and dustpan, she could have swept up all the names that were dropped.

They waited a very long twenty minutes before a commotion in the hallway caught their attention.
A few men and women in suits trailed by what were presumably assistants and a photographer showed themselves in - the suits ignored essentially everyone but Jimmy (even Beca barely got more than a handshake), and the photographer ignored literally everyone as he set up on the opposite side of the table.

Chloe saw one of the power suits coming her way, and she squeezed Beca's hand, leaning over to whisper, "I'm gonna move," before making a quick and quiet exit to the opposite side of the table, standing what she hoped was a safe distance from the photographer. She fiddled with her iPhone, juggling it and Beca's, which she'd swiped out of the car's console when parking. She planned to Facetime Beca's dad so he could watch it live and take her own photos with her other hand.

She looked up after a few minutes of getting everything set up on the phones and connecting with Beca's father - Beca seemed tiny at the massive table surrounded by so many people. Chloe hadn't realized things were already starting - she had anticipated some type of speech, which she realized was silly. This wasn't an award or a graduation. Two stapled packets of paperwork were in front of Beca and the man who sat down to her right, and a presumed assistant reached between them and turned pages and pointed, and the two signed - over and over again. Chloe whipped the phones up, nearly dropping them in the process, doing her best to document it without crying happy tears. It was anti-climactic enough that it wasn't too hard to not cry.

They got through the packet quickly, and the assistant swapped them and they went through the process again. It wasn't until they'd both signed everything that the photographer started snapping photos - apparently they preferred posed shots instead of action shots. The photographer gave trite direction to the bigwig and Beca - shaking hands, an arm around Beca's shoulders, smiling at the camera pretending to sign, and then all over again with Jimmy and Beca.

More commotion behind Chloe made her glance back in annoyance, giving the unsubtle movie theater "shut up" glare, but she froze, blinking, and blinking again, before changing her glare into a smile and turning back to keep her eyes on Beca, who clearly had no idea what was happening, her view blocked by the photography equipment, Chloe, and the other label reps that were watching. Chloe tried her best to keep her face the same - proud and happy and excited and absolutely not freaking out about the person standing behind her.

The photographer looked back and exchanged words with one of the members of the recently arrived entourage and nodded. "Okay, can I get everyone off the table except Greer, Jimmy, and the new girl? The paperwork can go, too." A brief commotion and people cleared.

Chloe held her breath, her eyes fixed on Beca.

"Katy, you ready?"
The alarm on Beca's face was instant, as was the color that rushed to her cheeks. Chloe mouthed "Oh my gosh!" and did her best to convey an excited serenity - if that was even a thing - to try to keep Beca cool. She watched Beca jump up from her seat, almost knocking over her chair in the process, and stick out her hand a few awkward seconds too early for a handshake.

"Hi. I'm Beca. Mitchell."

"I've heard a lot about you. They sent me a couple of your tracks - I like your sound."

"Me, too. I mean, about you. I mean, obviously, I've heard a lot about you. You're really pretty. I mean, shit." Beca turned away for a second, hands on her head, looking at Chloe with panicked desperation.

Chloe smiled and nodded at the mega-famous superstar being ignored and motioned like she was scratching records on a turntable - mentally apologizing for the motion sickness she probably gave Beca's father on the live video feed. You're here for your music. She likes your music.

Beca tried again. "Um, thanks."

"You seem nervous."

Beca laughed - nervously. "I am. Sorry. I didn't know you'd be here today. I wasn't mentally prepared."

"It's cool, it happens. When Madonna showed up at one of my shows saying she wanted to be friends, I basically shit my pants."

Beca laughed again, and Chloe could see the tension in her frame starting to dissipate - cursing was usually a surefire way to get Beca to feel comfortable, amongst "her people." Apparently that's what the photographer was waiting for as well, because he started ordering people around again. Photos of the group of four, photos with varying combinations of three, photos with just Beca and Katy in various poses - shaking hands, arms around shoulders and waists, hugging, sitting on the table in mirrored poses. Katy was actually really cool - Chloe wasn't sure why she found that surprising; she always seemed pretty chill - and by the time the photographer declared the photo-op complete, Beca seemed completely comfortable, even cracking jokes with her as they wrapped things up.
Chloe's arms were dying from holding the phones up for so long. It had been nearly an hour, but it was well worth the burn in her triceps. She waved a quick goodbye to Beca's dad and slipped the phones into her purse just as Beca - and Katy Perry - walked up to her.

"Hi!" Chloe said, greeting Beca with a hug before waving nervously. "Hi, Katy Perry."

"Katy's fine," she said with a smile. "And you are?"

"I'm Chloe. Beale."

"Nice to meet you, Chloe Beale."

Chloe laughed nervously and desperately wished Beca was by her side so she could hold her hand or waist or anything.

"Chloe's my girlfriend," Beca said, stepping to Chloe's side and slipping an arm around her waist, as though having read her mind.

"Oh! Well, I don't know which one of you is luckier."

"I am," Beca and Chloe said at the exact same time, making all three girls laugh.

"If that's not nauseatingly cute, I don't know what is. Anyway, my assistant is gesturing wildly behind you so that means I need to leave, but I'm glad we got to meet each other, Beca. I'm looking forward to working together."

"Thanks. Me, too."

"My assistant will get your number on our way out. We'll meet up soon and get to know each other better."
"Oh, that's not…" Beca pointed around the room. "That's not something that one of these people in a suit needs to arrange? Or no? I have no idea what I'm doing."

Katy leaned forward, mock whispering, "I'm pretty sure I can meet with my producer whenever I want."

"Right, of course."

"I really do need to go. Talk soon. And nice meeting you, Chloe Beale."

"Ditto, Katy Perry," Chloe said, instantly wanting to facepalm. Ditto?

With Katy's exit, the rest of the bodies disappeared, all but Jimmy, who stood behind them and draped an arm over each girl's shoulder, far too friendly for Chloe's liking.

"That went pretty well," Jimmy said. "You two ladies have plans for tonight?"

"We do," Chloe said quickly. Her reaction earned a curious look from Beca.

"If you need a gentleman to escort you, I'd be glad to join you."

I'm sure you would, sleazeball. "We're good."

"Thanks for the offer, though," Beca said, assuaging the tension. "Is it cool if we take off?"

The arm around Chloe's shoulder finally disappeared, but not before grazing her lower back, far far too friendly for her liking. She took a step forward and turned around to face him. She longed to lash out and tell him to keep his sleazy hands to himself, that two girls together does not equal entertainment for men, and he was definitely barking up the wrong tree.

Instead, she smiled and tucked her hands behind her back so he couldn't touch them. "Nice to meet you," she lied through her teeth.
In the parking garage, Chloe hesitated when Beca opened the passenger side door for her. Quickly, before Beca could stop her, she swiped the keys out of her hand and scurried around the car to get behind the wheel.

"Do you mind telling me what you're doing?" Beca said, leaning down to talk through the open passenger door.

"Get in."

"This is my car."

Chloe smiled. "I know."

"And you're going to drive it? In Los Angeles."

She started the engine and buckled her seat belt. "Yep. I drove in Atlanta and their traffic is just as bad. So get in."

"Chlo..."

Chloe smiled as sweetly as possible and batted her eyelashes. "Don't you trust me?"

Beca hesitated and Chloe knew she had her in a catch-twenty-two.

"Just get in!"

Beca sat down with a little bit of a huff. "Now what?"

"Now," Chloe said as she moved the seat back a couple inches, "we celebrate."
Unbeknownst to Beca, Chloe had spent the past few days planning ways to celebrate the big day. Their first stop would be lunch. Chloe followed the GPS on her phone to an Italian bistro she found on Yelp - it had great reviews and was held in high regard by the locals.

Beca ordered a panini, Chloe a salad, and upon seeing each other's food they promptly traded a half for a half.

They drove for quite awhile after lunch, and Chloe ignored Beca's questions as to where they were headed. "I promise, it'll be fun!" was all she'd give her.

Chloe pulled into a parking spot along the entrance to Santa Monica Pier, roller coaster and Ferris wheel lit up in anticipation of the setting sun. "Here we are!"

"The pier?"

"Totally! You might wanna leave your vest in here so you don't get too hot." Chloe got out of the car and dug around in her bag, tossing a pair of flip-flops to Beca's seat as she traded her heels for white flip-flops. "And put these on."

"Why?" Beca asked while doing as told.

"You don't always get to know everything, Beca!" Chloe was a tad exasperated at Beca's constant questioning, though she found her curiosity cute. Of course she did.

"Okay, okay," Beca said as she tossed her boots, socks, and vest into the car.

"Good. Let's go." Chloe took Beca's hand and led them to the pier's entrance.

They wandered around for a bit, people watching and eating the cotton candy Chloe insisted upon getting. The pier housed a few amusement park rides - a roller coaster, Ferris wheel, merry-go-round, sea dragon, and a slew of carnival games and food carts.
Chloe spotted the carousel’s Hippodrome in the distance and picked up her pace. "Ooh! Come on!"

"A carousel? What, are we, five?"

"Hey Grumpy Dwarf, get over it and come have fun with me," Chloe admonished with a wink.

The lines were fairly short and they were able to catch the tail end of the group being loaded. Chloe led them, weaving through poles and brightly colored animals and benches until she found two vacant horses side by side. She hopped on the white one, sitting side-saddle in her dress. She patted the brown horse next to her.

"Saddle up, little lady."

"You're serious?"

"Dixie Chicks serious."

Beca was hiding a smile and Chloe knew she'd break her down soon. She climbed up on the horse, and Chloe giggled that she had to use the higher option of the stirrups once she was seated.

"See, this isn't so bad," she said as they bobbed up and down and went round and round in slow circles.

"It's okay."

"Just okay?" Chloe pulled her phone out of her pocket and pointed the camera at Beca. "Say cheese!"

Beca rolled her eyes but smiled for the photo, which made Chloe happy. And gave her an idea. She slid off her mount and hopped onto the back of Beca's horse, holding onto her waist for balance. "Selfie!"
"Ah, of course," Beca said a little sarcastically - but Chloe knew when Beca was being silly versus truly grumpy and this wasn't grumpy time. Beca leaned back against Chloe for the picture - or pictures, since Chloe turned it into a mini photo shoot, making sure she stole a few shots with her lips on Beca's cheek.

The carousel slowed and they hopped off the ride. Chloe knew Beca's "this is lame" armor cracked on the carousel and she grabbed her hand again, pulling her into a run. "Come on!"

Beca laughed and followed, led by Chloe to the roller coaster. Its line wasn't terribly long either - they only had to wait fifteen or so minutes, long enough to catch their breath after running.

"Oh!" Chloe said, remembering. "We didn't even talk about the fact that Katy Perry crashed your signing and that you're officially a big-time record producer!"

"Right? What the Hell was that?" Beca said, eyes bright with excitement. "I can't believe they got her to come."

"Why not? You're going to be a big part of her next project."

"Yeah, I guess. No pressure," Beca laughed. "Just figure out how to top her last album. Which sold three million copies when all I've produced is one song and some a cappella numbers. It's cool."

"You must really have impressed them." Chloe nudged Beca with her elbow. "Not that I'm surprised."

Talking about the team at the label reminded Chloe of gross Jimmy; she was about to ask Beca about him when the line moved and they rushed into their coaster car, clicking the lap bar down tight. Chloe tucked her skirt under her thighs, suddenly realizing how silly it was to be wearing a dress and going on thrill rides.

"Ready?" Beca said, excitedly drumming her hands on the lap bar. Her armor was down.

"Duh! Let's do this!"
The train of cars lurched forward and click-click-clicked its way up the hill, sending them rolling down and around the simple little track. Chloe woohoo!ed most of the way. Beca was silent, but bravely held her arms up the entire ride; Chloe didn't dare to do that.

One short minute later and they were back where they began, hopping out of the cars to let the next riders board.

"That was fun," Beca said. She worked on getting her hair back in place, disheveled thanks to the wind on the roller coaster. "What's next?"

They wandered along the pier, a light breeze off the Pacific doing nicely at keeping the temperature down. It was getting late in the day and the sky was shifting from blue to orange as the sun neared the horizon.

"Just walk with me." She smiled and took Beca's hand, meandering along the wooden planks until she found an unoccupied bench near the end of the pier. They sat down and Beca draped her arm around Chloe's shoulders - tantalizingly close to her cleavage, Chloe noticed. It made her pulse pick up at the thoughts that raced through her mind - suddenly she regretted not taking Beca home and celebrating in a tad more intimate manner. But, as the sun set over the Pacific Ocean and they watched it together, the sounds of the carnival in the background, she was perfectly content to sit there forever. Or at least for another hour or two.

Beca's fingers trailed surreptitiously along her décolletage as though she was reading her mind. Chloe glanced at her, but Beca was gazing out over the water, wearing a faint, content smile. She just watched her, and the way the sun on the water reflected in her eyes. Beca's smile started to grow until it split into a grin.

"What?" she asked, still watching the sunset.

"Just looking at you."

"Why?"

"Because you're beautiful and I can't believe you're mine."

Beca looked down, suddenly shy as she stole a sideways glance at Chloe, still smiling. "You can't
say things like that to me."

Chloe cocked her head. "Why not?"

"Because it makes me want to cry."

"Babe..." Chloe didn't know what to say to that. Sometimes she forgot that the years of presumed unrequited love went both ways; Beca had waited as long for this as she had. Just hearing Beca mention wanting to cry made Chloe tear up and she quickly broke eye contact to look out at the ocean again. She saw Beca do the same, and after a few minutes of comfortable silence, Chloe tilted her head to rest it against Beca's.

Beca's fingers were still trailing along Chloe's bare skin. "This is nice."

The sun sank below the horizon and the carnival lights of the pier really came alive - reds and yellows and blues and greens twinkling in a dizzying array. Come on. Sunset selfie."

Chloe pulled out her phone and flipped open the camera app, and Beca groaned.

"Oh stop it - I know you secretly love it." Chloe pulled Beca off the bench and turned their backs to the sun, snapping a selfie with the glittering ocean behind them. She turned and kissed Beca, blindly trying to get a good photo. She got a little distracted in the kiss and gave up trying to take a picture, moaning a little when Beca's tongue grazed her lower lip.

As much as she wanted to continue it, she had one last stop on their little excursion. "Come on."

Beca put her arm around Chloe's waist, walking along the pier side by side. Chloe angled them toward the neon-lit spokes of the Ferris wheel.

"You're such a romantic," Beca said with a nudge.

Chloe shrugged. "Can you blame me?"
The line was longer than the others had been, but there was a pleasant silence between them, simply enjoying one another’s presence, with a hint of anticipation of things to come once they got home. It took quite awhile to load and unload the ride, but eventually, they stepped into a red umbrella-covered gondola. Chloe scooted around the bench to sit next to Beca and the wheel swung them backward, launching into motion. The view from the top of the wheel was breathtaking, the sunset having emblazoned the sky in reds and yellows over the water, with the lights of the pier below and the glow of Los Angeles extending as far as they could see.

Chloe was so caught up in the view that Beca kissing her was a surprise, though a welcomed one. She sighed into it and held the back of Beca’s neck, kissing her back sweetly, with a few teasing lip bites mixed in for good measure - enough to convey her desire. Not that Beca needed much of a hint, made evident by the hand that appeared on Chloe’s thigh beneath her skirt. Chloe’s breath caught when she realized where Beca’s fingers were wandering to, and she indulged in it, making her head swim and body throb.

Beca was teasing her, but Chloe was on the brink in an instant. The excitement of the day and the romance of the evening and the eroticism of making out and being touched on the Ferris wheel - private, but not completely private - was a huge turn on. She finally understood the thrill Beca got out of it; she’d been so paranoid during their little stint on the flight from Copenhagen that she hadn’t processed it properly. Chloe kissed her harder and let her knees part further, encouraging her to continue.

And she did. Beca had her under a spell, holding her on the edge of climax, never giving her the last little push over the edge.

Then the wheel halted, and their cart swung gently near the top. The sudden change in momentum brought Chloe's mind back to earth as they hung above it.

Beca pulled away from the kiss, smiling. "Damn, so close."

Chloe whimpered. She was teetering on the edge but there was no way to get it back now, not without almost starting from scratch. She felt high, nonetheless.

Beca chuckled and reclaimed her hand, not so subtly sucking on her fingers before kissing her quickly as the wheel swung them closer and closer to the bottom as passengers off-loaded. "You know, I thought this was supposed to be my celebration?"

Chloe almost growled. She needed Beca and she needed her now. "Don't worry. It will be." She grabbed Beca’s hand and led her off the ride, all but running back to the car where she didn't dare
even kiss Beca - if she did, they wouldn't make it home anytime soon and might get slapped with a ticket for public indecency.

She let Beca drive. She was too worked up and distracted. And of course, they were dozens of miles from home. And Beca wouldn't keep her right hand to herself as she drove. Chloe alternated between pushing it away and telling her to focus on the road and pushing it further between her legs. And just to make things even worse (better), Beca started singing along to The Cranberries’ "Dreams" on the radio; her voice had made Chloe melt for years, and tonight it almost literally did.

_I know I've felt like this before, but now I'm feeling it even more,  
Because it came from you.  
And then I open up and see the person falling here is me,  
A different way to be._

And by the look on her face, Beca knew exactly what she was doing.
"Open the door."

Easier said than done. Chloe's back was pinned against the front door, and Beca's hands were under her dress and mouth on her neck.

"I'm trying...just..." She had to turn around so she could have half a chance at getting the key in the lock. The door finally gave way and they stumbled through it. They dropped bags and shoes and keys, and Chloe led them up the spiral staircase to the bedroom, Beca's hands on her the entire way.

Chloe hit the bed first, sitting down hard since she wasn't paying very much attention. Beca tried to push her to her down, one knee on the bed along her thigh, but Chloe pushed her back to keep her on her feet. She wanted to slow it down, just a tad. This day was supposed to be about Beca, and she wanted to show her, make her feel how proud she was, how much she loved her.

She trailed her fingers up Beca's legs slowly, over the dark denim. She teased, slipping between her legs and pressing just enough to be felt. She watched Beca's face, eyelashes fluttering at the knowledge of more to come. Her hands continued their journey higher and paused briefly to unbutton the jeans. Beca's breathing hitched a little at that, and Chloe smiled at her - it was a wonderful and powerful feeling knowing she could have that effect on her. She slid her fingertips under the edge of her shirt, scratching over her warm abdomen, muscles tensing at the soft touch. She trailed them around and up, slowly pushing the shirt higher until she could lean down and press a kiss just below Beca's navel. She felt hands in her hair, the clips being removed one by one.

She moved higher until her fingers clipped the edge of Beca's bra just under her breasts. She caressed the sensitive skin there, taking as much pleasure in Beca's eyes falling closed as she was sure Beca was feeling. She pushed the shirt up further and Beca lifted her arms automatically. Chloe had to stand up to pull it off completely and she took the opportunity to kiss her again, a deep, slow, searing kiss that left them both breathless. She sat back down and smiled at Beca leaning forward a little as she tried to follow the kiss.

Her hands were on Beca again, working up from her knees, pressing between her legs with a little more pressure. Beca was chewing her lower lip, eyes closed, waiting. Chloe made her way to the fly on her jeans and drew the zipper down. The simple motion made Beca moan, and she knew without a doubt this was going to be a night to remember for more than just the contract that was stuffed in Beca's messenger bag downstairs.
She pulled, working the tight-fitting jeans over Beca's hips and thighs. She had to use her foot to push them the rest of the way down when she lost the necessary leverage. It was awkward, and she realized Beca was watching her when she heard her laugh.

"This is supposed to be sexy, not funny," Chloe said with a little pout.

"Trust me, it's sexy." Beca helped with getting the jeans off completely, tossing them to the side. She remained standing, and Chloe was pleased that she was just going with it, not questioning or demanding. Beca's fingers threaded through Chloe's loosened hair; the sensation made Chloe sigh and a shiver run through her. She wrapped her arms around Beca's waist and pulled her close, pressing a kiss between the valley of Beca's breasts. Chloe needed the black piece of lingerie covering them to be gone - now. Her fingers deftly unhooked it and Beca pulled it down her arms, hands immediately returning to Chloe's hair.

For a moment, Chloe leaned back and just stared. Beca had really nice curves, though she rarely chose to wear clothes that accentuated them. Stripping away the layers revealed the beauty underneath, and Chloe felt a little breathless that such a surreal thing as slowly undressing Beca to make love to her was happening.

"How long are you going to make me wait?" Beca asked, smiling.

Chloe quirked an eyebrow. "As long as I want."

"Is that so?"

"Mhmm." Chloe leaned forward and flicked her tongue against Beca's nipple playfully, making the other girl gasp. Her hands drifted lower over Beca's stomach, careful not to be too tickly. They traveled around the waistband of the last piece of clothing, dipping under it, starting to pull them down but stopping and continuing their explorations elsewhere, over Beca's hips, the backs of her knees, the soft skin of her inner thighs, pressing against the warmth there.

Beca whimpered a little, tilting her hips forward. Chloe knew she was more than ready - she could feel it. She lightened her touch, ghosting against the thin fabric so, so gently. She watched Beca's face and the way her eyebrows would lift and knit and how her mouth fell a little open. Beca was watching her, too, but was struggling to focus. Chloe reveled in it, leaning back again to see her better, touching her gently. She supported herself with her free hand, giving the distinct impression that she was in no hurry. A noise escaped Beca, something between a whine and moan, and her hands pulled from Chloe's hair and made a move to push down the little black panties.
Chloe halted her motions and clicked her tongue. That's all it took for Beca to stop what she was trying to do - and the power gave Chloe a huge rush. She removed her hand and gave a permissive wave. "Go ahead."

Beca pushed them down in a hurry, kicking them off her foot. She made a move to climb into Chloe's lap but visibly checked herself and backed off to wait. Whatever game they were playing, Beca was into it.

Chloe just looked at her, drinking her in. She knew Beca felt exposed, maybe a little insecure - her arms would move as though to cover herself, but then they'd straighten and remain at her sides before doing it again.

"Dude, are you just going to stare at me all night?"

"Sorry," Chloe said with a smile. "Just enjoying the view."

Beca rolled her eyes but locked her gaze with Chloe's again, and they watched one another until Chloe sat forward and pulled her hair around and off her back. "Untie me."

She felt Beca's hands working the knot at the base of her neck and the relief that came with the straps of the dress releasing and falling away. Her dress pooled at her waist and she sat back, catching Beca eyeing her cleavage, made prominent thanks to her strapless bra; it cost a pretty penny, but good strapless bras were hard to come by, and this one continued to return major dividends. Like now.

For a moment she considered removing it, but it made her feel sexy, and the way Beca was looking at her only accentuated it. Instead, she lifted her hips to slip the dress down and off. Beca was watching her so intently she could almost feel the heat on her skin from her gaze. It was all Chloe could do to keep taking things slowly. She wanted to throw Beca on the bed and ravish her until the sun came up; she still would, of course - the ravishing until sunup part - but there were hours to go until then and it was blissfully torturous to drag this out as long as possible.

Chloe worked her way backward on the bed, propping a pillow behind her against the headboard as she settled, legs out in front of her. She patted her thigh. "Come here."

The thought crossed her mind that that felt a little too akin to calling a dog and she grimaced,
wishing she could take it back. She needed to get better at the dirty talk. It didn't seem to bother Beca, however, or if it did she didn't let on, and she was on the bed and straddling Chloe's lap in a matter of seconds, sitting back against the tops of Chloe's thighs.

Chloe held Beca's hips lightly, touching, grazing her skin. She tilted her head back and pursed her lips in a request, and Beca's were on hers immediately, kissing her hungrily, hotly, passionately. Beca's hands were back in her hair, pulling and tugging and keeping her close; Chloe felt absolutely devoured. They had shared a number of extremely hot moments since revealing their feelings, but she was certain this moment was blowing the rest out of the water.

Her resolve to wait and then wait some more broke, and her hand slid between Beca's legs in a moment of weakness, drawing a long moan of gratitude from Beca. There was no longer a need to tease her, and she pressed her fingers up and in with one smooth, easy motion, fitting the palm of her hand against Beca.

Beca nodded as they kissed and Chloe pushed, hard enough to lift Beca off her lap a bit. She pushed again and this time Beca moved with her, and they worked to find a rhythm. They battled a little; Beca would start rushing so Chloe would make her slow down until they mutually agreed.

Chloe was getting overwhelmed quickly. In all the lovemaking they'd managed to squeeze into their short time together, it had never been quite like this. Sure, they got a little wild in Denmark, but they had been drinking and her senses were clouded. Not now, though. Now, they were clear as a bell. Now, Beca was straddling her lap and riding her hand and gripping her shoulders and moaning and...oh God...she broke her kiss with Chloe to sit back, eyes closed, moans slipping out as she moved her hips. Chloe let her dictate the pace now. It was too damn sexy to even consider trying to control. Seeing Beca like this, wild, uncensored, straight up taking from Chloe what she needed was arguably the most erotic thing she'd experienced so far - each passionate moment they made topped the next, and Chloe couldn't help but wonder how they could possibly go even further, higher together.

Her free hand hovered over Beca's chest, debating whether to grab or just watch. Would it be distracting? Beca seemed so focused, eyes closed tightly, breathing hard. Chloe's only job right now was to keep her fingers where they needed to be, and as insanely hot as it was, she wanted to be doing more. She eased her free hand a little closer, and Beca's movement brought her close enough for her breast to brush Chloe's palm.

A little gasp escaped Beca and Chloe decided it wouldn't be distracting. She grabbed her breast roughly and a high-pitched moan told her she was correct. She squeezed and caressed and pulled and pinched until she couldn't help but sit forward and take it in her mouth and bathe the tip with her tongue. Beca ground her hips down harder into her hand and Chloe could feel she was close, the heat and the tightness always a giveaway. Beca's hands were in her hair again, first pulling and then pushing her closer to her breast. She was moving fast now, with abandon. The desperate race
Chloe felt it just before Beca gasped, and moaned, and breathed, "Fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck," and fell forward, grabbing the headboard with one hand while the other stayed tangled in Chloe's hair.

Her head hit the headboard hard with Beca's sudden movement, making her wince - not that she cared. Beca was still trembling against her, and it was the only feeling that mattered.

"Shiiiiiiiiit," Beca finally said, peeling herself away from Chloe to sit back against her thighs again. She pushed her hair back and out of her face, holding it up and off her neck as she exhaled deeply.

Chloe smiled at her, withdrawing her hand slowly to just touch her gently and revel in the sensation.

"God damn."

"All you can do now is swear? I'm flattered."

Beca grinned. "Fucking Hell."

Chloe was torn between continuing their tête-à-tête and the increasingly urgent need to address her blazing inferno of arousal. She squeezed her thighs together, getting one-one-thousandth of an iota of relief. Beca must have felt her move.

"You turned on, baby?"

Chloe bit her lip. Pet names and sexy words, and the tone Beca was using...she nodded.

Beca dropped her hair and framed Chloe's face with her hands, staring into her eyes. "Can I do something about that for you?" She kissed Chloe before she could answer, and Chloe let herself be kissed.

When Beca pulled away, it took Chloe a few seconds to get her eyes open again. Her body was on
fire, and it wasn't going to die out without proper attention.

"Can I?" Beca's fingers trailed down from Chloe's face to her neck, to her chest to dip into the cups of her bra and then further down, one hand pushing between Chloe's tightly closed thighs.

Chloe opened her mouth to say "yes," but all that came out was a moan. She couldn't spread her legs with Beca on her lap, and she desperately, urgently needed more contact. Since she couldn't talk, she showed, nudging Beca until she moved out of her lap. She pushed her thong down and off, not wanting anything in the way. She slid down and laid back, Beca sitting on her knees next to her, just looking. She felt exposed, but if Beca allowed her to just look, she could do the same. Her fingers itched to move, to quench her thirst, and she wondered if Beca would judge her, or make a joke about it.

And then she thought...Beca would never do that. So she looked at Beca, and rested her hand on her stomach, tickling herself lightly, moving in slow circles, inching down bit by bit. Beca seemed to realize what was happening, eyes wide with interest and excitement, licking her lips in anticipation. It gave her the courage she needed to move lower, sliding her hand between her legs. She knew she was turned on, but even she was shocked by how aroused she was. She gasped at the sensation and heard Beca's own little gasp.

She couldn't believe she was doing this - touching herself while Beca watched. But there was something so insanely hot about it that it made it okay.

Beca shifted next to her, moving closer, resting her hand on Chloe's thigh. She was watching intently. She pulled a little, and Chloe parted her legs a little more.

A moment later, Beca was settling on her stomach between Chloe's legs, just watching as she wiggled her arms under Chloe's thighs until they were more or less over her shoulders.

They'd been in this position many times, but it was always Beca licking and caressing her, not watching as she caressed herself.

"Jesus, Chlo…"

And once again, Chloe registered it as the most erotic moment she had experienced, trumping the one they had just shared.
She closed her eyes and tried to not think about how extremely an intimate a moment this was. For a moment, she forgot how to breathe when fingers easily slipped inside, and they weren't her own. They moved slowly, pushing and pulling. When she caught her breath, Chloe moaned and pushed herself down, closer to Beca. No more shyness - she wanted and needed Beca to know all of her. Her fingers moved more quickly, as did Beca's - it was almost sensory overload. She could hear words of encouragement, of affirmation, of approval, but she couldn't actually decipher what they were. She just knew they all meant yes, and if she could have repeated them, she would have.

And then she felt it - the soft wetness of a tongue, teasing over her fingers, pressing between them, trying to get at what Chloe was handling. It was really fucking arousing, and Chloe felt almost out of body, hearing herself moan rather than thinking about moaning. The shields of bashfulness weren't just down now, they were obliterated. She spread her fingers to give Beca the access she was seeking out.

She saw stars - or flames, or fireworks - or all three, and she wasn't even at the peak yet. She'd never been so turned on, so desperate and needy and wanton. Her free hand found Beca and tangled in her hair, pulling her closer, needing her to not be so soft and gentle - she wanted force and roughness and speed, and she moved her hips to get her point across clearly.

Beca was intuitive, always so intuitive and thoughtful, and then she was sucking and pulling and pushing and there was no more soft and gentle, and Chloe watched herself come undone from above, shuddering, writhing, moaning. It was so intense, it arched her back off the bed.

Hers weren't the only moans filling the room, and the thought that Beca was enjoying the moment almost as much as she was only made it that much better.

Finally, it passed, and she unfolded, falling back onto the bed. She felt Beca move and sit up, crawling over her and Chloe licked her lips and took a breath, ready for the kiss she knew was coming. It was hot and wet and she knew Beca was aroused all over again from the way her tongue pushed further and further into her mouth. She had to turn away from it though; she hadn't had time to catch her breath. Beca's kiss adjusted and landed on her neck, drawing a shiver out of Chloe.

"Are we done celebrating?" Chloe asked breathlessly, already knowing the answer.

"Not even close."
The chime of Beca's text alert would not shut up. Then it started ringing. And chiming. And ringing again.

Chloe sat up and looked around the room for the source of the noise. It was coming from somewhere on the floor. She slid out of bed and followed the ringing, tracking it to the pocket of Beca's jeans. She pulled it out and silenced the call that came through at that moment - all the calls and texts were from the same number. It was nearly noon. It felt like midnight. She'd only gone to sleep a few hours earlier, and the lingering tremble in her thighs as she walked back to the bed was a pleasant reminder of why she had been up so late.

She fell back into bed and shoved the phone into Beca's face as it rang again.

A groan and an attempt to push the offending intrusion away was perhaps the cutest thing Chloe would witness that week. She smiled and dropped a kiss on Beca's ear.

"I think it's important, babe. They won't stop calling."

Another groan and Beca's hand waved around until Chloe put the phone in it for her.

"Shit, bright," came a gravelly morning voice as she swiped to answer the call. "Hello?"

Chloe could hear a female voice on the other end of the call.

"Yeah it's me...Oh hi...Sorry I was sleeping...You could say that..." Beca tried and failed to stifle a yawn. "Yeah that'd be cool...Today? What time?...Um...what time is it now?" Beca sat up quickly, looking around the room, bewildered. "What area?"
Chloe knew how she felt; after the night they had, she still felt disoriented.

"Um, okay I can make that work...Yeah totally...Text me the address...Okay...Bye."

Beca was scrambling out of bed and into the bathroom before the conversation was finished and Chloe lazily followed. Beca was already in the shower by the time she got there.

"Hey Bec? You gonna tell me what that was all about?"

Beca pulled the shower curtain back a little, and Chloe tried not to stare. "That was Katy's assistant. She wants to meet for lunch."

"The assistant?"

"No. Katy. Like, she and I are meeting for lunch."

Chloe gasped and clapped her hands. "That's so awesome!"

"Right?" Beca closed the curtain and Chloe took a seat on the closed toilet lid.

"Are other people going to be there?"

"I don't know."

"Are you supposed to have something prepared? Suggestions or something like that?"

"I don't know. Shit, I hope not. I'll bring my computer to be safe."

"Good idea." Chloe yawned. She felt like she could sleep for a week. She finally glanced at herself
in the mirror - her hair resembled that of a lion's mane, her mascara was flaking off, eyeliner smeared. She hadn't bothered to put pajamas on after everything last night and still hadn't bothered this morning.

She was also sporting a massive hickey, but she was grateful that it was on her breast and not her neck - she would have to warn Beca about that. She couldn't show up to job interviews with love bites all over her neck.

"You still here?"

Chloe jumped a little: she still wasn't completely awake. "Yeah."

"Good."

"Good?" Chloe felt a warm, wet hand grab her arm and yank.

"Get in here."

Chloe stumbled into the bathtub, a little shocked since she had every intention of going back to sleep once Beca left.

Beca was washing her face and stepped out of the way of the spray. "Go ahead."

"Thanks?" Chloe said with a laugh. "Who said I was ready to shower, by the way?" She stepped under the hot water and a groan slipped past her lips. It felt amazing.

"You're welcome."

For once, their shower was simply a shower. Beca was rushing to finish and Chloe was taking her time, resulting in a lot of trading places to take turns under the shower head. Beca did take the time to steal a kiss or two, but mostly it was all business.

Beca hopped out while Chloe finished and listened to the frantic slamming of drawers and the blast
of a blow dryer as Beca scrambled to get ready. Chloe was barely stepping out of the shower when Beca was fully dressed and made up - though Chloe noticed she had cheated with her hair and ended up tying it into a bun.

"I gotta run," Beca said, already out the bedroom door and on her way down the stairs.

That wouldn't do. "Wait!" Chloe called, scampering after her with her fluffy white bath towel wrapped around her body and wet hair dripping down her back.

Beca was at the front door, hand on the knob. "I gotta go, Chlo."

"I know I know!" Chloe didn't cut her speed, running right into Beca to pin her against the door and kiss her. "Good morning," she said when she pulled back.

Beca's face was a little flushed. Chloe smiled. "Morning," Beca said with a grin. "I really need to go. I'm sorry."

Chloe stepped back and held her hands up as though freeing her, forgetting for a second that her hands were holding up her towel. It fell but she caught it around her waist and pulled it back up, tucking it around her chest again. She noticed Beca was staring at her body rather than leaving, and it gave her butterflies. But she knew the butterflies could wait.

"Go."

"Right, yes! I'll text you."

"Not when you're driving!" Chloe called at Beca, who was running down the path, car beeping as she disarmed the alarm.

"I know!" Beca called back as she climbed into her Corvette and gunned it.

Realizing she was standing outside in nothing but a towel, Chloe stepped inside and closed the door. She was in no rush, still feeling the previous night all over her body in the pleasant tightness of her hamstrings and calves and back as she fetched a fresh towel out of the dryer in the pantry to
wrap around her dripping wet hair so she could make herself breakfast. She glanced at the clock on the microwave - or lunch.

It was Thursday. Or maybe Wednesday. Not having a regular schedule took a toll on Chloe's psyche. She was sleeping until noon and staying up until well past midnight. It started when she was up late applying for job after job - a perfectly respectable reason.

Then it evolved into staying up late watching terrible reality television with Beca. Then Beca couldn't handle the trashy entertainment anymore and called it quits, and Chloe would be up alone by herself watching infomercials and the Kardashians, stuck in endless loops of surfing the Internet - Facebook to Twitter to Tumblr to Instagram to see what she might have missed in previous episodes of trashy television and behind the scenes exclusives and back to Tumblr where she had started live-blogging her binge watching.

She had developed quite the following there. She was maybe kind of proud of making a name for herself within a new community - even if it was a digital one full of strangers. At least she had friends there, people who looked to her for advice or opinion.

"Dude, you didn't come to bed last night. Again."

Chloe looked up from her computer screen, muscles seizing from the sudden movement. She grabbed her shoulder and hissed at the pain.

"Don't hiss at me. You're turning into a hermit. Use your words."

"I'm not hissing at you. I tweaked my neck."

"Because you've been frozen in the same position for hours staring at that computer." Beca was in the kitchen making coffee at the Keurig. "What can you possibly be doing online all night that you didn't already do all day?"

Beca didn't know that Chloe's trash TV interest had spilled over into obsession - and Chloe had no desire for her to know. It was too embarrassing. "Nothing."
"You're doing *nothing* online all day and night?"

Chloe rubbed the kink in her neck. It hurt like a bitch. "That's right."

"So, like..." Beca hesitated, stirring milk and sugar into her coffee. "I promise it's cool and I won't judge you but...are you watching porn or something?"

"What? No!"

Beca's eyes went wide, and Chloe realized she might have reacted to that a little too quickly to be believable.

"No judgment, I promise," Beca said after a moment. "But you know...I want you to be healthy and I want us to be open and honest about our needs." She cleared her throat. "Do you want to talk about it? Is there something I'm not doing...that you want to try..."

"No, you're perfect." Other than the fact that their sex life had taken a serious nosedive since Beca's schedule turned so demanding.

Beca looked exasperated. "Then why are you up all night watching porn?!!"

"Oh my gosh, Beca." Chloe put her computer to the side and closed it, thinking she probably should have done that a lot earlier. "I'm not watching porn."

"Then what is it?"

"Nothing."

Beca looked taken aback, and Chloe realized this was the first time she had ever kept something from Beca when Beca wanted to know about it - and by the look on Beca's face, she had the same realization. She looked hurt, and Chloe thought it was such a stupid thing to keep from her, but it made her feel like a loser to think about it in the real world; she didn't want Beca to think less of her, or that she was on a slippery slope if something in her real life didn't change for the better.
It had been weeks. And weeks. It was nearly August. More than two months since they arrived in Los Angeles. School would be back in session soon, and Chloe had interviewed more than a dozen times for teaching positions, all to no avail. Beca was in the studio all day, every day. She would leave around ten in the morning and sometimes wouldn't be home until ten at night. Sometimes later, Chloe hated it. She understood and accepted that a ridiculous schedule was the nature of the music business. Pop stars had crazy schedules. Inspiration could strike at any time. You can't call it quits because it's after midnight when everyone is feeling it. But she still hated it. She was alone all day, and even when Beca was home, she would go to bed shortly after returning. Sex was a rarity lately. Beca was too exhausted and almost never in the mood, "using all her passion in the studio." So maybe Chloe was watching porn - but only sometimes.

Beca rarely fell off the radar in those long days, though. She would text her to let her know she would be home late, call during breaks to say hello.

Sometimes she would text photos from the studio - the soundboard, or Katy in the booth, or selfies of Beca herself in the booth laying down test vocals.

Or photos with Jimmy.

Chloe seethed when those came through. She hadn't figured out how to approach Beca about his ickiness when she first met him, and so much time had passed that it felt awkward to bring it up now. But every time he was in one of the photos, she wanted to vomit, or cry, or punch him. Sometimes she cried.

She knew she was being irrational. She had no reason to be jealous. She trusted Beca completely. She did not trust Jimmy.

She couldn't help it. He had been such a sleaze and took such an interest in Beca and Chloe as a couple, and in most of the photos he was touching Beca - an arm around her shoulders or arm wrestling or using her head for an armrest or the absolute worst: Beca on his lap at the soundboard.

She knew Jimmy was Beca's co-producer. She knew they had to have a close working relationship to have good synergy.

That did not mean, however, that Chloe couldn't sit on the couch and seethe about it.
And then Beca would come home, and Chloe would be on the couch, in the exact same place she was when she left that morning, only there would be an assortment of plates, cups, and silverware on the coffee table. Sometimes she would still be in her pajamas. On better days, she would actually put on real clothes and spend some time on her hair.

Beca settled onto the couch next to her. "I'm worried about you."

Chloe shrugged, instantly regretting it when that angry muscle seized up again. "I'm fine."

"You're not fine. Talk to me."

"Don't you have to get to the studio? Jimmy's probably wondering where you are," Chloe said bitingly. She instantly regretted it.

Beca looked at her watch and seemed to hesitate before answering, "Not if you need me."

"I don't need you." She regretted that, too. She needed Beca. Desperately.

Beca's lips flattened into a thin, flat line. "Is that so?"

"Yep."

Chloe couldn't identify why she was acting out towards Beca. All her anger and impatience and frustration and rejection and jealousy was piling up and Beca was her only human contact, and thus, Beca was the lucky recipient.

"You know what? Fine." Beca stood up and went back to the kitchen where she pulled a travel mug out of a cabinet and dumped her coffee into it. She grabbed her bag off the counter and left, slamming the door hard behind her, leaving Chloe alone on the couch with her head in her hands.

Chloe was alone for hours, like usual. However, her phone didn't ring tonight. The only texts she received were from Emily asking about a Bellas policy, and all she responded with was one sentence telling her to read her manual she was given after initiation.
She was angry. Angry at herself, angry at Beca for walking out on her this morning, angry at herself for being angry at Beca when she had given Beca a perfectly good reason to walk out on her. She spent the better part of the day slamming doors and drawers, and breaking down and crying when she stubbed her toe and dropped a glass because *that fucking figures*.

She showered, and cried there, too. She hadn't cried about the state of her life in weeks, and once she started, she couldn't stop it. Giving up, she sat down in the bathtub with water pouring down over her and sobbed.

It wasn't until the water turned ice cold that Chloe pulled herself laboriously to her feet and stepped out of the tub. She scrubbed a towel through her hair and roughly over her body, not caring about thoroughness or even bothering to comb her hair. She turned off every light in the apartment and climbed into bed to stare at the wall.

She heard Beca come home hours later. She assumed it was hours - she had no sense of time and no clock within view, not without moving. There was noise downstairs - the sounds of Beca cleaning up the mess Chloe hadn't bothered with after dedicating her day to anger - the clatter of plates, the tinkling of the shattered glass being swept. Beca was on the stairs, and Chloe closed her eyes, faking sleep.

Beca was quiet in the bathroom, the sounds of the sink cluing Chloe into where she was in her bedtime routine.

She felt the bed dip and covers move as Beca settled next to her. She could feel the warmth of her body behind her, felt the gentle pressure of Beca's hand on her shoulder.

"Chloe?"

Chloe didn't say a word, and the hand and warmth disappeared as she felt Beca turn over to face the opposite direction.

And she cried, silently, dying inside to scream for Beca to hold her and tell her everything would be okay.

When she woke up in the morning, Beca was already gone.
Chloe thrived on helping people, on basic social interaction. She had no circle of friends in Los Angeles. She was a social butterfly and her wings had been clipped. She needed friends and a purpose.

Blogging about the Kardashians was hardly fulfilling.

She knew that her attitude wasn't helping anything - it was bogging down her relationship with Beca, and she was sure the perpetual negativity emanating from her out into the universe was the reason she was spinning her wheels in a pit of unemployed, purposeless despair.

Knowing and admitting you have a problem is only the first step on the road to recovery, however.

She was alone again in the morning, and she struggled to get motivated to get out of bed and avoid relocating to the couch. But she knew she needed to try - she had let herself waste away long enough, and the thought that she was pushing Beca away was terrifying.

A few household chores were accomplished without too much anguish. Chloe couldn't remember the last time she swept the floor or hauled out the trash.

The more she moved - stepping outside into the scorching summer heat and feeling the sun on her face for the first time in days - the better she felt.

She even smiled once. But only once. When a butterfly landed on the windowsill when she was washing dishes. It gave her a shred of hope.

It wasn't a surprise that her phone was quiet all day once again. Either Beca was angry at her for her atrocious behavior or she was giving her some space, and Chloe wasn't sure which was worse.

Swallowing her pride, she made the effort to text her.

*Hi.*
It took ten minutes, but eventually her phone chimed. *Everything ok?*

Chloe frowned. The fact that Beca felt compelled to ask if everything was okay was all the more indicative of the mess she let herself fall into.

*I miss you. Do you know when you'll be home?*

The ellipses that told Chloe Beca was replying appeared and disappeared a few times before a simple *No* came through.

She didn't like that one bit - either Beca didn't know when she would be home or she had to think about her answer and changed her mind more than once about how she wanted to answer Chloe. She started to reply when the ellipses popped up again.

*Prob late. The guys wanna grab a drink.*

Chloe glared at her phone. She was trying to be civil, dammit! Maybe she should have opened with an apology instead of acting like she hadn't shut Beca out last night.

Now she was pissed though. It felt like a slap in the face. She tells Beca she misses her and her response is that she's going out with Jimmy? She used to invite Chloe to join them, but hadn't done so in weeks, and certainly didn't do it tonight.

Fuming - at herself or at Beca? - she threw her phone onto the couch, went upstairs and changed into the workout clothes she hadn't touched in who knew how long, and ran out the door with nothing but her keys in her hand and iPod blaring in her ears.

*Where was she going?*

She had no idea.
The stitch in her side was finally too much to bear and Chloe slowed her sprint to a jog. A glance at the street sign above told her she must have been running full-out for nearly a mile. The burn in her legs told her she would really be regretting it in the morning.

But for now, as block after block passed, the burn felt wonderful. She wanted pain - it made her feel alive, something she hadn't felt in so long. Her lungs burned. Her side ached. Her quads were screaming. It was euphoric.

The sun was setting by the time her legs failed her. She was seriously regretting not bringing a water bottle with her. It had to be at least eighty-five degrees outside, even now as the sun set, and she was drenched with sweat. She walked, hands on her waist as she breathed through the pain, and finally decided to look around and figure out where the hell she was.

The freeway wasn't far ahead - she could see the overpass in the distance. She also knew she hadn't turned a corner since leaving unless the road curved, so she turned around and started walking home.

She missed Beca. So much.

Beca's career was like a rocket; neither of them were ready for so much, so fast. Starting a relationship was a major change for anyone. Then they added a cross-country relocation. And moving in together. And then Katy Perry happened. They weren't even fully adjusted to being a couple, and suddenly adulthood was happening.

Chloe was dizzy from the breakneck speed at which her life was unfolding.

There'd barely been time to enjoy or appreciate any of it, and she was so beaten down waiting for something exciting to hitch her wagon to that she was left in Beca's dust. Not that she was making much of an effort to keep up with her. Not professionally - that was largely out of her control unless she decided to do the whole exotic dancer thing after all - but emotionally.

She was so caught up in her own moping that she didn't stop to consider what Beca was going through. Beca rarely talked about feelings - it was understood that feelings were Chloe's thing, and Chloe was the one to get Beca to open up and talk, and Chloe wasn't bothering to do it. And thus, she had no idea what was even going on in Beca's head through all this. Sure, she was excited about her career and seemed confident about things, but Beca always put on a confident front. Very few people got her to open up and be vulnerable. Chloe was one of those people.
And she was so busy drowning herself in self-pity and jealousy that she didn't stop and ask Beca, "How are you today?" or talk to her about Jimmy, so she could be reassured that she had nothing to worry about.

An hour later, it was dark and she seriously regretted this entire decision - no phone, no water; just an iPod that couldn't confirm her assumption that she was moving in the correct direction since it was so old it had no Internet connection of any kind. Everything looked different in the dark and Chloe felt the anxiety creeping up on her every time a car drove by or a person passed her on the sidewalk. She gripped her keys and picked up the pace.

Car after car zipped by. One of them slowed down and its driver whistled at her and asked if she wanted a ride in a less than chivalrous manner. A pair of young men with their jeans slung low with backward baseball caps passed her and turned and followed for a block, calling out atrocious remarks about her body, the way she walked, and her hair color before they gave up and continued on their way.

She started jogging again, praying she was headed in the right direction. Another car slowed, pulling over to creep along side her keeping her pace. She heard the hum of a window being rolled down and pushed herself to run faster.

"Chloe, what are you doing?"

Chloe jumped. Beca's voice was the last one she expected to hear come from the car.

"Beca?" She stopped, and so did Beca.

"I've been trying to call you for like two hours."

Chloe stood, panting. "I needed to get out."

"Of the house?"

"Of my head," Chloe said, surprising herself at the honesty. "I thought you were going out after work?"
"I changed my mind. Are you planning to run home? It's gotta be another five miles at least."

Chloe looked up the dark street. Her heart swelled that Beca had chosen to go home rather than out with the guys. "Five?"

"Chloe, get in the car."

She nodded. "Yeah, that's probably a good idea."

The drive was quiet for a minute or two until Beca finally ventured, "So...you went for a run?"

Chloe laughed, a weak huff of a laugh. She hadn't really laughed in quite awhile. "Apparently."

"And you didn't take your phone?"

Chloe looked at her hands in her lap, then noticed Beca's water bottle in the console and grabbed it, chugging whatever was left.

"I didn't want it with me," she said when she was finished.

"You're always telling me to be careful - you shouldn't have gone out without it. Something could have happened."

"I know, I know."

"But you're okay?"

"Define 'okay.'"

"Your run was uneventful?"
"Other than pulling every muscle in my body, yes."

Beca sniffed, and Chloe could tell she was trying not to smile.

"Some guy offered to give me a mustache ride."

Beca laughed at that. "Oh my God, ew!"

"Ew? But I always thought you liked that!" It felt good to hear Beca laugh, and tease each other like they did before she started to lose herself.

"Well yeah, but not some guy offering to do it for you. Hands off, dude."

Chloe smiled and watched the lights pass by through the window. She'd forgotten what it felt like to have Beca want to spend time with her, to be protective of her.

It's just that life kept getting in the way.

Chloe could barely move in the morning - not for lack of trying, though. Her body was a mess of strained muscles and angry knots. She had stretched quite a bit when they got home, but she was paying for her irresponsible exercise in spades now. She'd known better, and that made it all the more annoying.

It took a good bit of effort, but she made it down the stairs for sustenance and flopped onto her trusty couch, turned on the TV, dragged her laptop onto her stomach, and opened her email.

And there it was.

An email from the West Hollywood Academy for the Performing Arts.
Chloe held her breath and looked away as she let the email load. She had received dozens of "thanks but no thanks" responses to her applications, and no responses whatsoever to the "thank you for having me" emails she sent after her interviews.

Except this one said:

Dear Ms. Beale:

Thank you for your interest in the Hollywood Academy for the Performing Arts. After reviewing your resume and transcript and taking into consideration your considerable and relevant extracurricular experience, we are happy to offer you the position of Kindergarten Teacher.

Your employment will be effective August 1, 2015 - July 31, 2016. Please see attached.

I look forward to you joining the team.

She had to read it three times.

It was real.

There was a document attached that had a salary and schedule on it and everything.

She moved to jump off the couch, instantly regretting the strain it put on her raw muscles and instead pumped her fist in the air.

And then she cried.

When are you coming home?
Not sure. K's in the booth today. What's up?

:) 

?

:)

Chlo?

:):)

Stop speaking in emoticons, use your words!

;P

I'll try to get out of here ASAP.

:D

I'm not the boss tho.

:/

I promise I'll try.

:-D

It physically killed her, but Chloe managed to clean up the apartment, take a shower, and, most
painfully of all, use the stepladder to pull a bottle of wine down from the rack above the kitchen cabinets.

She uncorked it and set it on the counter to breathe with a pair of wine glasses and hauled herself back upstairs to find something nice to wear and do her hair and makeup.

And then she sat down to await Beca's arrival.

It was nearing eleven o'clock when she heard the slam of Beca's car door. Chloe wasn't annoyed, though. She had texted a few times, updating Chloe on her status, apologizing and promising she would be home as soon as she could.

Chloe pushed herself off the couch and straightened the legs of her khakis and tugged the hem of her navy blue blouse, and waited in the kitchen.

She poured the wine.

The front door opened and she watched Beca stop in her tracks when she spotted Chloe.

The way Beca looked at her could sometimes made Chloe's heart flutter. Now was one of those times.

"Welcome home," Chloe said with a smile.

"Hi," Beca said as she dumped her gear on the chair.

She sounded wary and Chloe brightened her smile and held out her hand. "Come here."

Beca crossed the room and took Chloe's hand, squeaking when she got pulled right into a kiss that Chloe held onto for longer than a casual greeting.

She missed kissing Beca like that. It had been so long. A few pecks here and there, some of them not even on the lips, was all they had shared recently. When they parted, Beca's cheekbones held a
pink tinge that wasn't there when she got home.

"So," Beca said, having to clear her throat to continue, "are you going to tell me what's going on?"

Chloe grinned. She felt ready to explode. "Guess."

Beca tilted her head, squinting. "Something tells me you'd rather blurt it out. So tell me."

She pressed her lips together, trying to hold it back until it burst out. "I got a job!" Chloe squealed and clapped and jumped, not caring about the pain in her quads. And then she threw her arms around Beca's neck and pulled her close.

Beca's arms wrapped around her waist, squeezing tight. "Oh my God - that's great!"

Chloe nodded sharply; just saying the words out loud made tears spring to her eyes. She opened her mouth to say something, but instead a sob came out, and the tears overflowed again.

It wasn't just a few months of stress.

It was seven years of not knowing what was out there for her beyond the Bellas, of being afraid of becoming an adult, of thinking she might never be more than she had become at Barden. There was light at the end of the tunnel.

Beca held her as she cried, and it felt warm and familiar. It felt like home.

"Are you going to tell me what it is?" Beca asked quietly.

"What what is?" Chloe croaked, voice thick with tears. She coughed and pulled out of Beca's embrace to wipe away her tears.

Beca smiled and helped push away the tears. "Your job, weirdo."
"Oh, right." Chloe laughed. Duh. "I got the position at the WeHo performing arts school."

"Teaching?"

Chloe nodded, grinning.

"No exotic dancing?"

"I interviewed with a couple places, but they all said I'm too short."

"What!"

"Right? As if height is what guys are paying attention to."

"No, not that. You actually applied to be a stripper?"

Chloe smiled. "You're so eeeeasy, babe. Of course I didn't."

Beca pushed her hair back. "Oh thank God."

Chloe chuckled and took a seat on one of the bar stools at the counter. "You really don't want me to be a stripper huh?"

Beca made a face as she joined Chloe on a stool. "Is that a serious question?"

"No." Chloe smiled and picked up the glasses, handing one to Beca. "Cheers?"

"I feel like I should make a toast."
"If you'd like. That would be nice."

"Okay. So - to new beginnings?"

Chloe nodded and tapped her glass to Beca's. "To new beginnings."

They sipped. "So..." Beca started, a little warily.

"So?"

"Chloe's...back?"

Chloe's eyes fell. She knew what Beca meant. "I hope so," she said quietly. "I'm sorry for kind of going off the rails."

"No, honey, no," Beca said, rushing to take Chloe's hand in hers. "You don't have to apologize. I should apologize."

"What? Why?"

"You needed me. I knew you needed me and I couldn't - didn't - make time for you."

"Well you have a lot going on. You have to think of yourself, too. It's not your fault I couldn't get a job and refused to leave my pity party. I didn't ask you to make time either. And I haven't exactly been the most supportive of you."

Beca sat back, swinging their clasped hands between them a little. "Are we just going to keep deflecting the blame for everything back on ourselves?"

Chloe smiled. "Apparently."
"So we agree that I'm a selfish asshole?"

Chloe bit her lip. "I'm not responding to that."

"So you agree! You think I'm a selfish asshole!" Beca was laughing, but Chloe knew better than to walk through that open door.

"I will only agree that I need you when I'm lost."

"Emotionally as well as geographically."

"I wasn't lost last night! Not really..."

Beca sipped her wine, eyebrows raised. "Mhm."

"Oh shut up."

They made love that night - for the first time in a long time. And for the first time in a long time, Chloe almost felt like herself again.

Almost. Two months of an altered mindset couldn't be undone with a couple glasses of wine and cuddling. If only it was that easy.

"Bec?" she asked, voice a little distorted from the side of her face pressed into her pillow. Beca straddled her backside, hands working the stress out of Chloe's back.

"Hmm?"

"Can I ask you something?"

"You just did."
"Shut up," she said, bumping her hips to jostle Beca. "I'm being serious right now."

"Sorry. What's up?"

Chloe took a breath. It was now or never and she really hoped this conversation didn't unravel into a fight. "What's the deal with Jimmy?"

Beca paused. "What about him?"

Chloe shrugged. "He kind of squicks me out."

"What do you mean?"

"Every time I've met him. He weirds me out. I always feel like he's ogling my goodies."

She felt a pinch on her bare butt. "Well can you blame him?"

"Beca."

"Sorry. I mean - I hadn't noticed that. He makes you feel weird?"

"Yeah."

Silence.

"Bec?"

"Sorry, I was just thinking. Has he ever said anything inappropriate to you?"
"Well, no. But he's so interested in the fact that you and I are together. And you send me pics from the studio and you're always so close and you aren't really a touchy feely kind of person with most people."

"I mean, he and I have gotten kind of close because we're together so much. But we're just friends. I'd never cheat on you - you know that right?"

Chloe nodded. "But knowing that doesn't make me feel less icky about him. I don't like him touching you and I don't like the way he looks at me."

"Okay."

Chloe could feel Beca thinking in the way her hands moved over her back, prodding and squeezing. "Well now I feel bad."

"Why do you feel bad?"

"He's your friend and I shouldn't make you feel like you have to act differently around him."

"Well...no, you shouldn't. But that doesn't mean you can't tell me that something makes you uncomfortable. And I don't like what you're saying about him checking you out."

"It's probably nothing."

More silence and more thoughtful prods.

"I don't like him," Chloe whispered, worried about how Beca would react.

"Okay. I'll be more aware of how he acts around you next time we're together."

Chloe frowned. It wasn't really the answer she wanted, but then again, she didn't know what answer
she did want.

"He's basically my boss, Chlo. There's not much I can do, at least not right now. If I catch him being uncool with you I'll put him in his place."

"Can you maybe...not sit on his lap? Or at least don't send me pictures of it."

"Fair enough."

An easy silence fell between them and Beca's hands worked their way down to Chloe's lower back, drawing a number of unladylike groans from her.

"Speaking of Jimmy..."

Chloe groaned again, this time in disgust.

Beca poked her side. "You're cute when you're jealous."

"Hmmph."

"The crew is getting together Labor Day weekend. Katy's hosting this big barbecue on the beach - one last summer blowout kind of thing. I RSVP'd us, but do you want to go? It's totally okay if you don't want to."

Chloe hadn't let herself think further than a day in the future; it was too frustrating. Today was the first day she could do it.

She would be teaching by then.

"A beach barbecue with Katy Perry?"
"And her amazing, sexy new producer, Beca Mitchell."

"Oh who's that? She sounds hot."

She felt Beca bend forward, breasts pressing into her back, breath warm on her ear. "I hear she's the hottest in the business."

"Is that so?"

Teeth nipped at her earlobe. "Mhmm."

"Then I better not miss my chance to meet her."
Chloe was so nervous, she thought her stomach might fall out of her butt.

Beca drove her to the West Hollywood Academy of the Performing Arts for her first day of orientation, and it felt like Chloe's own first day of school. If Beca had offered to walk her to the office, she would have taken her up on it.

Since she didn't have her own car - yet - and Beca's recording schedule didn't mesh with Chloe's strict 7:30am to 4:00pm schedule, Chloe would be taking the bus to work; today had been an exception, given the circumstance.

"I can't wait to hear all about it," Beca said as they pulled into the school's parking lot.

Chloe nodded. Speaking seemed too difficult at the moment.

"Call me if you need to."

Another nod.

"Chloe."

She looked, and her fear-filled eyes met Beca's serene, proud ones and Chloe felt her heart slow a bit.

"Go dazzle them - Bella style."

She had to smile at that. "Thank you." She leaned over and kissed Beca quickly while reaching for the door handle. "I love you."

"I love you, too, Miss Beale."
Chloe blushed a little at that. She would have to get used to being addressed formally. She gathered her belongings - a backpack with a notebook and pens and pencils, and a couple snacks in case she couldn't make it to lunchtime. The school advised that teachers could begin moving into classrooms over the weekend; this week was for policies and ice breakers.

Chloe climbed out of the car and turned to face the main entrance: multiple glass doors with various welcoming messages painted onto them, a few posters and notices taped up, and the school's name mounted above the doors in huge lettering. There were no children - not yet. A few other adults arrived at the same time, and Chloe took a breath and followed them into the school.

"Hi, are you here for orientation?" asked a peppy young girl.

"Um, yes."

"Great! I'm Miss Valdez, the third grade aide. Head down the hall and into the gym to the right. Be sure to sign in and pick up your name tag at the table by the door."

"Thank you. I'm Chl-Miss Beale. Kindergarten."

"Oh you're the new Kinder teacher! Welcome, welcome. See you inside."

Chloe wondered if her own exuberance was as irritating as Miss Valdez's. But then she thought...nah. She tried to dig up that exuberance as she walked down the hallway, walls covered with decorations celebrating music, and back-to-school, and dance, and reading.

The doors she passed were numbered, some already decorated, some not, with teachers' names. She wondered which one, if any, would be hers. Two propped-open doors gave way to the gym, and she stopped in the entrance. Tables and tables - the same picnic-table kind she remembered from lunchtime at school - lined the floor, and dozens of people sat at them, some talking to one another, others being wallflowers. Chloe was glad she wasn't the only obviously new person, and as she signed in and found her badge, she looked around. It was like high school lunch hour all over again; where she chose to sit could determine her destiny - or at least her clique. Or did teachers have cliques? She wasn't sure. Probably.

"Dazzle them Bella style," Chloe said to herself and pulled out her best and friendliest smile and headed for the table with several people actively conversing. She took a seat, interrupting them all to say, "Hi! I'm Chloe. Beale. Kindergarten."
It worked like a charm. The group greeted her and introduced themselves and their roles - mostly teachers, a few aides and one office staff member who was chummy with a few of them.

And as simple as that, Chloe had her clique.

As was expected, orientation started with ice breaker games. Chloe loved ice breakers. She organized the Bellas' every year. This game, she decided, was pretty lame. All they were doing was introducing themselves, saying one personal fact, and tossing a ball to someone else who would do the same - and around the room it went.

Chloe's coworkers, she quickly discovered, came from all backgrounds. Some were in their 20th year of teaching. Others were brand new like her, changing careers after a decade in a job they hated. She noticed how few staff members came from the performing arts - most mentioned it as an interest or hobby, not as a past profession or even education.

So when the ball finally ended up in her hands, Chloe was ready to dazzle; she flipped her hair and put on her most charming smile and used her best vocal projection.

"Hi! I'm Chloe Beale. This is my first year at WeHOAPA," she loved their acronym, it sounded like We Hope(-ah), "and my first year teaching. My fun fact is that I helped lead my all-female college a capella group, the Barden Bellas, to three national titles and we are the reigning world a capella champions." She finished with an even brighter smile and tossed the ball across the aisle to a guy who she'd caught looking at her more than once that morning. He was cute, and the attention was flattering, but he was thinking about barking up the wrong tree.

"You were the group that beat Das Sound Machine?" a girl asked behind her.

Chloe turned around, trying not to ignore the continued introductions. "That's right!" She was met, however, with a stern frown and crossed arms.

"DSM for life!"

Chloe was taken aback; the first day at her new job was the last place she expected to run into a DSMer, but it happened, and she had her first, she assumed, enemy. It wasn't the reaction she had anticipated to her introduction. She was a bit of a celebrity in the a capella circuit, and she thought at a performing arts school her championship belts would hold some clout, but here, she was at the
bottom of the totem pole.

"Oh my God, you're a Bella?"

Or maybe she wasn't.

It was the last item on the day's agenda, but finally the time came for Chloe to receive her room assignment.

It wasn't any of the rooms she passed that morning; in fact, she had to walk quite a ways down the hall and turn two corners, discovering another entrance to the building, before she found it.

Room 17.

The door was closed and lights were off. She was given keys to the building, her room, the office, teachers' lounge, and she shuffled through them, unsure which was which. Choosing one, she reached for the door knob and grabbed it to unlock it but it turned easily. She held her breath, and pulled.

The room felt miniaturized. The desks were tiny, the chairs were tiny, the classroom water fountain was below her waist.

The dry erase board was gleaming and white.

The teacher's desk - her desk - was empty.

An electronic piano sat, dark, in a corner.

The walls were bare, screaming for life.
Chloe sat at her desk - the teacher's desk - and looked over the rows of tiny desks and chairs.

And her mind buzzed at the possibilities, the colors, the shapes she would bring to it.

And the miniature people she would teach.

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She took the bus home. Los Angeles mass transit left much to be desired, but Beca was tied up in the studio, and even though she offered to pick her up during a break, Chloe declined. The recording studio was nowhere near the school.

On the bus, she reviewed the massive binder assigned to each teacher. Hers was specific to kindergarten coursework, and she was relieved that the example lesson plans mirrored the practice ones she worked through for her first certification class. Teaching things like the alphabet, the colors of the rainbow, and counting wasn't difficult content, but she had a pretty good idea that corralling a couple dozen five-year-olds would be.

The thought of it was thrilling.

She also had a massive shopping list - endless supplies, both required and suggested. She dug out a pen and began adding to it all the things necessary to bring Room 17 to life.

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It wasn't until Saturday she was able to move into her room. As impatient as she was, it was for the best. It gave her enough time to look at other teachers' rooms, to read more teacher blogs about classroom management, to scour Target and the arts and crafts and instructional supply stores for what she needed and wanted.

It also was for the best because Beca could drive her and her five heavy boxes of supplies to campus, and even had the day off from the studio.

"Room 17, right?"
Chloe was pushing a cart stacked with her boxes down the hallway, following Beca. "Yeah. On the left."

"This one?" Beca stopped, pointing.

"That's the one."

"Awesome. Ok come here."

"Why?"

"Just come here," Beca repeated.

Chloe abandoned her cart and obliged, only to have Beca grasp her arms and wrangle her to stand in front of the door.

"There. Stay." She backed up a few steps and pulled out her iPhone, and Chloe smiled for the photo. "This is a big deal. We should document it."

"Thank you; I don't think my selfies have really captured the significance."

Beca laughed, but Chloe was serious. Selfies could only do so much! She heard the shutter sound effect from Beca's phone a few more times as she unlocked her classroom door and navigated the cart into the room.

"Everything's so small!" Beca said immediately.

"I know! Isn't it the cutest?"

They worked on setting up Chloe's classroom well into the night. Beca had left her computer at home, and it was a nice change of pace to have Beca helping and observing her, after so many years of helping and observing Beca's musical magic.
It was pushing midnight when they left, but Chloe had transformed her classroom into a safari theme, with laminated cut-outs of lions, zebras, giraffes, elephants, rhinos, and hippos taped to the walls that would feature her students' names, and grass-patterned scalloped borders around the board, door, and windows, and a student mailbox system for homework return and delivery that used clothespins decorated to look like crocodile mouths that she learned how to make on Pinterest.

She finished the decor with a laminated lion on the door, with Miss Beale written on it in clear print.

Beca documented the entire process; she was trying to be sly about it, but she didn't always remember to switch her phone back to vibrate before snapping a picture, and the sound effect gave her away, resulting in a sheepish "Sorry" and an emphatic "It's okay, I really appreciate it!" from Chloe.

She wasn't sure why Beca was trying to hide her picture-taking at all, since Chloe was fully aware of it. But she figured, now that she knew Beca had surreptitiously documented most of their life together as revealed by the photos that showed up after the move, that maybe Beca simply enjoyed working behind the scenes. It made sense, given her chosen career. And so, Beca held the stapler and the tape dispenser and the other end of the whatever to help make sure it was straight, and photographed Chloe building her first classroom.

Chloe was so nervous, she thought her stomach might fall out of her butt.

She walked the block to campus from the bus stop.

The first day of school.

Three weeks of orientation and a few online classes and she was jumping headfirst into being one of the first instructional presences in young lives. She remembered questioning the lack of preparation and training required to be a teacher - a degree and a certification, which she could earn while on the job, was all she needed. The leniency played in her favor, but the knowledge certainly made her take notice and consider the state of the American education system.

But that was a thought for another day.
She breezed through the front entrance, saying good morning to the office staff and the couple teachers milling about the time clock where she swiped her ID card.

"First day - nervous?"

Chloe didn't need to be reminded. "Yes. But I'm excited to get started."

At the recent Meet the Teacher Night, she had opportunity to meet her students and their parents and guardians - all twenty-one munchkins - and it was as terrifying as it was exhilarating. Much to her relief, however, all the children but three seemed to love her immediately, and the three who refused to speak to her seemed to refuse to speak to their parents as well, too shy or scared to do anything.

Kindergarten was scary, after all.

Students began arriving, escorted by older siblings, parents, and grandparents, and before Chloe realized what was even happening, the bell rang, the guardians were gone, and she was standing in front of twenty-one little humans either staring at her, talking to their neighbor, or, in the case of one little girl who was sitting in the beanbag chair in the reading corner, crying quietly after finally allowing her mother to leave.

"Good morning, everyone! Welcome to Room 17."

And suddenly - Chloe Beale was a teacher.
Chloe was bouncing off the walls by the time Beca got home from work. She ran out to meet her at her car, opening the door and grabbing her bag off the passenger seat to speed up the process.

"Hi!" Chloe said brightly.

"Hey, babe."

"Guess what?"

"Hmm?" Beca was being way too disinterested.

"Beca."

"What's up?"

Chloe grabbed Beca's hand and dragged her to the couch. "Guess what?"

Beca shrugged. "You got me. Hang on, I need to grab my Mac, I just got the coolest idea for a hook."

Chloe was hurt. Did Beca seriously not remember that it was the first day of school? She knew she was really deep into the record and was living and breathing new music, but really? Beca left to grab her computer and Chloe frowned at the blank television set.

"Never mind, it's nothing."

"Nothing?" Beca smiled. "And here I thought you were all excited to tell me about your day."

Chloe turned her head to see Beca holding a bottle of champagne. "Oh my God, you're so mean."
Way to rain on my parade!"

"Aww, I'm sorry." Beca came back kissed her and smiled even wider. "Forgive me?"

"Oh I suppose. You threw off my mojo though."

"Somehow I doubt that. Come help me pop this."

They took turns wrestling with the bottle, both too nervous to put the necessary force on it to pop the cork, but Chloe finally sucked it up and pried it off with her thumb, making them both jump. Beca poured them each a glass and went back to the couch. She sat sideways and held her legs up until Chloe sat, and then she dropped them onto her lap.

"Now. Tell me about your day. Start with your ankle biters' names."

Being a teacher was easy. Not easy in the hours spent writing lesson plans or dealing with helicopter parents way, but easy in that every morning, Chloe had a classroom of children eager to learn, not yet jaded about school, and who could match her own energy level. It was akin to coaching the Bellas, but without the attitudes - mostly; as a performing arts school, many of the children had the performer persona bubbling under the surface, but they were still too young to know how to throw it around to their advantage.

After having to substitute monitor the middle schoolers' lunch period, she was grateful she chose the lower grades, at least to start. Thinking of working with older students who could really take direction, interpret, and reflect was enticing - self-centered attitudes aside. Maybe in a few years, she would be ready to take on the hormonal teenagers.

Some days she felt as though she was in over her head. Those were usually the result of an angry parent flabbergasted by a report that their precious baby could have possibly done something like pulling another student's hair or refusing to participate in a lesson. Other times, it was due to feeling the pressure of ensuring her students' success, for all the wrong reasons; her kids needed to perform well to ensure the school would continue to receive funding, and kindergartners aren't designed to perform well on formal testing.

Those were the days she was grateful for the friends she made the first day of orientation. They all
fought the same battles, and as much as Beca would listen and try to offer advice when Chloe would vent about an impossible standard or a crazy grandmother, she didn't get it, as Chloe would and could never get the stress Beca brought home from the studio. It also helped her understand why Beca needed and wanted to spend time with her team.

Misery loved company as much as happiness.

But Chloe was happy - truly, completely happy. Every morning when her students flooded in with stories of what they saw on the way to school, and when they would run up and hug her - something she loved and knew wouldn't last past first grade - and when they would sit in a big circle on the floor banging on percussion instruments which made the most godawful racket, she would smile, and breathe, and silently thank the stars for aligning to allow her this experience.

And at the end of the day, she would go home to the apartment she shared with the woman she loved and have a glass of wine as she graded homework and waited for Beca to come home.

Labor Day weekend snuck up quickly. They were both swamped at work and suddenly Chloe was scrambling to pack beach bags and a suitcase at midnight while Beca ran to the store for sunscreen and other beach paraphernalia.

The beach barbecue was a three-day party, kicking off at noon on Saturday and wrapping on Monday afternoon, all taking place at a beach house Katy rented for her team steps from the water in Malibu.

"I just realized that I'm nervous," Chloe admitted as they drove along the Pacific Coast Highway.

"Why are you nervous?"

"I've met Katy twice. Well, more like once. At your signing and then she waved at me from the booth when you brought me to watch that session."

"Oh! She's super chill and a huge nerd. Once you get past the celebrity thing it's easy."
Chloe thought for a moment, listening to the low-volume radio and then cranked it up, "Firework" blasting. "How can I get past the celebrity thing - she's everywhere!"

Beca laughed and turned the radio to a middle level. "I promise she's cool and she doesn't act like a diva bitch. I mean, sometimes she does but only when it's called for."

"And when is that?"

"Like when we can't read her mind about something she wants musically, or if another artist is trying to push us out of the studio when we go overtime."

"I guess that's kind of acceptable."

Beca shrugged. "Comes with the territory. You don't have to worry about anything this weekend though. This is just a big party."

"Okay." Chloe smiled and tried to stop thinking about Katy Perry as Katy Perry and instead as Beca's friend Katy.

It didn't really work.

"This must be it," Beca said, checking her GPS as she rolled to a stop in front of a road marked with a sign declaring it private property.

"I hope so," Chloe said, reading the sign, "or we will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law."

"I think I could handle myself in prison." Beca pulled onto the side road which winded down a hill towards a sprawling house. "House" was an understatement - it was a mansion, all white and windows and full of sharp angles and clean lines.


"Totally. I'm a badass. I'd have all kinds of bitches."
"Beca."

"What?"

"You're so whipped. You really think you would have, quote, bitches in prison? And not just a bitch, but plural bitches?"

"I am not whipped!"

"Right." Chloe smiled at her. "Oh, hey babe?"

"Hmm?"

"I don't really feel like doing this whole barbecue thing anymore. Can we go home?"

"Really?" Beca took her foot off the accelerator. "Okay, if you don't want to."

"Wuh-pssh," Chloe said, cracking an imaginary whip at Beca.

"Oh, fuck you."

Chloe laughed and had to grab the handle above her head to brace herself against the corner Beca took a little too sharply in retaliation.

Beca parked them at the end of a line of ten or so cars, a couple of them gleaming black luxury SUVs. "Looks like we're fashionably late."

"Nothing wrong with making an entrance," Chloe said as she climbed out of the car, looking into the wind coming off the ocean. She took a deep breath - fresh, clean, salty - a much-needed change from the smog of the city.
"Let's just leave our stuff here until we know where we're supposed to go."

"Good idea."

Chloe followed Beca down the path, a step behind since it wasn't wide enough to walk side-by-side, which curved around a rock formation and led to stairs and a deck and a door in front of which sat a massive man, potentially a former NFL lineman.

"I guess we *are* in the right place," Chloe muttered to Beca. "Security?"

"Yep," she answered. "Hey, Tiny!"

Chloe looked at the man again. *Of course his name is Tiny.*

"Hey, how ya doing, my short-stack?" The giant of a man stood up, and Chloe swore he was at least seven feet tall. He greeted Beca with a fistbump and Chloe feared for a moment that he would crush her knuckles, but she escaped unscathed.

"I'm good, thanks. This is my girlfriend, Chloe."

The man extended his hand to Chloe and she hesitated, a terrible mental image of her arm being ripped out of socket, but he shook her hand without issue.

"Nice to meet you, pretty lady."

"Nice to meet you, too...Tiny." Chloe struggled to say it with a straight face, and the man grinned as he opened the door for them.

The house was palatial. Sunlight poured in through the floor-to-ceiling and wall-to-wall windows, bouncing off the walls of the one massive room that housed the kitchen, dining room, and living room. Plastic cups and paper plates littered the counter tops in the kitchen and the oval mahogany table in the dining room. Phone charging cables hung out of a few outlets. A cabinet or two hung
open. The tops of umbrellas could be seen through the massive bay window, and further out, endless sand and even more endless blue ocean, with not more than a handful of people milling around on the beach.

Chloe whistled at the expanse and expense of the space.

"Looks like the party already started," Beca said, leading them through the great room and out to the balcony, thumping bass and blaring music greeting them as soon as she opened the glass door. The smell of grilling meat was overwhelming as smoke billowed up from somewhere below them and Chloe’s stomach growled.

Beca greeted everyone, introducing Chloe as she went. Some people Chloe recognized, remembering from brief past meetings. They all seemed friendly and nice, many of them greeting her with a hug rather than a handshake. Beca stopped to talk to one of the women for a few minutes, who Chloe recognized as Katy's assistant from the day at the label. She hung back, letting them talk as she accepted an unspecified drink in a yellow Solo cup from a guy in board shorts who appeared to be manning a makeshift bar. She sipped it, wincing at the strength, but it was fruity and sweet and perfect for the beach.

"Can I get another one?" she asked, indicating it was for Beca.

"You got it, babe. One Beach Bomb coming up."

Beach bomb? She made a mental note to drink them slowly. She had to look away after she saw him lift up three different bottles of hard liquor and pour without restraint.

"Okay, Tamra said our room's on the second floor. Let's go get our stuff and change. Is this for me?" Beca asked without pause, lifting the cup out of Chloe's hand. "Oh, God," she coughed a moment after taking a drink, sputtering a little.

"It's strong. Warning."

"Yeah, I got that," Beca said, still shaking it off a little. "Thanks."
Chloe led them upstairs, wrangling the suitcase they shared, Beca following with a couple bags over her shoulders.

"She said it's the third door on the right."

Chloe counted and turned into the third door to the right, another massive room with wall-to-wall windows that offered an unobstructed view of the Pacific Ocean. A king-sized bed with white linens and beige accent pillows faced the window, and Chloe was quite certain she would never want to leave after watching the sun rise from bed in the morning.

There was a mini-fridge in the corner on a counter next to a Keurig and a round table and pair of chairs in the corner. It qualified as a luxury hotel room, with the exception that the bathroom was across the hall.

They dropped their bags in the room, both a little caught up in the view.

Until Chloe grabbed Beca around the waist and yanked her onto the bed in a fit of protests and laughter until she got Beca pinned with her wrists above her head.

"Would it be unprofessional of you to have sex at your work party?"

Beca smiled. "It's a beach party with endless booze. I think it's not only acceptable, but expected."

Chloe lowered herself to capture Beca's lips with hers, kissing her thoroughly. When she pulled back, Beca was breathing hard.

"Let's go to the beach first," Chloe said with a grin as she crawled backwards off Beca and the bed to dig out her beach gear. She kicked the bedroom door closed and pulled her shirt over her head, tossing it at Beca who was still on the bed, propped up on her elbows.

"Strip tease?" Beca asked.

"Informally," Chloe answered as she unzipped her jeans and wiggled them over her hips with a little more sway than was necessary to accomplish the job. Her bra and panties went next, earning a
whistle from Beca.

She slipped into her turquoise bikini bottoms and pulled the top over her breasts in front of the large mirror. "Tie me up?"

Beca smirked as she climbed off the bed and crossed the room. "Handcuffs or rope?"

"I saw that coming a mile away, Mitchell. Stop going for the low-hanging fruit."

"Like these?" Beca said, smoothly pushing the bikini top out of the way to hold Chloe's breasts.

Chloe swallowed, trying not to let herself get too aroused despite the sexy reflection staring back at her. It was still early and she really did want to get to the beach. She knocked Beca's hands away and tugged the top down again, pulling her hair up and away from her back.

"Please?"

Beca sighed and kissed her shoulder. "Fine." She pulled and tied the strings behind Chloe's neck and again at her back, letting Chloe dictate how tightly to tie them to be the most flattering. "Tell me when it's tight enough."

"That's what she said," Chloe cracked, making them both laugh. "Hurry up and change," she urged Beca. Chloe unpacked the beach bags to find their flip-flops and sunscreen and the pair of straw hats she made Beca promise to wear with her.

Beca changed into her own bikini, a black number that Chloe had helped her pick out before they were a couple. She insisted upon it because it made Beca's cleavage look amazing, which at the time was secretly for selfish reasons. Taking advantage of that, she bent down and placed a big wet kiss on the inner curve of Beca's breast, finishing with a loud and silly smack.

"You gotta stop or we're never going to leave the room," Beca said with a groan.

Chloe grinned. "Sorry, not sorry." She tied a white and turquoise sarong around her hips and secured her hair in a messy bun high on her head, finishing her look with oversized sunglasses with
"Only you would coordinate beach attire."

"There's nothing wrong with wanting to rock the beach babe look."

"You could be out there in a burlap sack and you'd still be a babe."

Chloe curtsied. "Why thank you. Shall we to the beach?"

Beca pulled on a pair of purple gym shorts and picked up their towels, sunglasses perched on top of her head. "We shall."

They didn't quite make it to the beach proper immediately. They got caught up at the "bar" with another Beach Bomb handed to each of them. When their feet hit the sand, someone yelled Beca's name and Chloe turned, a little stunned to see Katy Perry running straight at them, an apron with a cartoonish illustration of a busty woman in a bikini on it - over her bikini.

Chloe was going to have to get used to this being their life, and she forced the concept of celebrity out of her mind.

"You guys came!"

"Are you kidding? We wouldn't miss this. You remember Chloe?"

"Yeah totally! Chloe Beale! Thanks for coming."

"Katy Perry." Chloe nodded at the house behind them. "Thanks for having us. This place is amazing."
"Yeah it's pretty sweet. I gotta get back to the grill, but you two eat, drink, and be merry. Oh and there's extra beach umbrellas in the crate over there if you need one. One of the guys will help you if you ask." And like that, she was gone.

Chloe watched her work her way back under an umbrella and pick up a pair of tongs. "Katy Perry is grilling hot dogs for us."

"I told you she was chill. Beach?"

"Yes, beach!"

The couple picked their way through the deep, soft sand, having to stop after a few yards to take off their flip-flops; they were making it far more difficult to walk than it needed to be. Choosing a spot to settle wasn't difficult; there were literally four other spots claimed, two with umbrellas staked into the sand.

They dug little holes in the sand to hold their drinks and unfurled towels and sat down. Chloe pulled the sunscreen out of her bag and gave it a shake, watching Beca tie her hair up until she noticed.

"What?"

"Just admiring the view," Chloe said as she untied her sarong and popped the top to squirt lotion into her hand, making quick work of covering her arms, chest, stomach, legs, and face. "Do my back, and I'll do yours." She turned her back to Beca and braced herself for the cold lotion.

She felt Beca working it into her skin and sighed at the light massage.

"My turn."

The bottle dropped over her shoulder to land between her legs. She turned around and Beca's back was already to her, waiting. She took her time with the sunscreen, being a bit more thorough than was necessary to get the job done, but Beca wasn't complaining.
"Okay, all done."

"Thanks, babe." Beca reclaimed the bottle and finished the front of her body.

Chloe balled up her sarong to use it as a pillow and settled on her back to soak in the sun. She heard Beca getting settled a minute or two later and she let herself zone out, the rhythm of the waves rolling ashore by their toes, the breeze, the caw of a seagulls, the music back at the house. It felt like a little piece of heaven.

"Mmm. Yeah."

"What?"

"Good song."

"I can't make it out - what is it?"

Chloe couldn't help but dance when a good song came on, even though she was lying down. "No? I know you know it." Chloe started singing along to the reggae beat floating down from the house.

"Honey came in and she caught me red-handed, creeping with the girl next door

Picture this, we were both butt-naked, banging on the bathroom door."

"Oh, yeah I totally know this. Throwback."

Chloe opened her eyes, squinting against the bright sun even with her sunglasses, to look over at Beca who started nodding along to the beat. She smiled, knowing Beca was waiting and finding her spot.

"How you can grant the woman access to your villa

Trespasser and a witness while you cling to your pillow

You better watch your back before she turn into a killer"
Best review the situation that you caught up inna'."

Chloe let her take Shaggy’s rap verses and she took the chorus, and she was reminded of how much she missed singing with Beca. She made a note to fix that, starting with this weekend.
“Love shaaaaack, that's where it's at. Love shaaaaack, that's where it's at,” Chloe sang.

“Hugging and a-kissing, dancing and a-loving, wearing next to nothing cuz it's hot as an oven! It's fucking hot out here,” Beca finished.

Chloe sat up from her towel and wiped sweat from her brow. “Seriously. Wanna go cool off?”

“Yes!”

Chloe laughed at Beca's emphasis and pushed herself to her feet to turn and grab Beca's hands to help her. Chloe led them to the water's edge, cold surf lapping at their toes.

Beca hesitated. “This is going to be fucking freezing.”

Chloe took a brave few steps forward, the temperature cutting through her hot skin like knives. “It's not so bad,” she lied. “Once we get used to it, it'll be nice.”

“That's what they all say.” Beca waded forward as well, and they took turns being the braver one to move out farther, the water inching up their bodies until it was at the edge of Chloe's bikini top.

“I'm just going to do it,” Chloe said, steeling herself.

Beca grimaced as a wave came in, hitting higher on her body than she had worked up to. “You're a brave, brave woman.”

“Oh God.” Chloe took off her sunglasses to make sure she didn't lose them, took a deep breath, and bent at the knees to sink below the surface completely.

It was freezing, but not as bad as she expected. She popped up a moment later and wiped the water off her face, slipping her sunglasses on again. “That felt great! You should do it.”
“No!”

“Just get it over with.” She flicked water at Beca, making her gasp and leap backwards. A wave came in and knocked Beca off balance, sending her rolling into and under the water unprepared.

Chloe lost it, laughing hysterically at the flailing of arms and legs and the swearing as Beca fought to find her footing, getting knocked over a second time before she finally stood up straight, dripping wet.

“God dammit!”

Chloe laughed even harder.

“Oh you think that was funny?”

“Extremely,” Chloe managed through her laughter.

“Then let's see how you like it!”

“What?” Chloe wasn't ready for Beca to slam into her body, knocking them both off their feet and into the waves. “Beca!” She shrieked between gasping for air as water crashed over her head. She caught herself and stood up, sunglasses floating in front of her.

Beca was sputtering and laughing a few feet away, clearly proud of herself.

“That's the way it's going to be, huh?” She lunged for Beca, and they chased each other around in the surf, drifting farther and farther out to sea until Beca shrieked.

“Something touched my foot!”

“Probably just sea weed, calm down.” Chloe treaded water a few feet away and tried to not get
nervous about creatures of the deep.

“No, it was slimy!”

“Yeah - sea weed.”

“Oh God, what if it was an eel!” Beca started hastily swimming to shore.

“Bec - Beca!” Chloe followed, catching up to her and grabbing her ankle to stop her from getting away, resulting in another panicked shriek and Chloe swallowing a liter of seawater from Beca kicking it into her face trying to escape from the eel that was eating her foot.

“I'm done swimming!” Beca shouted back as she trudged out of the water and back to her towel.

Chloe tried to laugh, but her eyes, nose, and throat stung from the salt water. “Yeah, me, too.”

Beca was sitting on her towel with one of the straw hats obscuring her eyes, arms and legs crossed like a petulant child by the time Chloe made it out of the water.

“Oh, come on,” Chloe chided. “I wasn't trying to scare you, I was trying to get you to stop and stay with me.”

“I wasn't scared.”

“Uh huh.” Chloe pulled a clean towel out of the beach bag and dried off so she could tie her sarong around her hips again. “I'm starving, so I'm going to go find food. Do you want to come with me?”

“No.”

“Do you want me to bring something back for you?”
“You don't have to.”

Chloe rolled her eyes. “Okay, I'm going to get something to eat; you can sit here and starve.” She started toward the house with every intent to bring back food for Beca as well, despite her attitude.

“I'll take a cheeseburger if those are happening.”

Chloe chuckled and kept walking.

At the house, the music was still going, and the drinks were still flowing. She couldn't handle another Beach Bomb, not on an empty stomach, and she found a cooler full of ice, sodas, beer, and water. She fished around for a couple waters and made her way to the umbrella with the grill. Katy was gone, someone else handling the cooking.

That someone else happened to be Beca's co-producer, Jimmy. Chloe hesitated, debating whether or not to turn back or brave it.

“Well hey there, beautiful,” he said, smiling and looking over the top of his sunglasses. He was wearing swim trunks, a tank top, and had a white streak of sunscreen down his nose, looking like a complete douchebag. “I remember you.”

Chloe glanced around, not liking being alone with him. “Hey, Jimmy.”

“I didn't know you were going to be here. Where's your other half?”

“On the beach. Are you doing burgers? Can I get a cheeseburger and a couple hot dogs?” She really didn't need small talk.

“Your wish is my command.” Jimmy passed two plates to Chloe and she turned for the picnic table covered in condiments and side items. “Leaving already?”

“Don't want our food to get cold,” she said, hurriedly filling their plates, chilly water bottles tucked under her arm.
“That's not the only thing getting cold.”

Chloe's head snapped up from what she was doing, staring at the man leering at her. “Excuse me?”

He actually had the audacity to point his spatula at her chest, lift his sunglasses, and wink.

“Excuse me?!” she repeated, absolutely shocked.

“Just an observation, babe,” he laughed and flipped a line of burgers.

“I would appreciate you never addressing me as 'babe' or commenting on my body.” She seriously regretted not wearing a tank top over her bikini, but he was literally the only person there that was gross enough to warrant it, and she didn't know he was there since she didn't see him earlier.

“I see something I like, I comment on it.” He tilted his beer bottle at her in a *cheers* and took a swig.

“Not with me, you don't.” Chloe was livid. She gathered the refreshments and walked away, rushing down the beach to her towel before she could say anything else and risk getting Beca into hot water.

“He is such a fucking creep!”

Beca looked up, startled. “What's wrong?”

“Jimmy - he was checking out my boobs!”

“What do you mean?”

Chloe sat down hard, almost bobbling the plates, and handed the burger to Beca. “He literally pointed at my chest and alluded to the fact that he could see my nipples through my top.”
“Wait, what?”

Chloe just looked at Beca, still beside herself with offense.

“You're serious?”

“Jesus, why would I lie about that?”

“Whoa, hey, I didn't mean to imply you were lying. Tell me what happened.”

Chloe threw a hand up in exasperation. “I just told you! The guy is a creep. The end.”

“He seriously said something to you?”

“Beca!”

“I'm not questioning your truth! I'm just shocked!”

“I told you he was a sleaze. I get it, he's a guy and guys think they can look at me however they want but at least be subtle about it or something. Shit.”

Chloe was pissed and Beca seemed to be in disbelief. She wasn't sure the reaction she wanted Beca to have - maybe she wanted her to storm off and tell Jimmy to fuck off, and deck him in the nose if she felt like it. But Beca was just sitting, mouth agape, stunned.

“That motherfucker!” Beca was on her feet before Chloe realized what was happening.

“Beca!”
“Stay here, Chloe!” Beca shouted, pointing behind her as she stormed toward the house.

“What are you doing?!”

Beca stopped, already several yards away, and spun around to face her. She ripped off the hat and threw it back like a frisbee. “Just stay here. No one talks to you that way.”

“You don't have to do this!” Except Chloe's heart was swelling so big at the sight of an infuriated Beca marching off to protect her honor, she thought it might burst.

“Yes I fucking do. Just stay down here and I will deal with him.”

Chloe held up her hands in surrender.

Beca started toward the house again, arms swinging and feet stomping, five-foot-two-inches of fury.

She watched Beca disappear into the shade of the outdoor kitchen area, and despite the music and the surf and the wind, she could hear Beca's shrill, angry voice. The music cut off a second later, and Chloe thought it would have been all the more dramatic a needle scratching a vinyl record could have preempted the silence. She could hear Beca better now, but still couldn't make out everything she was saying. She caught what sounded like “god damn” and “don't” and “shut up” and “Chloe” and a very clear “fuck you.”

Her voice disappeared as quickly as the music had, and Chloe could only assume someone had intervened or Beca had stormed off again. The music returned a moment later.

She was gone an uncomfortably long time, but still Chloe waited, passing the time by re-applying sunscreen and munching on the Doritos Beca abandoned in her haste.

Chloe didn't know how long it had been, but Beca finally returned - much calmer than how she had departed.

“Hey,” she said as she neared.
“Everything okay?” Chloe asked warily.

“He denied doing anything wrong.”

“Of course he did.”

“But I told him to knock his shit off anyway.” Beca sat down on her towel and worked on brushing the sand off her legs. “He needs to learn that he can't look at women like a piece of meat. And he can't fucking treat you that way.”

Beca had defended her honor. And not just to a guy in a bar that wouldn't take no for an answer, but to her superior, in fact to the person who gave her the biggest job in the business. It could have cost her her job. Chloe sprang forward, knocking Beca onto her back with a hug, sand flying everywhere.

“I love you so much!”

Beca protested a little at the chaos and the sand in her face, but relented to Chloe nuzzling and kissing her neck.

It occurred to Chloe after a moment that she, in fact, had no idea if it had or had not cost Beca her job. Fear washed over her and she sat back. “He didn't fire you, did he?”

“What? No. He can't fire me anyway. Besides, at this point it would cost Capitol too much in lost production time.”

“Oh thank God,” Chloe breathed, relieved. She saw the corner of Beca's mouth twitching, trying to suppress a smile. “What?”

“Katy was there when I confronted him. She laid into him, too. It was pretty awesome watching him get taken down a few pegs. There wasn't much he could say to her.”
“What! I don't know if I'm embarrassed or not.”

“Why would you be embarrassed?”

“I don't know.” Chloe said with a shrug, folding in on herself a little. “I mean, how would you feel if I told you that David Guetta was defending you to Kommissar?”

Beca's back stiffened. “Don't you joke about that.”

“See?” Chloe said with a laugh. They simply looked at each other for a few seconds; Beca looked smug, and happy. “Thank you,” Chloe said eventually.

Beca waved her hand dismissively. “I'm sorry I didn't realize how gross he was being. He's never acted that way towards me and there aren't many other women in the studio; I should have taken you more seriously when you brought it up.”

“It's okay,” Chloe said. “You said something when I needed you too. I'm only sad I wasn't there to see it.”

Beca laughed. “It was pretty great. We had an audience and everything.”

Chloe had just laid back down to soak in more sun when she felt Beca's foot nudge her.

“Can we go in soon? I don't want to get burned on the first day and I feel like I already am.”

Chloe looked over and lifted her sunglasses, squinting at the blindingly bright light, to try to see if Beca was turning red. “I think you're okay.”

“How are you not sunburned? Aren't gingers notorious for their inability to tan?”

The gears in Chloe's brain turned. “Can I tell you a secret?”
“Of course.”

Chloe scooted closer as if about to divulge nuclear warhead codes. “I'm not a natural red-head.”

Beca looked shocked for a moment as though believing her, and then laughed. “Now I KNOW that’s not true.”

Chloe grinned. “How would you know?”

“The curtains match the drapes.”

She reached over and grabbed Beca's hand, pulling her down to awkwardly lie on top of her, both laughing. “You perv! I knew you checked me out in the shower!”

“I did,” Beca said, struggling to find a comfortable position and finally doing so, lying alongside Chloe, one leg hitched over Chloe's. “And then up close and personally. Many times in recent months.”

“How do you know I don't dye it, too?”

“Okay, if you're doing that to keep up the ginger masquerade, you have bigger problems.”

Without preamble, Beca leaned down and kissed her, stealing Chloe's breath when she caught her lower lip between her teeth, pulling on it a little. Chloe knew that kiss, and it was a kiss that said Beca was ready to be be done at the beach and take it to the bedroom.

“How are you on the upkeep?” Beca asked with a wicked little smile. “I could check on it right now.” She wiggled her fingers in front of Chloe's face and just like that, they disappeared and reappeared a second later between her legs.

Chloe gasped, not expecting it and certainly not expecting it at that exact time and location. “What are you doing?”
“Checking.” Beca glanced down and Chloe felt a tug on her waistband. “You seem very dedicated to your maintenance. Impressive.”

“Oh my God,” Chloe groaned, covering her face with a hand. She was both embarrassed and amused by the line of questioning, and getting turned on by the thoroughness of Beca's manual inspection. “We can't do this here.”

“There's no one around us.”

“The house is literally right behind us.”

“It's like...twenty yards away at least.”

“Is that the designated safe distance for public indecency?” Chloe bit back a moan when Beca got a little more thorough in her exploration, trying hard to not give into it. Even though her body was screaming to succumb.

Beca smiled. “If you want it to be.”

Chloe sat up a little and looked around; there really wasn't anyone close. The few people on the beach were far enough down the coastline that she couldn't make out their faces, and if she couldn't see them, they couldn't see her...right?

It was moments like these, with Beca getting her into compromising positions in less than typical situations, that she was reminded of immense amount of trust they shared. It had been immediate in their relationship, learning over the years to have faith in the other, to catch if one fell, to push but not topple. It was what propelled them forward so quickly as a couple; instantly they shared a bond that took months with her past partners, if it ever developed at all. But with Beca, she knew they could push each other, and test boundaries, and bend the rules, and still keep each other safe. So, she did what she knew would be okay to do. She laid back down.

“I can't believe I'm letting you do this. I'm going to have sand in places sand shouldn't be.”

“Letting me?” Beca traced a particularly slow trail and hummed. “For some reason I don't feel like I'm twisting your arm. And you're kinda the one that started this with the whole dye job thing.”
“Shut up.” Chloe breathed, giving in by pulling Beca down to kiss her. She twisted her tongue with Beca's, pulling her deeper, and she felt fingers move to the bundle of nerves aching for attention, teasing and stroking, drawing whimpers from her lips.

Chloe was fighting a losing battle. She desperately wanted to keep her body in check, to avoid the tell-tale thrusting that would give away what they were doing to anyone who looked their way long enough, even if they were anonymous. She wanted to roll Beca over and grind her hips into her hand. She wanted to rip off their bathing suits and not be covered in sand. But that would have to wait.

She found her climax despite the restraint, and she had a fleeting thought that maybe Beca wanted to get caught with the way she ripped her kiss away just in time for the moan that accompanied it. She grabbed Beca's hand and held her still, pressed close, as she throbbed and caught her breath.

“You couldn't wait until tonight?” she finally asked with a lazy smile.

Beca scrunched her nose playfully. “Why would I wait when I could do it now?”

“Oh I don't know,” Chloe said, pushing her arms and back into a stretch. “Privacy is the first thing that comes to mind.”

“Now what fun would that be?”

Chloe thought of all the privacy they would have that night in thee luxurious room. “Is that a challenge, to prove you wrong?”

Beca grinned. “If you want it to be.”

“I'll consider it.” She swatted Beca's hand away and adjusted her bottoms, making sure they sat properly before untying her sarong to stand up on slightly wobbly legs. “I'm going to go cool off again. Put on more sunscreen if you're worried about getting burned.”

Beca gave her a little salute and reached for the sunscreen as Chloe headed for the water.
It was easier this time - still shockingly cold, but slow and steady won the race and she worked her way out deep enough to tread water. She looked back at the beach and at Beca, rubbing lotion into her arms and neck, and at the mansion behind her, and she wondered what on earth she ever did to deserve it.
Chloe's mind worked overtime as they packed up the beach stuff and headed to the house. She was still turned on from Beca's little adventure and it was making it difficult to think up something a more creatively sexual than usual to live up to the informal challenge. She simply wanted to run upstairs and get Beca in the shower and get on her knees.

_Not a bad idea though..._

Chloe followed Beca to and through the house. Along the way they gathered an invitation to drinks at dusk on the beach, to which they accepted; Chloe added that they might be late, earning a knowing glance from Beca.

They climbed the stairs and she gave Beca's butt a slap since it was conveniently close, a few inches in front of her face.

“Hey!” Beca's hand swatted around behind her, and Chloe waited until she gave up and then did it again, connecting a little more firmly. “God dammit,” Beca laughed and picked up her speed to put space between them and get out of Chloe's reach.

“I thought you liked that?” Chloe called as Beca got to the landing and jogged ahead and into their room, starting a game. She tried to close the door behind her but Chloe made it just in time, slamming into it shoulder first.

“No!” Beca tried to push the door closed, a battle they both knew she would lose. She tried to arm wrestle Chloe on a monthly basis, and she had yet to win. One time she came close when Chloe was drunk and sneezed in the middle of the match.

Chloe laughed and leaned into the door harder. “Let me in, or else!”
“Or else what?”

“Or else...” Chloe's mind churned. She wasn't one to be shy about sex and she was always open to new things, but other than doing it in a few risqué locations, she and Beca hadn't really experimented a lot. “Or else...” They were being way too loud in the echoey hallway so she pushed hard enough to be able to see Beca and her valiant attempt. “Or else I'll have to take you over my knee.”

She wasn't ready for the door to give way without warning, and she stumbled in, almost falling. The door slammed closed behind her and she heard the click of the lock. A second later she felt hands on her waist spinning her around into Beca's arms and right into a heated kiss. Apparently the threat of spanking set Beca off; Chloe filed that thought for later use.

Their skin was gritty from the sand and greasy from the sunscreen and as much as Chloe wanted to stand there and kiss Beca until midnight, she wouldn't feel sexy until she was clean. And there was definitely sand in uncomfortable places.

She pulled out of Beca's embrace and gave her one last peck. “Come shower with me first.”

Beca was panting - whether from the kiss or from the fight over the door, Chloe didn't know. “Yeah, okay. Did you really mean that?”

Chloe played coy. “I guess you'll have to wait and see.” She couldn't be sure, but she thought she heard Beca growl. Or maybe purr.

Chloe wondered how much they still had had to learn about each other's preferences. Their sex life was amazing, other than the break when she lost herself a bit. That aside, it was always mind-blowing and natural, and rarely did one ask the other to do something specific. Beca figured out that hair pulling made Chloe's toes curl, and Chloe figured out that there was a spot on the right side of Beca's neck just below her ear that if she licked and sucked on it just right, would almost bring her to orgasm. Chloe really needed to capitalize on that next time they played the “quick and fast in public” game.

But they didn't know each other's kinks and fantasies, not beyond Beca enjoying the thrill that came with potentially being caught.
Chloe wondered what Beca's enthusiastic response to her threat of punishment meant. Sure, they exchanged playful swats now and then, maybe with a firmer hand during particularly hot and heavy sessions. But was she into legit spanking? Or being submissive? Did she have a teacher-student fantasy? Or was she just horny and into anything?

“Well?”

Chloe didn't realize she had zoned out; Beca was waiting in the doorway with her toiletries for the shower and one of the white robes that hung on the back of the bedroom door.

“Coming,” Chloe said, and added a wink for good measure. Beca bit her lower lip and turned to head for the bathroom, leaving Chloe to gather her things.

Beca was already in the shower when Chloe got there, her bathing suit and shorts in a heap on the floor. Unsurprisingly, the bathroom was big. It wasn't the master bathroom, Chloe assumed, since it was in the hallway and not adjacent to a room, but it still sprawled with two sinks, a toilet and a bidet, and a massive doorless stall in the corner. Chloe's heart raced; there was no way they were making it back to the bedroom without someone getting off.

It was only a matter of who would take the upper hand first.

She locked the door behind her and stripped off her bikini as she walked toward the shower with determination. The stall had a pair of rainfall shower heads on opposite walls and Beca was already under one.

“ Took you long enough,” Beca said with a smile as she washed her hair.

It was Chloe's turn to bite her lip, seeing Beca under the pouring water, shampoo lather running down her body in rivulets. She resisted the urge to rush things and instead opened the faucets on the opposite side, sighing when the hot water hit her shoulders.

“This is the fanciest shower I've ever been in,” she said, trying not to think about the built-in bench along the rear wall which was surely meant for using the shower to shave or relax, and not at all for what was going through her mind.

“It's pretty sweet.”
Beca turned around to grab her loofah and it was all Chloe could do to keep her feet rooted where they were, especially when she turned back around and that soapy loofah started making circles over her chest and down her stomach.

Chloe also forgot the fact that she actually needed to have a shower, and reached for her shampoo so quickly that she dropped it, sending it sliding across the floor to Beca's feet. Beca gave it a kick and sent it back, saving her from the struggle that would come with having to walk over to Beca's side and retrieve it.

Once she got going, Chloe stopped thinking about what she wanted to do to Beca and actually enjoy the shower. It felt good to wash away the sand and wind and sun.

“Are you going to rinse your hair for an hour, or are you going to come make out with me?”

Chloe smiled. Beca was as impatient as she to get things started, and the thought sent a thrill through her. “You want to make out?” she teased.

“Yes, please.” Beca's eyes were bright, skin flushed from the hot water.

“Yes, please?” Chloe quirked an eyebrow. “So polite. I think you should come to me instead.”

Beca took a few quick steps without hesitating and kissed her, hot and deep and passionate. Chloe briefly wondered what it was about them and showers that always got them going - maybe nostalgia? Or maybe it was as simple as it being sexy to be naked, wet, and hot together. She felt a hand on her breast and the sensation gave her pause, and then she remembered her plan and the challenge to prove Beca wrong - that privacy allowed for far more fun than not.

She knocked Beca's hand away, and a second time, and then grabbed Beca's wrists and tugged on them. “No touching.”

“Fuck,” Beca muttered, staring at Chloe's lips, and chest, and lips again.

“Go sit down.” Chloe pointed at the bench wide enough for two people - but only one would be on it tonight.
Beca sat obediently, a smile playing on her mouth that she kept trying to hide. “Now what?”

“Now...” Chloe paused, drawing out the tension. “Stay.”

Beca wrapped her fingers around the edge of the bench and nodded.

Chloe liked this reversal of power; she remembered feeling it the night they got a little more intense than usual, after their evening at the Santa Monica Pier. She walked slowly to Beca, taking pleasure and pride at the way Beca watched her, eyes lingering longer some places than others. When her knees touched Beca's, she stopped, looking down at the eyes looking up at her expectantly.

She reached out and covered Beca's right breast with her hand, squeezing and drawing a sharp inhale out of Beca. Chloe lived for the sounds Beca made when she was turned on, and the acoustics of the stall amplified it nicely. She pressed a knee forward, easing Beca's apart until she could rest it on the bench between her legs, half kneeling on it. It brought her closer to Beca and she leaned the rest of the way, wordlessly offering her breasts to her.

When Beca hesitated, looking at them and up at Chloe, she lifted her hand to cradle the back of Beca's head and pull her forward.

Warm wetness slithered over her breast and she sighed, pulling Beca closer as she leaned forward, pressing her knee against the warmth between Beca's legs.

The sudden contact jolted Beca and teeth connected with sensitive skin, and Chloe hissed, both from pain and pleasure. She pulled her closer and felt a tilt in Beca's hips, seeking relief against her.

She slid her knee away with a tsk, returning her foot to the floor as she eased back. Framing Beca's face in her hands, they stared at each other, all love and desire and trust. And it was while holding Beca's gaze that Chloe sank to her knees, the realization of what she was doing registering visibly on Beca's face as she held her breath, legs parting automatically to accommodate her frame.

Chloe leaned in to kiss her first, teasing her tongue over Beca's, hinting at things to come. She trailed her hands up her calves to her thighs, higher and higher until she dragged her thumb across wet heat, drawing out a moan. Beca's hips tilted, trying to push into the touch but Chloe pressed
them back.

“Patience,” she said between kisses as her fingers grazed and teased, earning whimpers and whines of frustration in return.

“I have no patience,” Beca mumbled and kissed her harder, demandingly.

Chloe pulled back, cutting off the kiss. “You need to learn to have some.”

Beca bit her lip again, moaning even though Chloe was doing nothing but holding her thighs. “How are you going to teach me?”

Chloe waited a moment for effect. “You'll see.”

In reality, she had no idea. She didn't want a stranger's house and shower to be the place they tried...particularly different or intense things. This was more about teasing and fun, and getting Beca a little worked up over not being the one to call the shots - a role she seemed eager to play.

Chloe dipped her head down, capturing the tip of Beca's breast between her lips. She pulled, and felt a hand on the back of her head. Immediately Chloe let go and sat back, guiding Beca's hand back to the bench.

“I said no touching.”

“Fuck,” Beca breathed, squirming a little. “Okay. I won't.”

“No?”

“I promise.”

Chloe winked at her, letting her know this game was fun without saying anything. Beca smiled and closed her eyes, leaning back against the wall, and Chloe leaned down again, working her lips over the soft, warm skin of her breast until she twisted her tongue around the tip and sucked.
Beca's back arched a little, a gasp escaping her lips at the sensation. She suckled harder, making her squirm, hands lifting off the bench to make a move for her hair but checking themselves and grabbing the bench again, squeezing tight.

“Fuck...Chloe...” Beca leaned into the contact.

Chloe pushed her back with a hand against her shoulder and bit down, using a hint of pain to make her point.

Beca inhaled sharply. “Message received.”

Chloe glanced up; Beca's eyes were closed but her face was far from peaceful. Emotions and reactions evolved and revolved as Chloe changed her pressure and switched to the other side. Just when she thought Beca was about to give in and grab her and push her where she wanted her, Chloe pulled back and slid her hand through Beca's wet hair to bring her down. Beca thought it was for a kiss, but Chloe tilted her chin up and away to get access to that spot on her neck below her ear that would make Beca weak.

Beca sighed as Chloe ran her tongue up the side of her neck, tilting her head further. Finding that secret spot wasn't always easy - sometimes it was more sensitive than others - and Chloe worked for a minute or two, licking and nipping, waiting for the tell-take reaction that she'd found it.

And then Beca nearly came off the bench completely with a gasp so loud Chloe wondered if there was any air left in the room, and she knew she had found it.

“Chlo...Chloe...” Beca whined, somehow pulling away and pushing closer at the same time.

Chloe hummed and latched onto her neck, licking and sucking enough to leave a mark, and biting, making Beca's arm flail, landing on her back once but quickly moving away to try to grasp the slick tile wall behind her.

Beca's hips were rocking now, desperate for contact and relief, but Chloe only flicked her tongue over her neck more quickly and inched her hands higher up her legs. Beca's thighs flexed and moved under her grip, hips twisting as she tried to get Chloe's hands on her, or to close her legs to find her own relief.
And then Beca's hand ended up between her own legs.

Chloe hadn't considered that. She didn't know it had happened until she felt Beca's struggling ease, and she let go of her neck to see why.

It was Chloe's turn to gasp; she had never seen Beca do that before. She had only shared that part of her own private life with Beca a few weeks earlier. It was so sensual, the desperation and arousal, that Chloe almost forgot what she was doing when Beca opened her eyes and stared at her, not faltering in her rhythm despite knowing she had been caught.

It pained her to do it, but Chloe grabbed Beca's wrist and pulled it away, both of them groaning from the loss.

“That's my job,” she said, pinning Beca's wrist against the wall as she leaned forward to work that spot again.

“God dammit, Chloe...” Beca moaned, restless in her seat.

Chloe wondered if she refused to let up, if she really could drive Beca to orgasm just from that erogenous zone on her neck. She considered it, briefly, but she wanted to get her hands - and more importantly - her mouth on her for that.

It was that thought, the simple imagining of things yet to come, that made Chloe sit back so quickly that Beca almost fell forward from the sudden lack of support and restraint.

She was done wasting time. They were both more than turned on, and Chloe's resolve to drag things out was fading fast.

“Please…” Beca was squirming again, hands daring to reach out to Chloe before pulling back as though scalded, knees lifting, back arching, chest heaving. She was coming completely unraveled and Chloe had never felt so in command, to have Beca desperate yet controlling herself all because Chloe told her to.

She thought breaking in Beca the first month of her joining the Bellas had been a rush - watching
someone so stubborn, such a control freak, give in and bend to her will. That was nothing compared to this.

Beca actually wanted this. She was begging for it. And she still was doing what she was told.

A smile creeped across Chloe's face, oblivious to Beca, eyes closed tightly as she waited and whined.

As tough and bossy as Beca played, this is what really got her going: being forced to give up control.

Chloe wondered how she hadn't pegged it earlier. Beca spent three years as the captain of the Bellas, yet Chloe was the one running the show.

“Chloe...please…”

“Please what?” Chloe sat back on her heels and let her hands rest over Beca's knees.

Beca chewed her lower lip, eyes still closed, hands now interlocked behind her own neck to control them.

“What, now you're shy?”

Beca whimpered again and Chloe liked that she was playing along. Any other situation and Beca couldn't keep her sailor's mouth shut.

Chloe bit her lip; she loved this, but talking dirty still wasn't something she was confident about. But she also knew Beca loved it when she cursed, and this was about driving her crazy. “You fuck me on the beach in broad daylight, but you can't tell me what you want me to do to you?”

Beca sucked in a breath.

“Tell me what you want.”
“Baby...”

Chloe dragged her fingernails up Beca's thighs, getting her attention. “I want you to say it.”

Beca's hands pulled at her neck and let go to grasp her own thighs, hard enough that Chloe could see the pale imprints under her fingers from the pressure. “I want...”

Chloe clicked her tongue, a reminder of the question - and the answer.

“I want you to...”

Chloe watched the battle in Beca's features, the arousal and the thinking and the excitement. And then her Beca opened her eyes.

“I want you to fuck me.”

Chloe felt her entire body flush with heat. Those words from Beca's mouth...they were almost too much to bear. Beca's eyes were on hers, staring, dark with desire.

“Please.”

Chloe could listen to her ask for it all night. It was music to her ears - no. Better than music. “You want me to fuck you?”

Beca nodded, staring at Chloe's mouth as she spoke.

Chloe pushed her hands higher, easing Beca's knees wider. She tilted her head coquettishly, accentuating the word. “Fuck you how?”

“Jesus,” Beca breathed. “I love when you say that.”
Chloe smiled. “What - fuck?” She pulled the F hard over her lower lip and clicked the K nice and sharply.

Beca nodded and her hands moved to grab Chloe again but again she stopped and withdrew them.

“Then you should tell me how you want me to fuck you.”

Beca started shaking her head, lazy, almost lolling side to side. “I don't care. Just do it.”

Chloe felt drunk on power. She could bring Beca to her knees if she wanted.

But not now, not this night. She was the one on her knees, and for a reason.

“Want me to use my fingers?” She asked, wiggling one hand in front of Beca's face until Beca caught one of her fingers between her lips and drew it into her mouth. Chloe felt her tongue slide over it, sucking, and she allowed it. It was too sexy to make her stop.

Beca released her after a moment and shook her head.

“No?” Chloe ran her tongue over her lips. “Then what do you want me to use?”

Beca watched every millimeter of her tongue's journey, groaning and twisting her hips. “Please, Chloe.”

Arousal churned low in Chloe's belly. “Say name again.”

“Chloe.”

“Tell me what you want.”
“You.”

“Tell me the right way.”

“Please.”

Chloe shook her head slowly. Beca was about to lose her mind; she wasn't far behind her. “Try again.”

“Please fuck me, Chloe.”

Chloe's head swam hearing it. She slid backwards and leaned down, nipping at Beca's inner thigh with her teeth. “How?”

She heard Beca take a breath.

“Jesus Christ, please fuck me, Chloe. With your tongue.”

Chloe moaned at the request. “Now was that so hard?”

“Chloe,” Beca whined, hips twisting and knees parting further.

She didn't make her wait any longer; they had both waited long enough. She pressed her tongue against Beca, holding it still as she reacted, a loud, almost painful groan of relief.

It was quick and rough and passionate. Chloe hitched Beca's right leg over her shoulder get even closer, pulling and prodding. She felt a hand on the back of her head, tentative at first, and when Chloe didn't do anything to stop it, fingers tangled into her wet hair and pulled, making it difficult to breathe.

And then Beca's voice echoed off the walls, nothing but a string of moans; even her usual swearing had been rendered incapable, and Chloe felt the rush of heat and pleasure. She pressed her thighs together, eager for her own relief, and the brief friction was almost enough to push her over the
edge, too. Her moan almost harmonized with Beca's, she couldn't help but think how ridiculously cheesy a thought that was, especially in the heat of the moment.

But Beca and she made beautiful music together from the beginning; now was no exception.

She felt Beca start to relax and she sat back, easing her leg off her shoulder. She smiled at Beca smugly, watching her awareness return.

Beca opened her mouth to speak, but held up a finger, asking for another moment. Chloe only smiled and pushed herself back to her feet, the burn in her quads from kneeling so long not unpleasant.

Beca tried again. “Okay.”

Chloe shifted her stance, trying to ignore the screaming need for relief. “Okay?”

“You were right.” Beca tried to stand up but failed, sitting down hard.

Chloe laughed. “About?”

Beca waved her hand around, indicating the shower around them. “This is better than sneaking around.”

“I told you.” Chloe offered her hands to Beca and helped her back to her feet. “Let’s get out of here. We’ve wasted so much water.”

Beca nodded, and Chloe could tell she was still a little fuzzy. “I’ll get to you. I just need a minute.”

Chloe kissed her and sent her on her way out the shower with a playful slap on her butt. “I’ll be ready.”
Evening

Beca was sure-footed and of sound mind by the time they dried off and combed their hair and
competed their individual beauty routines. As they crossed the hall and returned to their room
wrapped in the fluffy white bathrobes, Chloe noticed most of the other rooms were open now, and
she hoped everyone was downstairs at dinner and none-the-wiser to their shenanigans. It was
highly unlikely to have gone unnoticed by anyone on that level, the way sound reverberated in the
shower.

Chloe reminded herself she had nothing to be ashamed of, even if someone had overheard. Sex was
private for her, but it was healthy and natural. Though still not something she needed to share with
the world.

The time spent primping and chit-chatting at the mirror had allowed her body to calm down a few
notches, and she no longer felt ready to combust. She was left with a pleasant buzz, almost like a
high, that made her head feel a little detached. It was nice.

“Should we go join everyone for dinner?” she asked, hoping Beca wouldn't take offense to her
putting food before sex for the moment.

“Oh thank God,” Beca sighed. “I'm starving. I wanted to ask but didn't want to make you wait.”

Chloe waved a hand dismissively. “Thanks, but I'm fine; I can wait.” She dropped her robe to the
floor and noticed it was already dark outside, the bedroom lights making it difficult to make out the
features of the beach. Chloe was eager to experience the view properly. Her stomach grumbled.
The view could wait.

They dressed quickly, not bothering to do anything with their wet hair beyond tying it up and off
their necks and bothering even less with make-up.

Chloe almost never went out without make-up, unless it was to the gym or rehearsal, and even then
she at least used an eyebrow pencil. The self-consciousness that came with knowing the always-
fully-made-up Katy would be there and she would instantly feel less-than weighed on Chloe, and
she pushed it back, opting for expediting dinner and getting back into the bedroom over vanity.

“Ready?” Beca asked, waiting by the door as Chloe gave in and stood in front of the mirror filling
in her eyebrows and dusting a bit of powder over her forehead and nose.
“Yeah, sorry.” She dropped her compact back into her bag and grabbed her phone to follow Beca out and down the curving stairs, the ruckus of laughter and many simultaneous conversations greeting them.

“There they are!” someone shouted, and a chorus of whistles followed.

Chloe's heart and feet froze, but Beca kept walking, finding open seating at the table and stacking up plates that were left behind by those finished and relocated to nearby chairs and couches or the deck.

“Ayyyyy Mitchell got some! Can we use the bathroom now? Or is it time for round two?” someone else asked loudly, followed by laughter.

“There are like four other bathrooms in this house, so shut your face, Shane. Don't be jealous because the last time you scored it was with your left hand,” Beca responded, unfazed.

A chorus of ooohs rose up from the table and the guy known as Shane didn't offer a retort.

“Oh shit, she shut you down!” a female voice shouted; Chloe looked, and saw it came from Katy, sitting at the table like a regular person. Because she's a regular person.

“Chlo, come on,” Beca said, waving for her to join her at the island in the kitchen set with a buffet that had been brought in by a caterer, full of salads and pastas and seafood.

Chloe still felt a bit mortified, but Beca put the guy in his place and conversation shifted to talk of how terrible the Lakers were the past few seasons and how the Clippers could make another run for the title. Mostly she was relieved that Jimmy wasn't amongst the group. He surely would have had something gross to add to Shane's comment. She didn't know where he was and she didn't care.

“Why do people feel the need to comment on things like that?” Chloe whispered to Beca as the worked through the buffet options.

Beca shrugged and spooned a pile of shrimp scampi onto her plate. “Because they're jealous I guess. Those guys live in a perpetual state of keeping tabs on how frequently their bros score so
they can try to outdo them. The studio is like a frat house. I never join their discussions about the hot chick they boned last night.”

Chloe laughed. “No? Why not?”

“Because I'm a lady.” Beca flashed a prim and proper smile and helped herself to a couple crab legs. “And because the chick I'm boning is hot enough to put all theirs combined to shame and honestly it would just be embarrassing for them. And also because she wouldn't appreciate me talking about it.”

Chloe blushed and giggled, and tried to arrange crab legs on her plate so they didn't fall off, finally giving up and dropping them in the middle of it on top of everything. “Thank you.”

They took a seat at the spots Beca cleared and, thankfully, someone steered the conversation away from sports and sex by bringing up something called “Teeny Little Super Guy” from "Sesame Street,” exploding into endless reminiscing about childhood television shows and shock that Beca had no idea what they were talking about with Teeny Little Super Guy. Katy even sang his theme song.

Chloe had no idea what they were talking about either, and while she didn't know anyone from Beca's team, she fell into conversation easily. She never was one to be a wallflower. The conversation became so heated over a debate between "Rainbow Brite" and "Sailor Moon" - illuminating a clear division in the age groups in the room - that Chloe forgot that dinner was intended to be brief so they could rush up to bed and pick up where they left off in the shower.

No sooner had the thought vacated her mind than she felt Beca's hand slip between her thighs under the table, demanding her attention. She jerked at the unexpected intrusion, slamming her knee into a table leg so hard it knocked over an empty cup. Pain flashed white and hot and she doubled over as she slid her chair backwards.

“JESUS motherfucking...!” She grabbed her knee, throbbing, and she knew it would be black and blue in the morning.

Beca's hand fell away in the chaos but she was up and squatting in front of Chloe a second later. “Oh my God, babe, are you okay?”

She could still see stars behind her eyelids and felt tears in the corners of her eyes. Whether her
knee was numb or on fire, she couldn't be sure, and she blew out a long, slow breath to try to get through the pain.

She nodded, hesitantly.

“I'm sorry,” she heard Beca whisper, and felt a hand on her thigh again, this time not inappropriately.

Part of Chloe wanted to snap and tell her to stop with the public groping, but she knew it would be out of agony, not anger, and she would regret it the moment she said it, so instead she nodded sharply, accepting the apology.

There were arms around her neck and lips on her cheek and she considered a full emotional breakdown, but the pain was subsiding and embarrassment for causing a scene was setting in as she realized the lively conversation had ceased and silence replaced the roaring pain in her ears.

Chloe opened one eye tentatively, and as she feared, the others at the table were staring, concern on their faces.

“I'm okay,” she squeaked, and conversation picked up again as though nothing happened. She sat back, still holding her knee, to see Beca looking up at her from the floor.

“Chloe, I'm sorry. That was totally my fault.”

“Yeah, it was,” Chloe breathed, forcing a laugh. Now that the shock passed, she noticed her knee didn't hurt all that badly and the solid crunch that she felt when it happened scared her more than hurt her. She straightened and bent her knee experimentally, finding it in working order. Her kneecap was tender to the touch, though.

“Do you want some ice for it? I'll get you some ice,” Beca said, up and gone to the kitchen before Chloe could tell her it probably wasn't necessary.

Chloe excused herself from the table to walk gingerly to the bottom of the stairs and wait for Beca, who showed up carrying what she assumed was a kitchen towel filled with ice.
“You can walk!”

Chloe laughed. “I banged my knee, I didn't get shot.”

Beca still looked sheepish for being the culprit behind what happened, but she cracked a little smile.

“Come on, help me up these stairs so I can get it elevated.”

“Yeah, sorry,” Beca said, quickly ducking under Chloe's arm and holding her waist as though supporting an invalid.

Chloe didn't need the help, she didn't mind a bit of coddling. She shook off Beca's support at the landing, and though she felt the urge to limp, she was fine and they walked to the bedroom in silence. Chloe glanced at Beca who seemed to be drowning in guilt.

Once in their room, Chloe closed and locked the door behind them.

“Beca, I'm fine. Please stop moping.”

“I'm such a dick.”

Chloe took a seat on the foot of the bed, facing the massive window. All she could see was herself and the reflection of the room. She ignored Beca's wallowing. “Kill the lights, will you?”

“Why?” Beca flipped them off and Chloe didn't bother answering.

With the interior lights gone, the natural light of the full moon on the water shine brightly, and Chloe could see for miles over the dark sea, a white path of light reflecting from the beach to the center of the ocean as far as the eye could see. Palm trees framed the scene, making it look like a painting, and Chloe was giddy to see what sunset would look like. They wouldn't miss it tomorrow night.
“Oh, wow,” Beca said quietly, sitting next to Chloe.

“It’s so peaceful.”

They stared out across the rippling water in quiet solitude, fingers intertwined lightly. Chloe heard Beca sigh and she stole a glance at her, but was unable to look away.

Beca was lost in the view, eyes dark as they took in the scene, lips slightly parted in awe, and Chloe felt herself blush. She had never and would never stop getting butterflies when she looked, really looked, at Beca.

For so long she could only covet from afar, fantasizing about her friend and living with the guilt and heartache. But now, now if she wanted to lean in and kiss her, she could.

So she did.

Sunday at the beach was quiet.

Chloe woke up bright and early around 6:00 a.m., thanks to their failure to draw the shade on the massive window before bed. Beca always slept like a rock, and unsurprisingly, the light did not wake her.

Chloe dressed quietly and made her way down to the kitchen to evaluate the coffee and breakfast situation. It was silent and empty, save for the mess left from dinner by those who didn't clean up after themselves. Much to her relief, a Keurig sat on the counter next to the refrigerator with a rack of pods. She popped in a Starbucks blonde roast and found a mug in a nearby cabinet and set it brewing as she explored more cabinets, finding very little in the way of typical breakfasty foods.

The refrigerator, however, offered eggs, and the crisper drawer provided an onion and a bell pepper, and the freezer revealed a bag of shredded cheese, and she decided it was omelet time.

Several minutes of careful preparation, interspersed with sips of scalding hot coffee, led to the omelet disintegrating into scrambled eggs.
“Whatever,” she said as she gave up on folding it into a neat little envelope and attacked it with the spatula before dumping it onto a plate. She opted to leave the ingredients on the counter, at least for now, in the event Beca woke up and made her way to the kitchen as well.

She hoped that by being the first to crack an egg and turn on the stove, she didn't thereby elect herself as breakfast chef for the entire house.

Chloe took a seat on the deck to enjoy the fresh morning air. The beach was quiet, aside from the surf and the seagulls. A couple merchant vessels made their way past, looking massive on the horizon. A commercial fishing boat trolled by. Eventually, a couple people showed up further down the beach, black figures carrying surfboards as they ran into the ocean and paddled out to where the waves began breaking to straddle their boards and float around, waiting for, Chloe assumed, a surfable wave.

“This is nice,” she heard Beca say after a length of time. She was so caught up in the view that she hadn't noticed Beca join her on the deck. It made Chloe smile; it was so reminiscent of their sunrise moment by the lake at the retreat, what now felt like eons ago.

“Mhmm.”

“Who made eggs?” Chloe watched Beca pick up her forgotten plate and scrape a final bite off it.

“I did. Want me to make you something?”

“Would you?” Beca sounded so surprised and hopeful Chloe couldn't help but smile.

“Of course I would.” She stood up and stretched, giggling at the poke to her bare stomach from Beca when her shirt rode higher. “You wanna wait out here? It won't take very long.”

“No, I'll come with you.” Beca smiled. “I like being where you are.”

Chloe felt butterflies again.

“And where the coffee is,” Beca amended, pushing past Chloe in the doorway. “Where is it?”
“Love you, too!” she called, following her in to point out the coffeemaker and get another batch of scrambled eggs going.

By the time Beca's breakfast was gone and cleaned up, more guests started appearing - Chloe was relieved to escape the kitchen without being required to cook for the entire house, taking refuge in their room before anyone became wise to the possibility.

“I got some sun yesterday,” Beca said, examining herself in front of the full-length mirror, wearing nothing but yoga pants.

Chloe tried not to stare too long, then gave up since it didn't matter if Beca caught her or not. She straight up ogled her and then whistled a cat call.

“Looking good, babe.”

Beca blushed and crossed her arms over her chest. “Don't let me burn today. I don't want to ruin yesterday's success.”

“I'm bringing my iPod; I'll set an alarm on it for every couple hours so we remember to put on more sunscreen.”

Chloe tossed her iPod and headphones into yesterday's beach bag, which still contained their towels and hats. She fished out the bottle of sunblock and shook it.

“Come here, let me do you.”

“That's what she said,” Beca teased.

Chloe rolled her eyes. “Shut up and get over here.” She yanked Beca's arm when she was close enough and spun her. Chloe was liberal with the lotion and, despite the borderline sexual sounds of gratitude Beca was making as she worked it into her skin, made quick work of it.

Of course, she couldn't really help that her hands slipped around her waist to her stomach and higher to cover her breasts.
“Don't want these to get burned, they're so soft and tender.” She nuzzled Beca's neck, making her giggle and squirm.

“Stop,” Beca said with a sigh, “unless you plan to finish what you're starting.”

Chloe released her with a laugh and slapped her butt playfully. “Get changed and you can do my back and we'll go.”
It was hotter on the beach today. They were out by high noon, much earlier than the previous day. Chloe broke a sweat almost immediately.

It was a pleasant surprise when cold mist and a narrow breeze hit her stomach as she laid under the sun. She opened her eyes to see Beca with a pair of spray bottles affixed with fans around the nozzles.

“You're a saint!” she exclaimed, taking the bottle offered to her. “Where'd you find these?”

“I got them when I was at the store Friday night. I thought they were dumb, but fuck, I'm glad I decided to.”

“Me, too,” Chloe said as she directed the spray at her face and next to cool off a little. She watched Beca do the same, finding it a little erotic.

No sooner than she resettled than music floated over her. She had yet to hook up her iPod, and she sat up, looking for the source.

Beca was fiddling with her Beats Pill, iPhone was in her hand and she navigated through it, the song changing a moment later.

“Good idea, babe.”

“Thanks.” She finally set down her phone and “Time to Pretend” by MGMT started playing.

Chloe smiled at the song choice; it was one of her favorites, and she had sent the song to Beca her sophomore year for consideration in their regionals setlist. Beca hadn't chosen it as it didn't mash well with the other options, but Chloe had overheard her listening to it more than once over the years. She watched Beca lay down, still craving her. Chloe didn't know what had gotten into her, but getting out of the house and onto the beach had ratcheted up her libido at least two hundred percent. Sex on the beach, and in the shower, and before bed - three times in less than a day. And she wanted it again. Now.
Only she refused to put Beca through the sandy ordeal of yesterday; it really wasn't fun washing sand out of certain places.

“Do you want to...” she started, and then hesitated.

“Want to what?” Beca asked when she didn't continue.

“Go swimming?”

“Already? We just got here.”

“Well…” Chloe chewed on her lower lip. “I'm kind of...warm.”

“That's why I brought the misting fan things.”

Chloe took up her bottle and aimed it at Beca's face, spritzing her to get her attention.

“Dude, that's cold when you're not ready for it!”

“Come swim with me.”

“An eel almost ate me yesterday.”

“It was seaweed!”

Beca sat up. “What makes you the expert on what's happening out there underwater? You don't know.”

Chloe sat up as well and turned to face her. At least Beca wasn't lying down anymore - that was progress. “I didn't tell you about my X-ray vision?” She added a wink for good measure.
A bark of laughter escaped Beca. “You must have forgotten to mention it.”

“Oh yeah, totally,” Chloe glanced out at the ocean. “I can tell you right now that there are no eels in the area. I do see a few crabs crawling around the bottom.” She reached over and pinched Beca's toes. “They might be hungry.”

Beca yelped and pulled her foot back, making Chloe laugh. “That's not helping.”

“I see a few dolphins out there, too. You don't want to swim with the dolphins?”

“Dolphins?” Beca looked out over the water as though Chloe really did have X-ray vision, and to Chloe's astonishment, a bottlenose dolphin jumped through a cresting wave as they watched. They both gasped, and Beca's head snapped around so hard to look at her, Chloe thought her neck might have broken.

“See? I told you.” Chloe had a rough time keeping it together. The timing was too perfect, the best coincidence she could have asked for.

The look on Beca's face was one of confusion and wariness, eyebrow raised and jaw pushed to the side. She looked out at the water again, as though to test whether or not it had been a mirage.

And damn it, if that same dolphin - or another dolphin - didn't jump again right at that moment. Followed by several more.

Chloe bit back a squeal, clearing her throat and slapping a smug grin on her face.

“I don't know about all this,” Beca said, swirling her hand in front of Chloe's face, “but I'm totally down to swim with the dolphins.”

“Yay!” Chloe cheered, letting Beca help her up from the beach to trot to the water excitedly, an entire pod of dolphins playing in the waves off shore.
They waded in more quickly than was comfortable, out of excitement, and though they didn't dare go out so far as the dolphins, they went far enough that neither could touch the bottom and treaded water side by side, watching them.

“This is so fucking cool,” Beca said with a grin as the dolphins rode the waves like surfers.

“It really is.”

For a brief moment, Chloe thought one of them was going to swim right up to them, but it dove out of sight a few yards away, not quite curious enough to venture closer.

“I wonder what it's like to be a dolphin,” she wondered.

“They always look happy.”

“You know, in *Blackfish*, they said orcas have as many emotions as humans, maybe more. I bet dolphins do, too. Orcas are just big dolphins.”

“Oh God, that movie was so sad. Can we not?”

“Sorry,” Chloe said, adding a playful splash to keep the mood light. “Did you know dolphins are like, the only animal besides humans that have sex just for pleasure?”

Beca laughed and splashed back at her. “Of course you know that, you perv.”

“Hey, nothing wrong with watching National Geographic now and then.”

“I didn't say there was,” Beca said, hands up defensively. It only lasted a second, as she started to sink and needed her arms to stay afloat.

“Speaking of having sex just for pleasure,” Chloe started, trying to set it up smoothly. She found Beca's hand and pulled her back toward shallower waters.
“What about it?” Beca asked with a smile as she kicked to propel herself forward as Chloe swam backward.

“Have you ever done it in water?” Chloe asked. She hadn’t intended to open a conversation, but she found herself genuinely curious.

“Like, other than in the shower?”

“Yeah. Like in a pool or a hot tub or,” Chloe gestured around them as she found her footing, “an ocean.”

Beca shook her head. “No. Why, are you propositioning me? Have you?”

“Yes,” Chloe said with a wink. “And yes.”

“Chloe Beale!”

“Which ’yes’ does that apply to?”

“The second one. When did you do it in water? And where? And with whom?”

Chloe wore a sly smile. “Jealous?”

“Am I jealous of everyone you ever slept with? Yes. Yes I am. Now tell me. Where and who?”

“My ex-boyfriend Ryan, and in the pool at his parents' house.”

“His parents' house?”
“We were fifteen. Now that I remember it, I don't really recommend it, at least not, like, full-on.” She punched her arm forward, indicating force. “Not without lube, anyway.”

“Chloe!” Beca slapped her hands over her ears and spun away in disgust, adding a few feet between them and moving into calmer waters.

God, how she loved pushing Beca's buttons; it was so easy. She spoke louder. “It was still pretty hot though. We just had to take it slow.”

“Ughhh!”

Beca's shock and apparent offense made Chloe realize they had never had this conversation - the always fun ‘how many partners have you had?’ discussion. She knew almost nothing about Beca's past, other than Jesse, and Chloe hadn't shared much beyond what had been truthed out of her over beer pong or Jell-O shots at Bellas parties.

She wanted to have it, to be open and honest with Beca, and the memory of the water making sex less than smooth had muted her arousal.

Now was a good a time as any to have it.

“Beca,” she started, waiting for her to finally uncover her ears. “Can we talk?”

Beca's face fell. “Nothing good ever starts with 'can we talk.'”

Chloe smiled reassuringly. “No, no, not like that. I just...we haven't talked about our...romantic history really.”

“Our romantic history?”

“Yeah.” Chloe shrugged, trying to be nonchalant. “I mean, I think it's good to talk about these things, so something like me saying I had sex in a pool doesn't shock you.”
“It was the age that shocked me more than the pool, I guess.” Beca looked unsure.

“Okay. That's why we should talk about it. So, I'll go first. I lost my virginity when I was fifteen, to Ryan. We dated for two years and he was my first real relationship. Now you.”

“Chloe...”

“This is a judgment-free conversation. We're learning about each other is all.”

Beca made a face, and Chloe could tell she was uncomfortable. “When I was seventeen.”

“Okay,” Chloe swam closer. “Tell me about him.”

“I don't know his name.”

Chloe worked to hide the shock from her face; she never in a thousand would have pegged Beca to have anonymous sex. She kept her mouth shut to let Beca continue at her own pace.

“It was at a house party. I'd fought with my dad about it; he wouldn't let me go, and he never wanted me to date. Every time I got asked out, he would find an excuse to not give me permission. A boy I had a crush on, Jeremy, asked me to the party, and of course Dad told me no. So I snuck out, and went anyway. But when I got there, Jeremy was making out with Kimmy, the slut that slept with the entire football team. So, I knew where that was going. I got mad, and started drinking, and started crying. And this guy, this cute, cute, boy that I knew wasn't a high school boy saw me crying and started talking to me, and he kissed me, and I was really drunk and I don't really remember anything but waking up on the floor of a bedroom and my jeans were off and my underwear were missing and the guy was gone.”

Chloe released the breath she didn't realize she was holding. Her heart was breaking for Beca, for having such an upsetting experience, especially for her first time. Suddenly so much of her cautiously holding people at arm's length forever before trusting and caring made sense.

“Beca...I don't know what to say.”
Beca shrugged. “What is there to say? It is what it is.”

“I...I wish I could have been there for you.”

“We didn't even know each other then. You couldn't have been.”

“But I still wish I could have been. That wasn't...you deserve...” Chloe bit her tongue. She didn't know if Beca regretted what had happened; if she did, she didn't want to make her feel worse about it, and if she didn't regret it, she didn't want to give her cause to.

“You're so sweet to me,” Beca said, finally smiling a little. She reached out and grabbed Chloe's hand to pull herself into her arms, kissing her gently. “If I could go back in time and somehow have it be you, I would.”

Chloe felt a lump in her throat, the sting in her eyes that warned of tears. She swallowed hard and was grateful for her sunglasses. She nodded, not trusting her voice's stability.

“But, you know, I don't really regret it. I try hard to not have any regrets; everything that happens in our lives makes us who we are today. So if that night had never happened, who knows where I'd be today? Maybe I'd have never caught Jeremy and that girl, and maybe we would have started dating, and maybe I would have been insane and married him straight out of high school, and maybe I'd be a pregnant housewife somewhere today instead of going to college and running into you in in the quad my first day, and I wouldn't have my internship and I wouldn't be producing.”

That made Chloe laugh, the image of tiny Beca, hugely pregnant, barefoot in a kitchen slaving over dinner, 1950s style, flour on her face and apron.

“When you...” she caught herself, about to ask if Beca even wanted kids; it felt too early and not the right time to cross that bridge. “…want to keep talking about this?”

“I don't know.” Beca scrunched her nose. “Maybe? Is it going to get uncomfortable and awkward?”

Chloe settled her arms around Beca's waist below the water, and giggled when Beca hopped up and wrapped her legs around Chloe's hips, effectively sitting on her lap while Chloe stood; easy, in the water. She shifted her hands under Beca's thighs, supporting her a little so she didn't sink so low.
“It'll only get awkward if we let it. Do you want to ask me stuff? Instead of talking about you.”

Beca shrugged and rocked her head back and forth, thinking. “Okay. Can I ask how many guys you've slept with? Is that okay? If it's too personal, it's okay. And I'm not going to be judgy about it. But you said sexual history so that's like the biggest qualifying thing right?”

Chloe smiled. “It's not too personal.” She took a moment, checking her memory. “How many guys?”

“As opposed to?”

She gestured between them. “People in general?”

Beca opened her mouth as if to react, and then snapped it shut. “Start with guys.”

“No judgment?”

“No judgment.”

“Four.”

Beca exhaled sharply enough to get Chloe's attention, making her tense. “What?” she asked.

“Nothing,” Beca said quickly.

“Did you think it would be more? Or less? I don't know which is worse.”

“I wasn't thinking anything. I promise. No judgment.”
“Okay,” Chloe said, tentatively. “And one girl. And Reagan, who didn't identify as either gender.”

Beca's eyebrows went up, and Chloe could see her doing math in her head. “Six,” she answered for her. “Ask something else.”

“You were with other girls before me?”

“Well, one. I mean, we're both bisexual, I assumed you would assume...” Chloe wanted to ask if Beca's surprise meant Chloe was the first woman she'd been with. Beca never mentioned it during their first time, and had seemed confident in what she was doing.

“Well you know what happens when you assume.”

Chloe shook her head. “What?”

Beca tilted her chin down and lifted her sunglasses to wink. “You make an ass out of you and me.”

It took her a moment, but Chloe connected “ass” plus “u” plus “me” in her head to make “assume” and burst out laughing. “You're right, I'm sorry, I shouldn't assume...that you would have assumed.”

Beca pushed her sunglasses up and smiled. “It's okay. I guess I liked to think I was the first chick to rock your world. But it's cool.”

Chloe squeezed Beca's thighs, jostling her a little. “You are the first chick to rock my world. Ask again.”

“Do you want to ask me something instead?”

“Are you sure?”

“Yeah, why not.”
“Okay. So...” Chloe looked around them - complete solitude as they floated offshore. It felt safe, and Beca was close, hanging onto her so she wouldn't float away. “Can I ask the same questions?”

“If you want.”

Chloe nodded toward Beca. “Then that's what I'm doing.”

“How many? Easy. Four.”

Chloe frowned thoughtfully, as though sizing up Beca's response *Godfather*-style. “Not bad, not bad.”

“Hush,” Beca said with a swat to Chloe's shoulder.

“Who were they? Other than the first guy, I mean.”

“Jennifer, Jesse, and you.”

Chloe gasped. “Jennifer!”

Never during any drunken dare or open and honest conversation had Beca disclosed a relationship with a girl. Had she shared her sexuality? Yes. They all had, over the years. Chloe thought and thought, and she never remembered Beca mentioning a Jennifer, and she was certain that was a fact she would not forget.

“Don't worry.” Beca said with a knowing smile. “You're the first girl to rock my world. We were more like friends who made out when we got bored or hooked up when we were lonely. Which only happened a few times.”

“Okay,” Chloe said with a nod, accepting the answer despite wanting to learn everything about this Jennifer, like her height and weight and hair color and astrological sign and was she alt like Beca or preppy like her or something else entirely and did she even like music or understand Beca at all?
“Your turn.”

“Um...I feel like by now we know all the basic stuff about each other, yeah?”

“Probably.”

Beca kept thinking, and then she jumped a little. “Oh! I know. Okay. Remember when you invaded my shower freshman year?”

Chloe rolled her eyes and smiled. “Of course. You won't let me forget it.”

“When I walked in, I heard you and Tom talking. You said something about getting electrocuted. And he said something about you promising to try it. What the hell were you doing before you overheard me?”

“Oh my God.” Chloe felt her face turn red. “You heard that?”

“Kinda hard to ignore the word *electrocuted*. Spill.”

“It was my vibrator.”

Beca inhaled quietly, and Chloe noted the intrigue in its tone.

“I didn't know if it was waterproof.”

“It is.”

Chloe paused, and then remembered back to their first time together in Beca's room, and how she had found and commented on the vibrator she found in Beca's bedside table being identical to her own. And then she was flooded with mental images of all the possible ways and places Beca might have used that vibrator and tested its waterproofing. And suddenly she was flustered.
“When we get home, we're using it.”

“What, I'm not good enough?” Beca teased. “And don't change the subject.”

“I wasn't! I just thought it would be a fun thing to try. And we have two of them so...double your pleasure, double your fun.”

“Oh God, I don't know if I should be turned on or nervous. Now quit changing the subject!”

“I'm not!” Chloe laughed. “I answered your question about getting electrocuted.”

“What happened when you left with him after traumatizing me? Did you use it?”

“No. I was so excited about your voice and your boobs that I pretty much grabbed my stuff and went back to my room to figure out how to get you into the Bellas. And also how to seduce you.”

“Is that so?” Beca laughed. “Took you long enough to execute that plan.”

“Oh I executed it immediately. You liked to play hard-to-get. In fact, I think you're probably the world champion at it.”

“Hey! In my defense, I didn't realize you were trying to seduce me. I thought you were just a natural flirt with everyone. Which is not untrue. But I didn't think you were into me like that, and it drove me crazy because I was so into you, and I needed you to stop flirting so I kept pushing you away or I'd have eventually gone crazy.”

Chloe liked where this was going, and grinned. “You were so into me? Just how into me were you?”

“Shut up.”

“No, that's my question for you. How into me were you? Did you have dreams about me?” She gasped. “Did you fantasize about me?”
Beca's jaw tightening answered that question.

“Oh my God, you did! You totally did! What did you imagine?”

“You asked your question! It's my turn.”

Chloe stopped talking but kept bouncing. She knew what her line or questioning would be for the next several rounds, and by Beca's attitude, she knew as well.

Beca poked her in the chest, between her breasts. “You're so giddy about me thinking about you. You're the one who tried so hard forever. When was the first time you touched yourself thinking about me?”

Chloe gasped. The gloves were coming off, the gauntlet thrown. “Beca!”

“Oh like you aren't about to ask me the same thing.”

Beca was right; that was her next planned question, along with how/where and what about. Chloe swallowed, lifting her chin high to boost her confidence. “When I went back to my room to figure out how to seduce you.”

“You walked in on me, abandoned your boyfriend, went back to your room, masturbated, and then planned my seduction?”

“Yep. And that's two questions. When did you finally give in and do it? Because I bet you fought it for a long, long time.”

“That same day.”

“What! Oh my God we were literally doing it at the same time thinking about each other?”
“Well I had to wait until Kimmy Jin went to class, but apparently.”

“That is weirdly beautiful,” Chloe said thoughtfully. “Who said there's no such thing as love at first sight.”

“I don't know about love. But definitely lust. You're right though - I fought it. I hated doing it; it felt so, so wrong thinking about you that way.”

Chloe's arousal was returning, thanks to the line of questioning. And the way Beca was shifting in her arms, thighs squeezing her a little, hinted they might be in sync.

“What's the dirtiest thing you thought about me?” Beca asked, catching Chloe a off-guard. She thought Beca might work up to that, but nope - right for the jugular.

“Uh...”

“C'mon.”

“I'm...thinking!”

Chloe had had countless fantasies about Beca over the years. She went through so many batteries that she started buying the mega packs intended for families with children and their dozens of electronic toys. Thoughts of stealing away under the bleachers during rehearsal, of sneaking into Beca's room at night and catching her with that vibrator, of pulling her into an empty classroom as they walked to class, of pulling up her little plaid skirt in the Dean's office and showing the ICCA what a Bellas scandal could really look like.

Her face must have given her thought away, because Beca gasped and jostled her shoulders.

“What is it?! You're thinking about it right now!”

“Really?” Chloe whined. “I have to tell you?”
“Yes.”

There was no law requiring Chloe to answer, no gun to her head; she could make up the biggest lie and Beca would be nonethewiser, but Beca had a way of pulling things out of her, things she would never, ever divulge in any circumstance. Mostly because she had a hard time ever telling Beca ‘no.’ She whimpered, and stomped her foot, ineffective underwater. Beca was grinning at her evilly, and as though she knew she was breaking Chloe down already, went a step further and pushed her shoulders back, accentuating the cleavage provided by her bikini. Not. Fair.

She took a breath, and closed her eyes. She would have covered her ears to prevent herself from hearing her own words, if that would have worked.

“Handcuffingyoutothebed.”

Beca stared at her, and Chloe seriously contemplating dropping beneath the surface of the water to hide and never resurface.

“Okay,” Beca said. “I have a pair of cuffs at home somewhere. Is that all you want?”

Chloe blushed. The thought of Beca already having handcuffs, because she liked using them, had used them at some point, of being so ready and willing to use them with her, to make a fantasy come true, sent heat curling through her like smoke from a match.

“I...um…” Chloe didn't know what to say. Was that it? Such a simple fantasy - something that could and probably would happen naturally in time as they explored and grew more and more comfortable with each other. Beca was inviting her to lay it all on the line, to tell her what she wanted and be given it readily and willingly and she was going to have that, something so safe, so vanilla be her free pass confession? Wake up, girl - wake up!

“Hmm?” Beca was still smiling, taking pride in her unraveling.

“Anduseastrapon. On you.”

“Anything else?” Beca said, smile growing.
“From behind,” Chloe added with a squeak.

Chloe wanted to hide; she knew her entire body was blushing now. Now that she said it, uttered the salacious words, she couldn't get the visual out of her mind. A dull throb sat low in her belly and she shifted her grip on Beca's thighs, as though having a mind of their own, her hands moved higher and closer to intimate territory.

Beca tilted her head thoughtfully, agonizingly silent for what felt like hours but was likely only seconds. “I think I pass a sex shop on the way to the studio. I can get one if you want.”

Chloe swallowed so hard, her heart fell into her stomach. She was certain this entire exchange was a dream, and she would wake up any second. She waited. And waited. And when she didn't wake up and when she didn't respond, Beca kissed her.

“Did you go into shock?” Beca asked with a laugh.

“I...uh...I mean…” Words. What were words? “No. I mean yes.”

“Yes you're in shock?”

“Yes I want you to get one.” Chloe gasped as soon as she said it, shocked by her own admission.

Beca grinned. “Okay.”
The concept of Beca strolling casually into an adult toy store and buying a strap-on was preposterous to Chloe. She assumed the vibrator - and apparently handcuffs - were purchased via mail order; Beca was perpetually shy and awkward with everyone and everything until she wasn’t; maybe she frequented such shops? Or maybe Beca was as confident discussing sex out of the bedroom as she was in it. She was learning something new about her friend-turned-girlfriend every day.

“You...would do that?”

“Yeah, totally. I mean, it’s not like you want to chain me up for a week and whip me and make me beg for food and water and mercy, right?”

“What kind of...what?” Chloe shook her head. She didn’t even know what to say to that.

“You can make me beg for mercy though.” Beca smirked. “That’d be hot.”

Chloe desperately needed to cool off. The ocean felt like a hot tub. “I...can?”

“Mhmm.” Beca’s hands were on the move, sliding down from Chloe’s shoulders over her collarbone and the swells of her breasts, teasing and caressing them. “I mean, I trust you. So.”

Chloe’s breath caught at the touch, hips pressing forward seeking relief as she slid her hands along Beca’s thighs until they were on her backside so she could jerk her forward against her. It provided nothing in the way of relief, but the action itself was sexy.

A grunt escaped Beca, and another smirk. “Maybe it’s not just from behind that you want me.”

“I want you every way,” Chloe breathed before crashing her lips to Beca’s.

Finally. Finally they were on the train, after waiting on the platform as train after train passed them, teasing them with possibilities until the express arrived, sweeping them up and away to their final destination.
Chloe wanted her hands to be everywhere, touching every inch of Beca, but the moment she moved them, Beca sank too low to kiss, and that was unacceptable. She wanted to tell Beca to hold onto her, support herself so she could touch her, but Beca was the one doing the touching at the moment, and as her hand pushed up her bikini top to squeeze her bare breast, Chloe decided that was just fine.

Her tongue licked over Beca’s, tangling in a battle for dominance that Chloe always inevitably won despite Beca’s best efforts. A pinch and twist at her breast pulled a groan from Chloe, and Beca broke away, breathless.

“Do you want to know my dirtiest thought about you?”

She was torn. She wanted all talking to cease, except for begging one another for more. But the very concept of Beca having fantasized about her had sent her temperature skyrocketing. Hearing the sordid details could perhaps cause her to spontaneously combust. She pulled Beca against her again, the desired roughness of the act slowed by the resistance of the water.

“Tell me.”

Beca seemed to hesitate, suddenly tentative. She had been so nonchalant about the conversation so far, Chloe wondered what in the world could be so vulgar to make her take pause, now, when walls were down and sexual tension was high.

She opened her mouth to speak, but her jaw clicked shut and her awkward grimace of a smile appeared, the smooth confidence of moments ago evaporating in front of Chloe’s eyes.

“You’re going to make me confess, and tease me with that, and then clam up?” Chloe laughed. “I told you mine!”

Beca shook her head. “I know, I know! I heard myself saying it out loud in my head and now I’m mortified.”

Chloe rolled her eyes, adding a shift in her shoulders since her sunglasses likely hid the gesture. “If you don’t tell me, I can’t make it come true,” she sing-songed.
“Okay, okay.” Beca visibly took a focusing breath and rolled her shoulders. “I promise it’s not some gross freaky thing with like animals or clowns.”

“Oh my gosh, just spit it out.”

“You can’t judge me.”

Chloe gestured around them. “We are in the Ocean of Acceptance. I won’t.”

“Fuck.” Beca let go of Chloe’s shoulders to shake out her hands.

The longer she took to admit whatever it was, the more nervous Chloe grew. For Beca to get so shy about it, after all the times and ways she so brazenly instigated sex in less than private places, it must be something beyond comprehension. A sense of foreboding washed over Chloe, and she wondered if she was about to be confronted by a request to have sex via live webcam or on the hood of the car parked on a busy street or literally any other scenario that involved a total and complete lack of privacy.

“Okay. I...”

Chloe’s hands tightened against Beca’s thighs; she was grateful for the water, as it erased the fact that her palms were sweating. “Go ahead.”

“I...thought about having a threeway with you…” Beca was hesitating again.

Chloe bit her lip. So far, it was okay. She could be down for that. Threeways weren’t too crazy. It would be easy to pick up a girl at a lesbian bar, and even easier to pick up a guy if it was a guy she wanted. As long as it was a stranger and not someone they kn-

“...and Aubrey.”

“WHAT?! Beca!” Chloe all but dropped Beca. ‘Aubrey’ was literally the last word she ever would have thought could have ended that sentence.
“Shut up, shut up!” Beca tried to cover her face, clumsy with sunglasses in the way. “You said you wouldn’t judge me! Ocean of Acceptance!”

“I’m...I’m not judging but oh my God! She’s my best friend!” Chloe didn’t know what to do. Could she do that? Would Aubrey be down for it or horrified? More than once, Aubrey shocked her with facets of her personality; it could literally go either way. But did she want to do that? With Aubrey? It wasn’t like she wasn’t pretty or sexy or confident in all the right ways, and Chloe had caught her making out with a girl at a party once or twice and maybe the thought crossed her mind when they had a little too much to drink and Aubrey started getting clingy but oh my God it was Aubrey and!

“I didn’t say you had to do it!” Beca looked like she wanted to crawl out of her skin and hide. “Please stop freaking out, it’s really not helping the no judgement thing.”

“The mental images…” Chloe shook her head, overwhelmed. It was confusing and wrong and sexy and horrible and the concept of Beca and Aubrey, who lived for the opportunity to be at one another’s throats...physically being at one another’s throats...because they’re making out as she watched...fighting to be the one to come out on top...

“I’m sorry! I told you it would be ridiculous to say it. She doesn’t even live here, so it’s irrelevant.”

“What…” Chloe cleared her throat. It wasn’t fair for Beca to be so open and accommodating to her and for her to freak out and shut down Beca without hearing her out. “What would you...want to do?”

“Wait. You’re okay with this?”

“I’m...asking what you would want. To do. Theoretically.”

“O..kay…” Beca’s frame was still tense, but her hands were on Chloe’s shoulders again, gentle. “You can’t laugh!”

“I won’t laugh!”
“Okay. Mostly I...want to knock her off her control freak high horse and...and have her do both of us at the same time.”

Chloe tilted her head, feeling her neck pop a few times. That wouldn’t be so bad...right? It’s not like Aubrey hadn’t made her life a living hell more than once, shrieking in her ear about cardio and choreography and taking personal offense when Chloe would be late to rehearsal because a lecture ran long. And the concept that this was Beca’s fantasy, one she had thought of innumerable times, had brought herself to orgasm imagining it...she swallowed hard, heat starting to rush again, imagining Beca touching herself in her bed.

“You want to get her back for bossing you around all year?”

“And...then I want to watch her go down on you.”

“...while you touch yourself?” Chloe breathed.

Beca nodded.

Something snapped. Words became foreign. Suddenly the concept wasn’t laughable or horrifying; Beca wanted to watch, to take pleasure in her pleasure. All Chloe could do was groan at the thought and capture Beca’s lips again. She thanked her for her honesty and revelation with her tongue, and as her mind worked to decide how she could and would have Beca, Beca made the decision for her - apparently she wouldn’t have her, not yet.

Beca let her feet return to the seafloor, water up to her shoulders. She swam backwards to shallower water until it was chest high. Chloe followed, half wading, half swimming until water was at her ribs.

“Come here,” Beca said, voice thick with desire. She grabbed Chloe’s hand and pulled her through the water to her, but caught Chloe a little off guard when she spun her, pulling her back against her chest.

She felt kisses on her shoulders and hands on her waist, Beca’s knees fitting behind hers and then they were falling, slipping lower in the water - all the discretion of deeper waters without the need to float, as she realized Beca was dropping them onto their knees.
Hands were on her stomach, working lower until one dipped down into her bottoms and between her legs. There was no teasing - not that she needed it - just the initial caress, the one of curiosity, of exploration, and a moan escaped Chloe’s lips.

No one was around, not even on the beach, and the thought was thrilling, as though they had escaped to their own private island, free to do as they please however and whenever they desired.

So Chloe decided to do whatever she desired. The first thing was to turn around again, putting her back to the beach and forget that other people existed. The second was to push her sunglasses up and out of the way and do the same for Beca. The third thing was to kiss her until the need for oxygen forced them to breathe. The fourth was to pull Beca’s hand back where it was, and the fifth was to mirror Beca and slip her hand between her legs to find her just as aroused as she, perhaps more so.

Chloe moaned into their kiss. They had never done this, touching one another simultaneously. They were always so focused on the other, on learning, that there wasn’t room for it. But as Beca’s fingers moved in quick circles against her and she copied the action, pushing two sets of hips into motion, Chloe couldn’t fathom why they had waited. Watching and feeling and hearing Beca always pushed Chloe’s arousal through the roof, but this, with Beca pushing it even higher, she was at the breaking point quickly.

“Beca…” she whimpered, a warning. She tilted her hips back to stave it off, making Beca’s rhythm falter and her climax fall, buying her much-needed time.

Beca was close, too, but not close enough. Chloe knew her tells, the twist of her hips to the left, the staggered breathing as she held her breath, waiting for it to hit.

Chloe kissed her as long and as hard as she could; a thought flitted through her mind that it was a kiss from of a pornographic movie - all tongue and an encompassing desire to consume. She felt her tongue be captured and pulled, demanding more.

She had precious little more to give, teetering on the brink as she was. But Chloe could never tell Beca ‘no,’ so she did her best to focus on Beca and nothing else, despite her hips moving of their own accord. The very real possibility that this could happen together brought Chloe to the edge again, kicking and screaming.

“Bec…” she moaned, rhythm faltering as throbbing started.
“Yes. Yes yes yes,” Beca breathed before kissing Chloe again, a moan ripping from her throat as her body rolled in waves. Chloe’s fuse expired and she nearly fell forward as ecstasy exploded and flowed between them, clinging to one another.

Chloe didn’t know how long they stayed that way, kneeling in the ocean, embracing one another, heads on shoulders to kiss and nuzzle necks. She felt like they had become a single statue, and suddenly she was reminded of the mini-movie they saw recently, two volcanos in the sea, both singing the same song but never hearing the other, thinking they would forever be alone after waiting a lifetime for a soulmate, only to discover one another but be out of reach, too much distance between them to touch each other until the very earth could no longer contain the pressure and love erupted, pushing them finally together, into one island, stronger than ever before.

“I lava you,” Chloe sang, squeezing Beca tighter.

“You’re so weird,” Beca sighed, a smile in her voice as she squeezed her in return. “I lava you, too.”

“You know,” Beca continued after a few comfortable minutes of silence and loosening their embrace for much needed cool air. “It’s totally cool if we never do that. With Aubrey. I one hundred percent get it; I’d be majorly freaked out if you told me you wanted to do it with, like, Legacy.”

A shudder ran through Chloe. “Oh gosh. She’s a child!”

“Exactly. So yeah. It’s totally cool. It was hot talking about it and sharing it with you. It doesn’t mean we have to do it.” Beca tapped her forehead with a finger. “I’m sure there’s more than one idea in here you’d be down for.”

“I’m kind of scared to find out,” Chloe laughed. “But we’ll see.”

Chloe decided this had been the best weekend of her life, and they still had twenty-four hours to go.

Aside from the hiccup of being forced to submit to Jimmy’s grossness, it had been perfect. Fun, sun, laughs, and love and she felt so grounded, so connected to Beca, it felt like a new relationship while somehow also feeling like they had been married for a decade. Everything was comfortable and second nature, and the honesty and secrets they shared and explored took them to a higher
She was on her stomach on her towel on the sand, singing along to “Cool for the Summer;” when she questioned how Demi Lovato ended up on the discerning Beca Mitchell’s iPod, Beca’s defense had been ignorance to the artist and loving the beat and it was perfect for Labor Day.

“It doesn’t have anything to do with the fact that she’s hot and singing about wanting to sleep with a girl?” had been Chloe’s teasing counter. She knew Beca better than that, though, and Beca knew she knew and didn’t validate the absurd question with an answer.

Chloe scrolled through Facebook on her iPhone, catching up with her Bellas’ lives. It was fascinating to see where everyone was going - a few stayed in Atlanta, a couple moved home, but most left the city to pursue their careers or higher education. She scrolled, commenting and liking, and stopped to upload a selfie of Beca and herself throwing terrible West Coast gang signs with the massive beach house in the background hashtagged #CaliforniaLove. She heard Beca’s phone’s Facebook notification chime.

“Oh God, what did you just tag me in?”

No sooner had it published than a comment notification popped up and Beca’s chimed again.

Aubrey Posen  Looking good you two! Jealous of the beach. The Lodge is shutting down for the season in a few weeks. What do you say to a Halloween reunion?

“Okay, that’s really weird timing,” Beca said, apparently having read the comment as well. “That’s just a coincidence, right? You didn’t say anything to her.”

“Oh please, as if I would tell her something like that.” Chloe tapped her screen to reply to the comment. “We talked awhile back about her coming to visit when her season was over.”

Chloe Beale  Yay! Yes! Halloween in Hollywood! We aca-bitches are going to take this town by storm!

She missed her bestie; she missed her dearly. The probability of Aubrey coming to visit was suddenly very high, and she felt tears welling. It wasn’t often Chloe got homesick, but thinking of having Aubrey there with her, and getting to show her around the school and show off her
accomplishment the same way Aubrey proudly showed off her success with The Lodge of Fallen Leaves made her giddy. Chloe started a new comment.

**Chloe Beale**  YOU CAN STAY WITH US! You have to see our apartment it’s sweet! It will be like when we were roomies!

“Okay, but I don’t know about her staying with us. It might feel weird now?” Another chime from Beca’s phone. “Chloe!”

“Oh hush, it is not going to be weird. She’s just our friend.”

“Yeah, I guess.”

“Who you want to bone.”

Chloe ducked and covered her head to protect herself from whatever would be hurled at it, knowing full well something was coming. When nothing happened, she lifted her head warily, to be greeted with a spray bottle and at least five squirts of water right into her face, sending her sputtering and laughing back into her defensive stance.

“Shut up!” Beca screeched.

Chloe watched her from the space between her face and crook of her elbow as she fumed and fumbled for weapons, hands flailing and balling into fists until she settled for punching the sand. Chloe couldn’t help it, she was in hysterics and Beca’s reaction was only making it worse. She laughed until she cried, until she felt Beca tackle her from behind, climbing over her until she fit against Chloe’s back.

“Stop. Please?”
Beca’s sincerity sobered Chloe quickly and she tilted her head to the left, Beca hovering close above her. “I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay.” Beca smiled and dropped a kiss on her lips. “But no using fantasies against each other. That’s not fair.”

Chloe nodded. “Deal. Now, what are you doing back there?”

She felt Beca wiggle around a little, on her knees, lying over Chloe chest to back. “Hugging you. I guess.”

Chloe chuckled and relaxed under her. It was nice when Beca instigated a cuddle, and while it was hot and sticky, she was in no hurry for it, or the weekend, to end.
Paradise Cove

Waiting for sunset was agonizing for Chloe.

They'd remained on the beach as long as they could physically stand it, until it became too unbearably hot and sunburning became a very real possibility as the sunscreen bottle emptied.

They shared the dual shower again, Chloe pointedly avoiding starting anything with Beca. She had plans for later.

The crowd for dinner was smaller; several members of the team headed back LA to avoid traffic. They were less than fifteen now, six at the dining table and others on the couches and on the deck.

Chloe steered them to the deck after loading plates at another catered buffet. They claimed an outdoor love seat facing the coast, legs propped up on the accompanying ottoman.

"Thank you."

Beca looked up from her corn on the cob. "For what?"

"This weekend. It's been the best weekend. Ever."

"It has been pretty awesome."

Chloe slipped her arm around Beca's shoulders as soon as she set down her plate, pulling her in close, and tucked her bare left foot between Beca's.

Chloe felt like they were in Eden. They weren't alone at the house as they were on the beach, but laughter and positivity floated through the air and it wasn't unwelcome. Together they gazed out over the ocean, the rhythmic crashing of the waves bordering hypnotic as the sun grew larger, lower in the sky.

Chloe stood up, holding her hand out to Beca. "Come on."
"Where are we going?" Beca asked, taking her hand.

"Just come on."

She led them back into the house, past Beca's friends who paid them no mind as they walked up the staircase hand in hand.

"Close your eyes," Chloe instructed at the top of the stairs.

Beca smiled, closing them. "Uh oh, is this when you chain me to the bed?"

Chloe shushed her; Beca's frequent inability to not ruin quiet moments was as endearing as it was aggravating. She held Beca's hand, leading her into the bedroom and across to the window spanning the length of the room.

The sun was low, casting yellow and orange reflections over the ocean and Chloe was reminded of watching the sunset together at the pier. It was magical in its own way, with the sounds of the carnival overlaying the surf. But now they were in a vacuum, surrounded by silence, and the lack of other senses being overwhelmed made the view all the more brilliant.

"Keep them closed." She guided Beca all the way to the window, stopping her a few inches short of bumping into it.

"What is this?" Beca asked, voice hushed.

Chloe shushed her again and released her hand to step behind her. "Keep them closed,' she reminded. With her hand she pulled Beca's hair over her shoulder to lean in and press her lips to her neck in a soft kiss.

She heard Beca's breath catch and a glance at their reflection in the window showed her eyes still closed. Lips traveled over her flesh slowly, down her neck and Beca tilted her head, offering more of herself to Chloe.
Chloe pointedly avoided seeking out that highly sensitive spot, wanting a slow burn instead of the explosion it could cause. She wanted romance, anticipation. More frequently than not, they were hurried, ravenous, grabbing and taking; Chloe wanted to *feel*.

She held Beca's shoulders, trailing kisses until her shirt blocked her progress. Instead of removing it, she changed her path, to the back of her neck, to shift her hair to the other side and kiss where she had not yet. Hands traveled down Beca's arms, brushing lightly over the sensitive undersides of her forearms, drawing a shiver out of Beca.

Beca chuckled at her own reaction and rolled her shoulders as though steeling herself for more.

Chloe checked their reflection again; Beca's eyes were still closed, and the sun was hanging heavy in the sky now. Her hands caught Beca's and she intertwined their fingers as she placed a resolute kiss against Beca's shoulder.

Crossing their hands in front of Beca's stomach, she grasped the hem of her tee and lifted, up and off to let it fall from her fingertips behind them.

Her hands returned to Beca's waist, holding her gently, fingernails grazing over her abdomen. She could feel the muscles there, tensing under her touch, and Beca jumped a little when she hit a ticklish spot.

She soothed it with a firm caress and worked her hands higher, swirling patterns up her ribs and over the soft cotton of her bra. She paused there, just holding and feeling Beca's chest rise and fall with her breaths. They were slow and steady, mirroring Chloe's pace.

A feeling of urgency began to creep into Chloe's mind, and she swallowed it, determined to take this slowly and make it count. Beca's eyes were still closed, and Chloe eased her hands away from her chest to work the clasp at Beca's back and slide the garment down her arms and to the floor to join her shirt.

She saw Beca's lips part slightly and take a deeper breath at its removal.

Chloe let her hands return to Beca's waist, just holding for a moment to watch her breathe. Fingertips found the waistband of the denim shorts resting on hips and followed the edge around to find the button, undoing it with a twist. A nudge was all it took for the shorts to fall to the floor; she pulled them with her toes until Beca caught on and stepped out of them so Chloe could kick
them out of the way. She bit her lip; nothing was underneath them.

Her lips met Beca's neck again, kissing slowly along invisible trails as she watched the sunset over her shoulder, until the sun kissed the horizon. Her hands rested on Beca's thighs, thumbs tracing idly. Her breaths were quicker now, and Chloe let one hand wander higher, brushing the curved underside of a breast.

"Open your eyes," she whispered, kissing the shell of Beca's ear as she covered the breast fully with her hand.

She watched their reflection, saw Beca's eyes flutter open to take in the sunset, heard the catch in her breath as she absorbed its beauty.

"Wow," Beca exhaled. She leaned back a little, into Chloe. "Chlo...this view..."

When Chloe devised this idea, the sunset had been the driving factor - watching it sink into the ocean together, offering hints of risk making love in front of a window over an empty beach. She hadn't factored in the sexiness that would be provided by the mirroring effect of the window.

Chloe hummed in agreement. She reached out and tapped on the glass, over the reflection of Beca's face. "Gorgeous."

She watched Beca shift her focus from the horizon to the window, noticing their reflection, and heard her breathing hitch. Her arms lifted instinctively to make a move to cover herself, but she hesitated and Chloe lifted her head to meet Beca's eyes in the reflection and smile.

"Kinda sexy, too," Chloe said with a wink. "And you know. Romantic at the same time." She squeezed again, reminding Beca where her hand was, and brought her left up to join it, covering both breasts, simply enjoying the feel and weight of them in her hands.

Beca twisted a little, as though in front of a dressing room mirror. "I know it isn't socially acceptable for women to be topless in public, but I wonder if your hands can count as a bra and I just live my life this way?"

Chloe laughed. "And my life becomes devoted to being your what - your boob handler?"
"We can take turns." Beca covered Chloe's hands, squeezing. "Or like, because it's really important for you to be at school every day I'll take Monday through Friday and you can cover me on the weekends."

"That doesn't sound very even." Chloe rested her chin on Beca's shoulder, shifting her hands to start tracing circles with her fingertips. "Or particularly appropriate for five-year-olds to witness."

"Stop poking holes in my plan, Beale."

"Sorry," Chloe said with a joking, apologetic grimace. She softened her expression and lifted her chin to point at the sunset. "Now shh."

Chloe had found her mind wandering more than once this weekend, remembering every lingering stare, every hand graze or playful hip bump that sent her heart racing; all the times Beca fell asleep in her lap during "The Bachelorette" making her completely miss the results because she was too busy watching Beca sleep; each and every tantalizingly torturous shared hotel room during competitions and victory tours. A line she had read during her first senior year, one that had brought tears to her eyes when she read it flashed back into her memory.

*The first stab of love is like a sunset, a blaze of color - oranges, pearly pinks, vibrant purples...*

Chloe had loved Beca so fiercely, so completely, so painfully unrequited for so long, she felt compelled always to show her, to make up for lost time. In fact, she realized, she would be content to simply give to Beca, for the rest of her life, and never receive, if it meant Beca could remain hers, could know how much she truly loved her. The sound that came from Beca as they watched, together, as Chloe's hand slipped between her legs made her shiver. Her own sound of gratitude escaped, feeling how much Beca was anticipating this.

A hand tangled in Chloe's hair, Beca leaning against her, hips tilting against the slow rhythm Chloe set. Whimpers escaped Beca, breathy and increasingly impatient, but no loud moans, no swearing. It was as though they were in a reverie, both respecting the beauty and peace of the moment. The sun was sinking into the Pacific now, a massive hemisphere of gold turning the ocean copper and silver. Chloe's focus shifted repeatedly, watching the beauty of the sunset and the desperate patience on Beca's face.

It was unhurried, her pace, and Chloe didn't know how close Beca was until she was trembling against her, a sharp tug on Chloe's hair and scarcely more than a sigh escaping Beca's lips.
The sun disappeared a moment later, leaving the sky in shades of orange and apricot chased from above by indigo and black.

She watched Beca come down, the darkening sky lending itself to turning the window more and more into a true mirror as they stood together, embracing one another, until Beca finally pulled her fingers from Chloe's hair and straightened, easing Chloe's hand away gently. She saw Beca meet her eyes in their reflection.

"That was fucking sexy, babe."

"Always so eloquent in the afterglow," Chloe said with a slight roll of her eyes.

Beca shrugged an apology and spun around, catching Chloe off-guard with a deep, passionate kiss. It knocked her back a few steps and Beca kept walking, pushing her back, stepping blindly, walking and almost tripping over Beca's discarded clothes until she ran into something firm and unforgiving. Hands on her shoulders made her sit down, and she landed on the bed.

When Beca didn't immediately follow, she opened her eyes, seeing a smiling Beca looking down at her. Her pulse raced faster; it always did when she saw how much Beca wanted her - as much as she wanted Beca. Hands were at her waist, grasping her shirt to pull it up and off, divesting her of her bra just as efficiently.

And then Beca was on her knees, hands at Chloe's waist again, grasping the waistbands around her hips and pulling. Chloe lifted her hips and Beca pulled, yoga pants and thong moving down her legs quickly. Hands on her knees pushed her thighs apart, and that's when Beca looked back over her shoulder until Chloe, confused as to what she was looking at, followed her line of sight until their eyes met in that window again, now almost completely dark outside as well as in.

"Enjoy the view," Beca said, a smile in her voice as she leaned in and pressed a kiss high on Chloe's inner thigh.

Chloe gasped, both from the contact and the realization that she was going to watch this happen, not just by looking down, but by looking out, to see Beca, nude, kneeling, hands on her thighs, head between her legs.

She gasped again at the tongue probing her and she had to hold herself upright with a hand pressed
into the mattress, the other tangling in Beca's hair.

The scene was downright pornographic, something Chloe never would have expected to see herself in from this point of view. A thought flashed through her mind, the memory of the fear she felt that Beca's fantasy would be to have sex on camera, and now...watching it happen, Chloe filed it away for later reference; making a sex tape and watching it together? Yeah, that would be hot.

She couldn't tear her eyes away from their reflection, and part of her felt wrong, so very narcissistic that watching herself have sex was more arousing than any dirty movie she'd sought out on the internet. But then Beca hitched her right leg over her shoulder and she felt her tongue simply everywhere and Chloe couldn't be bothered with shame. She watched it happen, the way her body rolled to seek out more, the way her teeth pulled at her lip to try to stifle the moans, the way the muscles in Beca's back and shoulders flexed as she moved with Chloe's tempo, flowing dark hair shifting with their rhythm, the way she jerked forward as Beca coaxed the pleasure out of her.

Her arm finally gave out and she fell back to stare at the ceiling until she felt Beca crawling up and over her to slide into view, licking her lips proudly.

"Jesus," Chloe finally said, weakly. She reached up and wiped Beca's chin, both of them laughing at the need to do so. "Okay, that was hot."

She felt Beca settle over her waist and sit back comfortably. "You planned this, didn't you," Beca stated, grinning down at her.

"Well," she shrugged, nonchalant, "yes, but to be honest, it was supposed to be more about the sunset and less about...auto...self...voyeurism? Is that a thing?"

"It's called katoptronophilia."

"I..." Chloe's brain stuttered around the word. "I...of course you know that. Why would you know that? I don't want to know why you know that."

"Because I know how to use Google and I was a horny teenager."

Chloe raised an eyebrow suspiciously. "Was?"
"I'm not a teenager anymore, am I?"

"No, no you are definitely not."

"It really was beautiful though, Chlo. Thank you."

Chloe scrunched her nose. "Don't thank me for sex; that feels kind of prostitute-y."

"I'm not thanking you for sex!" Beca laughed. "I'm thanking you for a beautiful experience and trying to not sound like a complete dork or, apparently, a John. Okay?"

"Okay, okay! You're welcome," Chloe said with a grin. She felt her heart skip a beat at the vision above her, Beca's hair disheveled, hanging loosely as she smiled down at her, the still-flushed skin of her décolletage rising and falling with her even breaths. Again she found herself wondering, for the umpteenth time, how she ever got so lucky to be in this position - figuratively and physically - with Beca Mitchell.

She saw Beca's expression soften and felt the vice on her heart, the one that came when she knew Beca was being sincere.

"I love you."

Chloe always had a big heart, but when she heard those words fall from Beca's lips, she felt like the Grinch, her heart growing three sizes every time. She nodded sharply, emotions getting the best of her and revealing themselves in her wavering voice. "I love you, too."

"Oh my God, you can't start crying every time I say it." Beca poked at her stomach, drawing a giggle out of Chloe.

"I don't cry every time."

"True. You don't." Beca moved off Chloe and climbed up the massive king bed to flop onto the sea
of pillows and kick at the blankets until she wiggled under them. She threw the covers back on the other half of the bed and patted the mattress.

With a grunt of effort, Chloe pulled herself backward until she was side by side with Beca again, who tossed the covers atop Chloe and the wiggled up next to her, hugging close with an arm over her waist.

"It's really cute when you get all emotional over me."

Chloe scoffed. "Don't flatter yourself; I get emotional over everything." She chuckled at the teeth that gnawed playfully at her shoulder. The realization that they would be driving back to LA in the morning set in and Chloe felt her mood sink a little. They were in paradise, and she had forgotten all earthly responsibilities except cultivating romance. "What time do we need to be out of here tomorrow?" she asked quietly.

She felt Beca's arm move up and down in a shrug. "I think we have the house the whole day. But would you be totally opposed to trying to beat Labor Day traffic?"

Chloe sighed. "As much as I never want to leave, I do have a week's worth of lesson plans due on Tuesday morning."

"Trigonometry and Chemistry?"

She giggled. "Triangles, squares, and circles, and we're learning how to write letters F through J."

"I miss when life was that simple."

Chloe pressed a kissed to the top of Beca's head. "Me, too."

It seemed half the California coast had the same idea to beat the holiday traffic back to the city.

They crept forward, Chloe barely taking her foot off the brake before stopping again. She had convinced Beca to let her drive, and the anticipation of speeding down the freeway in the Corvette
had been squashed promptly upon the fifteen minutes spent on the on-ramp.

Both of them were growing agitated after spending an hour in the car and traveling what couldn't be more than ten miles.

"Oh my God...fucking MOVE your ASS!" Beca yelled, gesturing wildly toward the windshield at the pickup with a lift-kit and oversized tires trying to merge in front of Chloe, as though their lane was any quicker. "Don't let that asshole in front of you, Chloe."

"I'm trying, Bec." She stuck to the bumper in front of her until the truck forced her to hit the brakes, the massive tire inches from taking off their bumper.

"Oh my God. I can't. I can't!" Beca threw her hands in the air and stared out her window with a frown.

This wasn't how Chloe wanted to end their perfect weekend, tense and ready to snap at every annoyance. She reached for the buttons on the radio, silent after Beca turned it off with such ferocity that Chloe had feared she would break the dial. For Beca to be so agitated and angry that she didn't want music was as scary for Chloe as the anger itself. She hesitated when she saw Beca's eyes on her hand as she turned the dial slowly, bringing the volume up to an audible level again. A Spanish language commercial loudly proclaiming "Accidente? Abogados!" was airing, making Chloe frown and punch the button to activate the satellite radio and navigate to her favorite channel, '90s on 9.

She tried not to get too excited when the infamous three piano chords thumped, signaling the intro to "...Baby, One More Time." She waited for Beca's judgmental declaration of her terrible music choice, but she sat in silence, index finger tapping her knee to the beat.

So, in an effort to break the tension and with a new goal to make Beca laugh, Chloe affected her best Britney Spears whiny voice and jumped in at the bridge:

"Show me, how you want it to be
Tell me baby
'Cause I need to know now what we've got"

She saw a smile pulling at Beca's lips, and since traffic was at a complete and total standstill, she threw the video's choreography into the mix, best she could buckled in a car, head tilting and arms
"My loneliness is killing me
I must confess, I still believe
When I'm not with you I lose my mind
Give me a sign
Hit me, baby, one more time"

Beca was laughing now, slapping her hands against her thighs to the beat, pausing as the song built up to the ending before she finally jumped in to sing with Chloe.

"I must confess that my loneliness
Is killing me now
Don't you know I still believe
That you will be here
And give me a sign
Hit me, baby, one more time!"

"I can't believe you made me sing Britney Spears," Beca said, grinning, when the song ended.

"Yeah, I really twisted your arm," Chloe laughed. Then she gasped as all-too-familiar drums came through the speakers.

"Oh my God, NO, Chloe!" Beca dove to change the channel.

"Yes!" Chloe covered the controls with her hand and laughed as Beca recoiled. "So much yes!

"I gotta new life, you would hardly recognize me, I'm so glad
How could a person like me care for you?
Why do I bother when you're not the one for me? Oooh...
It's enough, enough"

"Make it stop!" Beca shrieked, covering her ears.

"Nope! I saw the sign and it opened up my eyes, I saw the sign
Life is demanding without understanding
I saw the sign and it opened up my eyes, I saw the sign
No one's gonna drag you up to get into the light where you belong
But where do you belong? Come on, Becs, you know you wanna sing it! Throwback!"

Beca just watched, grinning and shaking her head at Chloe as she did the stiff Bellas choreography.

Chloe noticed they finally reached the exit sign she had seen in the distance when they'd merged onto the freeway, and as depressing as it was realizing they had dozens more signs to pass, it felt like they had made progress, and they weren't ready to explode from anger anymore.

"Come on, you gotta get in on whatever's next."

If I...should stay…

"Oh my God, Beca if you don't sing along to Whitney, I don't know how we can be friends. I would only be in...your waaaaay."

"Fine," Beca said with a little playful attitude. "So I'll go but I know I'll think of you every step of the way."

"Yes!" Chloe cheered triumphantly.

"And I... will always love you, ooh
Will always love you
You
My darling, you..."

Singing with Beca would forever be one of Chloe's favorite things, the way they could harmonize effortlessly, the way they played off each other, always knowing when the other wanted to take the lead with a run.

It was belting, in some cases rapping, to the hits of R.E.M, TLC, Madonna, Alanis Morissette, Coolio, and Salt 'n' Pepa that got them home without murdering anyone, four hours to drive what should have taken one.
And Chloe wouldn't have had it any other way.
"Hands behind your backs, bubbles in your mouths!"

Chloe watched her twenty-one students lock their hands behind their backs and puff out their cheeks - some more successfully than others - in line in the hallway, awaiting their turn to join the lunch line.

"Remember, quiet as mice as we go!" She led them down the hallway and into the boisterous cafeteria where the mouth bubbles were forgotten and chatter erupted. Once she made sure her students were in the proper line to pick up their lunches, she stepped past them and swiped her ID, greeting the perpetually grumpy cafeteria worker with a bright smile that went ignored.

"Tacos?" she questioned rhetorically, unsure if what was on her tray qualified as tacos.

She had writing assignments to grade and intended to eat in her classroom, and she stopped by the front office check her mailbox. She noticed most everyone's box contained a bright yellow flyer, but not hers. With a shrug of dismissal, assuming whatever it was was wasn't for everyone, she collected her other communications and returned to her classroom.

The tacos weren't all bad, if she thought of them more like movie theater nachos.

"Hey, you!"

Chloe looked up, unsurprised to see Suzanne Washington hovering in her doorway. Mrs. Washington taught fifth grade, so she was rarely in Chloe's building, except during lunch and meetings and such. Mrs. Washington was also her personal fangirl, the woman who had taken notice during orientation, knowing who the Bellas were. She had become somewhat of a shadow to Chloe, which she found equal parts sweet and odd, and maybe sometimes mildly annoying. Suzanne also had at least fifteen years on Chloe, which made the fangirl aspect a little awkward, though it was endearing and she always meant well.

"Hi!" she responded, not quite setting down her pen in case she needed an excuse to ask her to leave. "What's up?"

"Just passing through. Still settling in okay?"
"Yes, thank you."

"Say, when are you bringing your partner by? I'm kind of dying to meet the Beca Mitchell."

"She's pretty busy right now; it's not very easy for her to get away from the studio in the middle of the day."

"The studio! That sounds so Hollywood."

Chloe tilted her head and smiled. "Well, we are in Hollywood."

"We are!"

Chloe wondered if this woman's personality was how she came across to others; if so, she was going to have to majorly consider making some changes.

"I better get back to it," she said, waving her pen.

"Oh, of course!" Mrs. Washington disappeared, and Chloe thought she heard her say something about saving her a seat at the meeting, but she didn't have a meeting on her calendar.

Chloe played with her iPhone as she walked to the bus. Most of the teachers fled campus as soon as possible, but today everyone's cars were still in the parking lot, making her take pause. She checked her calendar again and double-checked her email, but there was nothing new.

Something gnawed at her, telling her to go back and ask the office if there was indeed a meeting after school, but the bus rolled to a stop in front of her and the desire to get home and relax won.

Her iPhone chimed as she chose a seat.

Don't have dinner. Or make it.

Ok. What's happening?
Getting take-out.

*What's the occasion?*

We need an occasion to get take-out?

> No :) gonna take a shower now then so we can chill when you get home.

Xoxo

Excited for a relaxing night at home with Beca, Chloe made her way upstairs and tossed her phone onto the bed to shower.

She was sprawled on the couch snacking on grapes when Beca walked in, hands full with two bags of what looked to be Chinese take-out containers.

"Hi, babe!" Chloe said brightly, tossing one last grape into her mouth.

"Hey," Beca said with a smile. "Guess you didn't get my text. Do you mind running out to the car and grabbing my gear while I get all this set up?"

Chloe hauled herself off the couch and out the door - making a detour to kiss Beca before bounding down the front stairs and scurrying barefoot to the car. She pulled open the passenger side door and scooped Beca's bag off the floor, and then did a double-take.

Sitting on the driver's seat was a bouquet of red roses, wrapped in cellophane and white paper. She smiled and reached back in to pick them up, inhaling their deliciously sweet scent. Beca, the woman who lived to be tough, was a total romantic, and Chloe lived for it.

"Thank you, they're gorgeous."

Beca looked up from organizing the spread of cartons and smiled. "You're welcome."

"Really, what's the occasion?" she asked, padding through the room to pull a vase from a cabinet and fill it with water.

"There's no occasion. I was hungry and wanted to buy you flowers."
Chloe still wasn't completely convinced, but she let it slide at the spread laid out on the kitchen counter: box after box of rice, chow mein, beef and broccoli, sweet and sour chicken, egg drop soup, wontons, and edamame. Her stomach rumbled.

She pulled a pair of plates out and handed one to Beca. "I'm starving, I want to literally eat all of this."

"Hey hey hey," Beca chided, slapping her hand away when she reached for the chicken, "you can eat half of it."

They settled side by side on the sofa, Chloe's feet propped on the coffee table, Beca sitting cross-legged to use her knees and lap as a table. Beca picked up the remote and punched buttons, pulling up their DVR recordings to queue up the night's episode of "The Bachelorette."

"You didn't watch it before I got home, did you?"

"Of course not."

Chloe was in her classroom carefully writing examples of capital and lowercase Gs on the whiteboard to prepare for the day when the intercom clicked on, paging her to the office.

"Hi," she said, greeting the office manager for the second time that morning. "You rang?"

"Sheridan asked for you."

Chloe gulped. Principal Sheridan had been pleasant enough during her interviews, and she was quite welcoming during orientation, but there was something innately terrifying to be called to the principal's office - something she realized she needed to get over, being a teacher and all.

She knocked on the doorframe of the open office. Tabitha Sheridan was a formidable woman, always in a pantsuit with her blond hair in place perfectly over her shoulders, and impeccable
makeup, and carried herself on the razor's edge of potential tyranny and held a Doctorate in Educational Leadership and a Master's Degree in Music Education. She was massively intelligent and an incredible leader for the school.

"Miss Beale, good morning. I'm sorry to pull you out of your prep. Please, have a seat."

She sat in one of the chairs, a massive oak desk separating them, left leg crossed over right, and tried not to let her foot bounce. "How are you today, Dr. Sheridan?"

"I'm well, thank you." Sheridan set aside the files open on her desk and folded her hands, leaning forward in a way that made Chloe sit back in her chair. "How are you doing? Is your mentor providing sufficient guidance?"

"Oh yes, thank you. She's wonderful."

"I'm glad to hear that. Now, on to business. Are you aware there was a mandatory staff meeting after the bell yesterday?"

Chloe felt her stomach fall to her feet. Her intuition had been accurate after all. She had chosen to ignore checking the voicemail that Mrs. Washington had left on her phone after school, and she now regretted that decision; she knew it was a voicemail asking where she was. "N-No. I'm sorry, I was not aware."

"Memos were delivered to all teaching staff prior to yesterday's lunch hour." Sheridan handed Chloe a bright yellow piece of paper full of details of a mandatory meeting regarding required training, the same yellow paper she saw in almost everyone's inbox but her own.

"I'm so sorry, but this was not in my box. I also checked my calendar before I left campus and didn't see anything scheduled. I must have overlooked it."

"Miss Beale, the fact that we are a performing arts school does not mean we lack structure and shuck responsibility."

Chloe felt sucker punched, in trouble for ignorance. She also felt that such a stern reaction was a little excessive for missing a staff meeting. "I understand. My apologies, Doctor Sheridan. It was completely unintentional."
"I recognize that this is your first year in a workplace, but there is precious little room for learning basic professionalism."

Chloe tried her best to shake off the slap in the face; she was the utmost professional, always had been, and a simple mistake - she didn't even know how it had happened - was making her look terrible.

"I can appreciate that, and I assure you that it will not happen again." She glanced at the flyer, re-reading the details. "And I'll be sure to RSVP to a session immediately."

Sheridan nodded. "I like you, Miss Beale. You're one of my most promising new teachers. Please don't make this a habit or you will be written up for insubordination."

"Of course, thank you." Any other moment, the compliment would have made Chloe giddy, but not today. "Is there anything else?"

"No, that will be all. Enjoy your day."

Chloe exited the office defeated; it was her first mess up, and they were only three weeks into the school year - not the best first impression.

Still ruminating over how she didn't know about the meeting when everyone else did, and getting in trouble for it, she stopped short in front of her classroom. Blocking her path was the Second Grade teacher who had declared her allegiance to Das Sound Machine during orientation - Anika Schmidt, and in her hand dangled a fluorescent yellow flyer identical to the one she had been sent away with.

"Hello, Bella."

"Good morning, Miss Schmidt." She took a step forward, assuming it would prompt her colleague to move, but she didn't budge.

"I didn't see you at the meeting yesterday."
Suspicion flooded her. "Somehow I missed the memo. Can I help you with something? I do need to get back to my prep."

"I believe this is yours." Schmidt held out the flyer, a villainous smile on her face. "I must have taken it out of your box by mistake."

Chloe smiled tightly and snapped it out of her hand. "I see. Well, I guess I did miss the memo."

"Did I hear you get called to the front office? Nothing serious, I hope."

Rage boiled in Chloe. Anika Schmidt was the smaller, American version of Kommissar, the same evil smile, and the same holier-than-thou attitude. Chloe despised her, and it took a lot for her to despise someone; Schmidt had been on her radar since Day One, and frequently she noticed her walking slowly past her classroom when she had no business being in the area.

"Nope! Just some personnel paperwork to wrap up." She noticed Schmidt's eye twitch, perhaps in frustration that she wasn't cracking.

"I see. I'll be on my way now. Good day to you."

"Bye!" Chloe said, bitingly. Schmidt didn't carry a German accent, but she heard it in her mind, making her all the more irritated.

She swept into her classroom, aggravated and annoyed; she had a bully. Chloe did not have bullies, for she killed them with kindness. But some bullies could not be squashed, as kindness was foreign to them and thus had no effect. She would need a new tactic with Schmidt; perhaps she needed to start fighting fire with fire, out-performing her in the way she and the Bellas took down DSM in competition.

But not yet - it was far too early in the game.
Chloe was in a mood when she got home.

She was still pissed she'd gotten into trouble about missing a meeting, and she was annoyed that such a thing warranted a talking-to. She was also determined to find a way to bring Schmidt down - in the most professional way possible, of course.

She ventured upstairs, intent on taking a bubble bath to soak away the stress of the day.

Something glinting in the light caught her eye as she breezed through the bedroom and brought her to a halt, silver and sparkling, lying in the middle of the bed.

Handcuffs.

She felt her entire body flush and rushed to pick them up, examining them. They were cold against her skin and heavy in her hand, undoubtedly metal, and she just held them a moment, heart racing. They definitely seemed real, since she couldn't open one of the cuffs after she latched it - thankfully, not around her wrist. She assumed there was a key hiding somewhere.

They hadn't been there when she left early that morning, but Beca had been. She was still asleep when Chloe kissed her goodbye.

The fact that they were left for her to find, to stumble upon at her leisure made excitement flood her. It was new, and kind of naughty, and Beca offered them as an invitation, a reminder that she knew what Chloe wanted and that she wanted to give it to her.

She placed the open cuff over her wrist experimentally, not quite letting it latch, and arousal, white-hot and loud, flashed through her. Her fantasy had always been to snap them around Beca's wrists, but suddenly she wanted to try them on, to feel what it was like to be restrained by something more than hands, to be teased and tortured in the most exquisite of ways by the one person who could unravel her from the inside out.

Part of her wondered if these desires were metaphorical. She finally had Beca, and she was desperate to hold onto her. And she wanted Beca to know she was hers, wholly and completely, willing to anything for her.

Anything.
She remembered Beca's confession and sat on the edge of the bed, handcuffs on her lap, to think.
Beca got home late.

Chloe had been a mess of anxiety and excitement all evening, wondering if the time had come, if Beca leaving the handcuffs out meant she wanted it tonight.

But exhaustion won out, and when Beca still wasn't home at midnight and with a 5:30AM alarm set, she curled up in bed, handcuffs sitting on her nightstand to be addressed another time.

Morning in the classroom. Chloe had a routine now, more than month under her belt: erasing the agenda from the previous day and rewriting it, sorting the day's assignments into the students' mailboxes, organizing the bookshelf, and remaining vigilant in knowing the whereabouts of Anika Schmidt in relation to her, her classroom, and her students.

Anika Schmidt wasn't going to go away anytime soon.

One morning she arrived to find the safari decorations on her classroom door ripped to shreds. Schmidt had passed by shortly after her discovery of the vandalism and promptly blamed it on Chloe's misbehaved students. Chloe knew better, and the joke was on Schmidt - she planned to change the decor in a week anyway to prepare for Halloween (or "Fall Festival", as they were required to call it).

Another day, Chloe's lunch disappeared from the fridge. It was Salisbury steak day in the cafeteria, and no employee with working taste buds dared eat it. The smirk on Schmidt's face when Chloe sat down in the teachers' lounge with a tray from the lunch line brimming with gelatinous brown gravy was enough to assign blame. She learned to keep non-perishable snacks in her locked desk in her locked classroom.

Perhaps most annoyingly, Schmidt's lack of professional respect had given Chloe a healthy dose of paranoia. No longer did she trust the inter-office delivery system, and she'd taken to relying on Ms. Washington for double checking her calendar every day - a responsibility that truly thrilled Ms. Washington.

What really got to her though, more than destroyed decorations and stolen lunches, was that
Schmidt didn't care if what she did had an impact on her students.

The afternoon Chloe walked back to her classroom during recess after forgetting to lock her room to find **FIRECROTCH** scrawled across her whiteboard was the last straw.

She'd dealt with the gross nickname her entire life, especially during some particularly difficult developmental years in middle school. It was meaningless to her now - if someone wanted to insult her, they should criticize her voice. Or, more accurately nowadays, her teaching abilities, her students, or Beca.

What angered her the most about the whiteboard incident was that any of her better readers could have walked in and seen it. They might be in kindergarten, but a few of her students read at second and Third Grade levels and they could sound things out.

That, and frankly that it was so incredibly juvenile and unimaginative. She was more insulted by the laziness than the act itself.

It was that incident that led to a night of sitting on the living room floor with Beca on a Friday night in late September, a large, half veggie-half pepperoni pizza and four empty beer bottles between them.

"So like," Chloe said, chewing, "this chick is trying to intimidate me, right? But for the most part, she's failing, and I've never given her a reaction."

"But she keeps trying?"

"Yeah. I mean, it's almost comical? As long as she doesn't get me in trouble again. That wasn't cool."

Beca took a swig of her beer. "Such a bitch move. I get rivalry, but grow up, dude."

"Right? It's annoying, is what it is. I know she's peeved we beat DSM but we're all adults here. We're colleagues. We don't have to be besties or even like each other. But if you hate me so much, why not just ignore me? Why try to make my life hell? Why try to get me fired?"
"Seriously."

"Bec, she literally goes out of her way to mess with me. Her room isn't even in the same building!"

"Is she new there, too? Or does she think you're invading her territory? Maybe some kind of hazing?"

Chloe shook her head. "She's a first-year, too."

"So, what, she's trying to win some New Teacher of the Year award? This chick has serious issues. Are you going to confront her?"

Chloe remembered hearing something during orientation about end-of-the-year awards. Surely it wasn't something as unremarkable as an award driving this.

"I know that at least part of why she hates me is because we took down Das Sound Machine. If we could take them down, I can take her down." She sipped her beer and set it down on the floor with determination. "I just have to figure out how."

"Well," Beca said, pausing to pull another slice of veggie pizza onto her plate, "we tried playing their game, and we were terrible."

"We won because we found our harmony."

"We stopped trying to beat them."

"And we did it for us."

Chloe watched Beca take another drink and burp, excusing herself half-heartedly. *We did it for us..."

"You have an idea; I see it on your face. What is it?" Beca asked.
"Not an idea...not yet. But it'll come to me."

"Mm." Beca set aside her empty bottle. "You let me know if you need me to come down there and kick some ass."

Chloe laughed. "Sure, babe."

The conversation shifted from the mini-Kommissar to the latest "Bachelorette" rumors that Chloe came across on Tumblr earlier that evening until Chloe's mind started to wander, fueled by Beca playing with her hair as she used Beca's lap for a pillow.

"Hey, babe?"

Beca glanced down at her and then refocused on the television screen. "Hmm?"

"You wanna go upstairs?"

"Are you tired?"

"Not exactly."

Beca looked down again, a smile playing at her lips. "Bedtime?"

"Yeah. Bedtime."

Chloe followed Beca up the stairs, grabbing at her playfully until they got to the bedroom where Beca requested a time-out to use the bathroom. Chloe used the time to turn down the bedding and, heart skipping, pull the handcuffs out of her drawer and tuck them under her pillow. She didn't know if she would have the guts or not to go for it, but she wanted them close.

Their sex life was far from boring, but half a year together had allowed shortcuts to be taken in the interest of expedition and general physical comfort. She stripped while waiting for Beca, crawling into bed to revel in the coolness of the sheets against her body. The muffled clink of the cuffs
beneath her pillow sent a zing through her.

She heard Beca in the bathroom, going through her nightly routine - the sink, the brusha-brusha of a toothbrush, the garge of Cool Mint Listerine, the prolonged running of the faucet that meant she was washing her face. Beca reappeared, fresh-faced and hair tied back and, unsurprisingly, nude.

"Why did you wash up? Now I have to wash up, too," Chloe said with a groan, rolling out of bed.

"You don't have to," Beca said, catching her around the waist to kiss her. "I don't mind."

Mint and apricot overwhelmed Chloe's senses, and she shook her head. "Nope, I have beer and pizza breath."

She went through her own regimen quickly and returned to the bedroom. The lights were off and she could make out Beca in bed, covers pulled to her waist, hands beneath her head, waiting patiently. Just enough glow from the streetlights filtered through the blinds to make it easy to see.

"Feel better?" Beca asked.

Chloe clicked her teeth, running her tongue over the smooth minty surfaces. "Much."

She slid into bed and under the covers to straddle Beca's hips, bending at the waist to kiss her.

"Minty fresh," Beca said around the kiss.

Chloe teased with her tongue, slipping easily into Beca's mouth to meet hers. It was a slow, languid kiss, neither of them rushing, grabbing, or demanding more. Not until Beca caught Chloe's lower lip between her teeth and tugged; it pulled a moan out of Chloe and sparked heat between them.

Beca wrapped her arms around Chloe's waist, and Chloe shivered at the contact. Beca's hands were cold - ice cold - and she pulled back, breathing hard.

"Baby, why are your hands so cold?"
She felt Beca's arms slide away and heard the distinctive clink of metal. Her hands showed up between them a moment later, handcuffs hooked over Beca's thumbs, held tautly and on display.

Chloe felt her heart stutter. Beca had found them under her pillow and, apparently, unlocked the cuff she had tested the day she discovered them. She glanced at her nightstand and then at Beca's, noticing a tiny silver key lying next to Beca's water glass.

"Did you want to use them?" Beca asked. Her tone was light, no expectation or intent.

Chloe bit her lip. She really, really, wanted to.

"It's okay if you want to wait."

"Um, yeah." Chloe cleared her throat and swallowed. "Yes."

Beca smiled and gave the cuffs a tug, making them jingle as the loose ends swung open. "Do you want to do it? I can do it myself if you want."

"No," Chloe said quickly. She didn't realize she had even said it until Beca laughed and commented on her enthusiasm. "I want to do it."

She sat back, taking the handcuffs from Beca, looking at them again. They looked like the real deal, not the cheap kind she saw at bachelorette parties and bridal showers, and part of her wondered where Beca could have acquired authentic police handcuffs.

A high-low whistle got her attention, and she looked down, Beca holding up her left hand expectantly.

"Are you sure it's okay?" Chloe asked.

"I trust you."
Chloe hadn't realized it, but apparently, those were words she needed to hear. The anxiety drained from her and was replaced with a nervous kind of excitement. In one smooth motion, she wrapped one of the cuffs around Beca's wrist and closed it, feeling the metal teeth click one by one.

"You can do it tighter. If you want."

Chloe glanced at Beca; she had been so focused on what she was doing, she hadn't noticed that the look on Beca's face was screaming arousal. The thought that this was as sexy for Beca as it was herself was incredibly hot.

She clicked the band in a few more times, watching Beca's eyes on it until she nodded, flexing her wrist a little.

"It's okay?" Chloe asked.

"Yeah, totally. Do you want, um…" Beca held her other arm up side by side with the first. "Or…" She moved them above her head, patting the railing of the headboard.

Chloe licked her lips. Beca's arms above her head that way, handcuffs hanging off one arm, looking up at her to see what she would do next was a vision she thought would forever live in her imagination. But it was real. She could feel her under her fingertips as she ran her hands over her stomach, up her ribs, over her breasts to her shoulders and higher until she couldn't quite reach.

It wasn't as graceful as it was in her fantasy, having to work her way up Beca's body on her knees to be able to reach. She fumbled, excitement starting to get the better of her and she had to try a couple times to get the free cuff around one of the rods without it slipping back through before she could get it around Beca's other wrist and aligned to close. It clanged loudly against the metal headboard, illuminating her lack of skill and making Beca giggle.

She finally got it, though, clicking it closed with an arousing and pleasing tk tk tk tk.

She backed up and just looked.

She'd never seen anything so provocative.
Beca was hers. At her mercy. Willingly. Completely.

Chloe felt a smile creeping across her face.

"Don't hold back. I want this, too."

Chloe's stomach tightened. She wouldn't hold back. Not tonight.

Beca shifted. Chloe knew she was getting impatient, being forced to lie there and simply be looked at while knowing what was coming. The movement made the handcuffs scrape and clang and Chloe felt a moan lodge in her throat.

She swung her leg off Beca and shoved the bedding to the floor before slipping to the floor herself, crouched at Beca's feet. She saw Beca lift her head, straining but unable to sit up and her heart raced. What a rush of power it was! She used both hands to tug Beca's feet apart, a little rougher than necessary, and leaned in to press a kiss to the arch of her right foot.

Beca laughed and yanked her foot away. "Ticklish!"

"So?" Chloe's eyes widened at her own response, surprised how easy it was to fall into this role. She reached for Beca's ankle and pulled it back, kissing it again, this time below her ankle. And again up the inside of her calf as she crawled back onto the bed, four kisses to make it to her knee, and five slow, wet, full-lipped kisses up her thigh.

Beca squirmed when she hovered, not kissing, just breathing.

"Chloe. Please touch me."

A quick, feather-light graze against wetness with her finger was all Chloe gave her, pulling a moan out of Beca and a jerking of her arms, the metal clanging in her ears. It was the sound of desire.

She continued on her way, five kisses over her stomach, six over her ribs - one for each that heaved under Beca's increasingly strained breaths. Three on each breast in a triangle pattern - left side, lower curve, right side, avoiding the most sensitive flesh.
Beca's shoulders twisted, trying in vain to put herself in the path of Chloe's lips. She had already moved on though, trailing another three kisses between her breasts to the hollow of her throat.

She was high enough now, looming over Beca on her hands and knees, elbows bending and back dipping as she moved. She dragged her tongue along the side of Beca's neck, seeking out the spot that made her nuts. Beca tried to sit up, to get closer to her, but Chloe pushed her away gently.

There was no way Beca could have sat up anyway; they both knew that. But it didn't stop Beca from trying again, and again she pushed her down.

"Baby..." Beca groaned in frustration.

It lit another fire in Chloe and she moved to kiss her. It was going to be rough and demanding, but at the last second Chloe froze, lips millimeters above Beca's. Daring her to try. All she need so was lift her head. But instead Beca's tongue flitted over her lips and she waited, eyes closed, lips parted.

It was with her tongue that Chloe led, grazing the edge of Beca's lower lip, drawing a breath out of her. She pulled back, making her - both of them - wait again.

Another graze, catching her upper lip.

Beca's tongue chased it, seeking and finding nothing, instead licking the spot left moist by Chloe.

Chloe hovered, her mind racing. She could do anything she wanted, anything her heart desired right now with Beca. There were so many options that her thoughts stalled and jerked, and a part of her wanted to crawl all the way up until her thighs pressed against Beca's ears and "make" Beca give her what that part of her wanted.

Another part of her wanted to do the same thing, but instead turn around and lean down and give it to Beca at the same time.

Yet another part wanted to simply slide down and allow her tongue to take up residence between Beca's thighs.
And then she had an idea.

But first, she needed to do something.

She dipped down, leading with her tongue again, and claimed Beca's mouth.

The sound the came from Beca reverberated in Chloe, echoing to her toes. Metal scraped as Beca tried to lifted herself into the kiss and Chloe let her try and fail; Chloe was the one in control, and she would control exactly how much she would give and allow Beca to take. She pulled back and Beca tried to chase her and failed again, falling against the pillow with a frustrated groan.

"You're planning on cashing in that whole 'beg for mercy' card, aren't you."

"Maybe." Chloe smiled. She had no intent to take it so far as to beg for mercy, but there might be a little begging involved.

Beca shifted a little, muscles in her biceps flexing as she pulled. "Good."

She sat back for a moment and rapped her fingers on Beca's stomach thoughtfully as she rocked her hips a little, getting kind of impatient herself. And then she held her finger up, signaling her great idea, and leaned over to pull open Beca's nightstand and reach deep into it, under the spare tank tops, Kindle e-reader, and a multitude of unknown electronics cables until she felt the velvety bag.

Beca watched her and closed her eyes tight when Chloe sat back, loosening the pouch's drawstrings. "Seriously?"

"What better way to make you beg?" Chloe said matter-of-factly.

"You're evil."

Chloe tossed the pouch aside and checked if the toy had batteries and clicked it on to check if they worked. The soft buzz in her hand told her they did, and she felt Beca's hips roll a little at the
sound. Her eyes were still closed though, and she wondered if Beca was embarrassed that she'd pulled out her vibrator.

"It's okay?" Chloe asked quietly, clicking it off.

Beca seemed to hesitate a second before nodding. But it was a determined nod, and Chloe watched her take and release a deep breath and open her eyes.

She worked her way back a few inches and shifted to rest over one of Beca's legs instead of both, her knee separating Beca's. She watched Beca as her fingertips grazed over wetness that made Chloe groan. Beca was really turned on.

"Jesus, Beca..."

Beca tried to laugh, but it came out more like a strangled hiccup when Chloe slipped inside without much preamble.

The feeling made Chloe start to rethink her intentions with the vibrator, but she felt the brief tightness around her fingers that told her Beca wanted something more. Almost begrudgingly, she withdrew her hand and clicked the toy on again. The sound made Beca's eyelashes flutter and her hands fist, tugging a little against her restraints.

"Chlo...baby, please..."

"Shh," Chloe whispered moving between Beca's legs, floating, waiting.

She wasn't ready when Beca's hips canted upwards, bumping the toy, drawing a quick moan out of Beca. This was supposed to be on her terms, not Beca's, and she pushed her hips back to the mattress with her free hand.

She waited longer than she had planned as a result, a touch of punishment for Beca's actions. She stared at Beca, wearing a soft smile, and watched her beg with her eyes, glancing back and forth between Chloe's face and her hand, holding relief mere inches out of reach.
When Beca finally opened her mouth to say something, Chloe brushed the tip of the vibrator against the swollen bundle of nerves, and instead of a question, curses spilled from Beca's lips. Metal clanged again as she made a reflexive move to reach down. And Chloe smiled.

This was as fun as it was hot.

She pulled it away and watched Beca relax a little, breasts heaving with her labored breathing. And then she brushed against it again, firmer this time, holding it in place longer, waiting for Beca to adjust to the low vibration and relax a little.

"You're so tense," Chloe said with a smile, starting to ease the length of the vibrator up and down.

Beca yanked against the handcuffs pointedly. "Gee. I wonder why." She groaned through gritted teeth when the tip of the vibrator slipped inside and stopped. "Oh my God, seriously? Just do it already."

Chloe smiled bigger. "Do what?"

Beca hitched her leg, the one not trapped between Chloe's, up a little. "We're playing that game now, too?"

"Sure, why not?" Chloe pulled back a little, and she liked how Beca tried to slide lower to follow but got stopped short.

How Beca had the mental capacity to roll her eyes was beyond her - if their roles were reversed, she would be a sobbing, incoherent mess by now.

Her voice was monotonous and flat, and she said it with a sigh. "Fuck me, Chloe. Oh please, fuck me."

"What kind of begging was that?" Chloe said, laughing.

"You take any longer and I'm going to fall asleep."
"Somehow I doubt that."

Beca shrugged, best she could, given her situation. "I don't know, man. You are seriously dragging this ou-ho-hoooooout! Okay, yep, point taken!"

Chloe smirked, sliding the vibrator in the last bit until the "ears" that inspired the toy's name rested flush against Beca. Beca pulled herself toward the headboard and hissed through her teeth as she slid back down.

Chloe allowed her to do it; it was beyond sexy to witness.

Beca's eyes fell closed and she moaned in relief, and Chloe saw her head fall back against the pillows and her fingers wrap around the railings of the headboard, gripping it for leverage as she pulled and pushed.

She watched until Beca's moaning was becoming too urgent, and then she grabbed her hip and made her stop.

"Fuck, Chloe…" Beca groaned in frustration, giving the headboard a good rattle.

Inspiration struck. "Yeah. Yeah, that's exactly what I'm going to do."

"What?" Beca breathed, still trying to twist and move her hips.

Chloe clicked the vibrator's speed up a level, and then just for fun, a second, and Beca jolted so hard Chloe worried that she was going to hurt herself, but there was no pain on her face, just frustration, and lust. Chloe leaned forward to support herself with her left hand, holding the vibrator in place with her right, positioning her thigh to press against the back of her hand holding the toy, Beca's thigh between her legs.

"Shit…" Beca breathed, looking up at Chloe leaning over her. She bent her knee, flattening her foot against the bed, and pressed her thigh up and against Chloe.
She hadn't anticipated that, getting a shred of relief for herself, and she moaned in appreciation. She tilted her hips experimentally, pressing into Beca, rocking against her thigh. "Shit..." she echoed, the dull friction sending lightning through her.

"Okay, yeah. This is good," Beca said. She adjusted her grip on the railings.

Chloe nodded in agreement and rocked her hips again, making both of them moan.

Heat flooded her. This was hot. This was sexy. She set a slow rhythm and the motion alone was almost enough to tip her over the edge. In the past, they'd made love, or they'd had sex, or sometimes they fucked - hard. But this - this was some mind-bending combination of the three. Being over Beca this way, moving her hips against her, finding sweet friction in the press of her thigh, thrusting into her and making Beca slide up the bed with the force, and for Beca to push herself back down only to be pushed up again - Chloe had only ever been on the receiving end of it with her ex-boyfriends. She felt connected to Beca in a way that their usual positions didn't allow.

She pulled her lower lip between her teeth and sped up her motions, and then she felt Beca's free leg wrap around her waist, and she thought she might pass out from their combined heat.

"Kiss me," Beca breathed. "Please kiss me."

She dropped from her hand to her forearm, bringing their bodies completely flush as she claimed Beca's mouth, tongues twisting. Beca whimpered against her kiss, high-pitched, desperate, driving Chloe to push her hips faster. The speed and the kiss yanked Chloe's climax forward, and suddenly she was on the brink. She was toeing a line, refusing to back off or slow down because she knew - she knew - Beca was almost there, but if she didn't slow down, she wouldn't be able to stop it. The links of the handcuffs scraped with their rhythm, heightening the scenario even more.

She wrenched herself away from their kiss, pressing her face into her neck. "Baby...baby, I'm..."

"I'm close, too," Beca said, voice shaky.

Beca uttering those words was enough to undo her, and Chloe felt the tension snap, euphoria flooding her. She tried to hold her rhythm despite it, but she didn't need to. She heard Beca follow a moment later, moaning and cursing her name in her ear.
Chloe's wits returned slowly and she realized she was probably crushing Beca. She'd collapsed on top of her. With a grunt she peeled herself away and rolled onto her back next to Beca, breathing hard and soaking in the cool air against her heated skin. She pulled the vibrator with her, getting Beca's attention as she withdrew it.

"Shit," Beca laughed, pressing her thighs together at the loss.

Chloe clicked off the toy and reached to set it on the nightstand, letting her arm flop over her abdomen, still breathing hard. "Wow," she managed.

"Um, yeah. Hey, babe?"

"Hmm?"

Metal jangled. "You wanna maybe let me go before my arms fall off?"

"I'm not going to let you go," she teased. "But I'll uncuff you." Chloe smiled and rolled over to palm the key she noticed earlier and flipped back onto her stomach, reaching awkwardly to fit the key into the keyhole of one cuff, and then the other, popping them open to let Beca detangle herself.

Beca dropped her arms immediately, hissing at the burn that came with proper circulation returning. "Dude. That was hot."

Chloe wheezed a laugh. Her top five hottest moments in bed had quickly been filled by experiences with Beca, and now even those were becoming difficult to sort and rank. She tucked her arms under a pillow and turned her head to the side to look at Beca, still on her back, staring at the ceiling.

"Thank you," Chloe said quietly. Beca had given her her fantasy, or at least most of it, and it had been worth having made the confession.

She watched Beca struggle to turn over and get comfortable on her side to face her, arms weakened. The handcuffs jangled somewhere in the bedding; the sound sent a zip though Chloe - a Pavlov effect. She bit her lip and smiled.
Beca smiled back. "You're welcome."

Chloe had expected a smartass response, something cocky or crude, but no. Beca was simply smiling at her, holding her gaze, and Chloe squinted, determined not to get emotional over what she knew was coming.

It wasn't that she couldn't handle Beca saying it; they told each other every day, multiple times per day, that they loved one another. But sometimes she said it so earnestly, so raw, it cut Chloe straight through to the core.

"I love you."
I assume everyone in the English-speaking world has seen Mean Girls, but if you somehow haven't, 1) watch it, and 2) I'm sorry if you don't understand my references.

Chloe loved Halloween. She lived for it. She had been solely responsible for planning the annual Bellas' party at Barden all seven years, and before that, she coordinated the house parties for each of her grades in high school, and before that she hosted her first real Halloween party in her basement. She was in sixth grade, but it was her party that Somerset Academy talked about for a month, not the one held at the eighth grader's house.

So, of course, the evening of September 30th, Chloe stayed at school late to take down her classroom safari decorations and replace them with kindergartener-friendly Halloween decorations, including a spooky paper leafless tree with little smiling paper bats attached to the branches, each with a student's name written on it. She opted for leaving the exterior of her door bare save for a few paper leaves and a pumpkin cutout with her name on it. She had discovered early-on that being a teacher was expensive - it paid little and she had to spend a lot of cash out of pocket if she wanted to have even a remotely engaging classroom experience for her kids. But, she had a lot of experience decorating on a budget, and that included not placing decorations where Anika Schmidt could vandalize them.

Her love of Halloween is also what spurred her to volunteer to help organize the elementary Fall Festival. It kept her occupied in the evenings, which was a fun, enjoyable project when Beca was tied up at the recording studio until all hours of the night. Her responsibilities included devising and setting up a game booth and helping run the pumpkin painting tables - and everything that went into setting up and executing it all. Naturally, she was elated.

A glance at the clock told her it was time to put away the remaining decorations and go deal with the chaos of morning student drop-off. She loathed it - she truly did - but her initial plan to defeat Schmidt was to become everyone's favorite, to befriend literally everyone but Schmidt. It wasn't her intent to exclude Schmidt from anything, but rather to cut off any and all resources she had in making Chloe's life hell and getting away with it.

And Kommis...Schmidt had friends. Cronies. They always sat together at the same table during lunch in the teacher's lounge, looking at Chloe and her friends and laughing or scowling. They reinforced her behavior, enabled her, laughed at her jokes like bitchy teenagers. They had the biggest targets on their backs.
Chloe felt like she was Cady Heron, the new girl from Atlanta who, for unknown reasons, caught herself a Regina George. She had her plan to take down these Plastics - she'd taken to thinking of them as Das Sound Mechanics. Her plan wasn't to rid Schmidt of her Aaron Samuels or her technically good physique, but she was working on her Army of Skanks. She had to take them on one by one - together, they were impenetrable, but alone they were weak and vulnerable.

Which is why she had to grab her orange safety vest and her whistle and jog out to her post on the corner. Traffic duty was assigned by the office, but Chloe offered to cover shifts for others as frequently as she could - especially for the Mechanics. Everyone hated traffic duty; it required being on campus earlier and staying later than was required, and much like the exuberance of discovering your pop quiz was canceled in lieu of simply attending class, relieving someone of traffic duty earned you major brownie points. If she could clone herself and cover everyone's shifts every day, she would, but this would have to be a slow burn.

The teachers not part of the Mechanics were easy; many of them had already become her friends and those who hesitated for one reason or another quickly folded. Chloe Beale knew how to charm the pants off anyone.

She had chosen the weakest of the herd as her first Mechanics target - a warm-up if you will: another first-year, a girl with whom she had paired a few times during orientation team building exercises before the cliques formed. Her Gretchen Wieners.

"I've had such a week," Chloe bemoaned one afternoon after purposely timing her trip to the staff bathroom. It was an easy carrot to dangle - who didn't love jumping in on a work bitching session?

"Oh my God, me, too! That new policy they handed down today? I'm going to lose my mind."

"Do you want to go grab a drink later? I saw a place down the street advertising happy hour. My treat."

"Sure!"

Gretchen Wieners had cracked.

She still sat with Schmidt at lunch of course, but now and then Chloe overheard her politely correcting Schmidt, defending Chloe in the least obvious way possible. She knew it was enough,
though - one weak link would eventually break even the strongest chain.

Of course, a few more weakened links would expedite the process, and as she passed the Mechanics' table during lunch, she paused, drawing the sharp stare of Schmidt and a few curious glances from the others.

"Hi, Mr. Andrews. Don't forget, I gotcha covered today!" she chirped, adding a wink for good measure.

The men were the easiest - thought with their dicks, all of them. She didn't even need to try; a wink, a lingering hand on a shoulder when laughing at a joke, a promise of "we should grab a drink sometime."

Which is why two short weeks into implementing her plan, she'd charmed her way into the figurative pants of three of Schmidt's cronies, one of whom worked in the office and was in charge of sending out the school-wide communications - the likely culprit behind Chloe never receiving any email communications about the missed meeting that landed her in hot water.

She was on a roll, and it was while she was covering someone else's traffic duty after school that her phone rang. To her pleasant surprise, it was Beca calling, and not the guy from the office harassing her again about grabbing that drink. Pick-ups had dwindled to next to nothing, so she took the call.

"Hi!"

"Hey babe. You busy?"

"Not really. What's up?"

"Anyone ever tell you that you look hot in orange?"

Chloe looked at her vest. "What are you talking about?" She waved an SUV through the line and saw Beca roll up behind it in her Corvette.
They smiled at each other through the windshield. "Wanna play hooky?"

Chloe laughed and hung up, walking to the passenger side window as it rolled down. "It's not playing hooky if it's already time for me to go home."

"Hey, I'm trying to be cute, don't criticize me or I'll quit trying."

Chloe grinned. "You don't have to try - you're always cute. I can get out of here in a few minutes. Grab one of the visitor spots up there and I'll be out in a few."

Beca gave her a little salute and pulled ahead, leaving Chloe to direct the last few cars around to pick up their students for the day. She smiled when she saw Beca waiting for her at the entrance.

"You could have waited in the car," she said as she approached.

"I haven't been here since school started. Can I check out your room?"

Chloe grinned. It was nice when Beca took interest in her work; it wasn't that she didn't care or wasn't interested - she flat out didn't have a lot of free brain power; she was under a November deadline to finish recording Katy's album, a December deadline to have it mixed and mastered for a February single drop, and a March album release. Chloe never held it against her.

"Totes! Come on!"

After a tour of Chloe's classroom, Beca took a seat on one of the students' chairs. Chloe couldn't stop giggling; as kindergartners, the furniture in the room was tiny, and though Beca was also tiny, the chairs were even tinier, just ten inches off the ground.

"What?" Beca asked innocently when Chloe started laughing after looking at her for the third time.

"Nothing," she lied, still chuckling.

"So is that bitch still here? Can I give her a piece of my mind?"
"Bec, shhh - kids are still around."

Beca shrank a little in her tiny chair. "Oops, sorry."

"But no, she's not - thankfully. Let me get my stuff and we can go home."

"Umm, about that…I need to go back to the studio tonight?"

Chloe's heart sank a little. She'd been excited to have a proper evening at home together, and she thought Beca might have had something up her sleeve, showing up unannounced as she did. "Oh. Okay. Do you think you could take me home first? I really hate the bus."

"I was hoping you'd maybe want to come with me. Katy's there. She said she might want to pull an all-nighter and I didn't want to not see you until tomorrow night if that ends up happening. Do you have work stuff to do? Could you bring it with you? You can take the car home if it gets too late; I'll cab it."

"Is Jimmy going to be there?"

"No. He's not around as much now. I promise it's safe."

Chloe smiled; Beca seemed so sincere, almost desperate for Chloe to accept the invitation. It was nice to feel wanted and missed. "Sure. I have some stuff I can do. And I love getting to watch you work."

"Cool," Beca said with a grin, made all the more adorable by being folded up on that tiny chair in her ripped up jeans and black V-neck tee. Chloe couldn't help herself from bending down to kiss her.

"Can you grab my computer? The bag's under the cart," she said, pointing as she stacked up folders of papers and art projects. She left her plastic recorder behind; tonight had been her intended night to re-learn how to play it to spare Beca the ear-splitting torture, as she would be introducing it to her students in a week, but tonight wasn't going to be the night.
"Yeah, sure."

She watched Beca pack it up and sling it over her shoulder to wait, looking around the room with genuine interest, pausing when she noticed the photo of the two of them on the pier at sunset in Santa Monica in a frame on her desk. She smiled at the photo and then at Chloe.

"Ready?" Beca asked.

"Yep! After you."

They stopped at In-N-Out Burger on the way to Beca's studio, getting a sack full of 'animal style' cheeseburgers and another sack of fries. When Chloe questioned the quantities at the drive-through window, Beca explained that walking into an active studio at dinnertime without food was the equivalent of walking into a gladiator ring with no sword, to meet a lion. Even though everyone was on a break intended to allow everyone to have dinner? The answer was yes.

Chloe liked Beca's studio - it was very...studio-ish. It was dark and earthy and full of comfortable couches and chairs and, generally speaking, she liked everyone Beca worked with. She liked the chorus of greetings she received when walking through the door, and she loved the fact that the team had some type of ritual and Beca had to walk around the entire room clockwise high-fiving everyone with her left hand before taking her seat at the board. Each subsequent person that came in did the exact same thing, and Chloe was left wondering if she should have done it as well. She hoped she didn't drop some bad juju for skipping it.

The booth was empty, but Chloe figured if they were just coming back from dinner break, Katy would be the last to arrive.

Chloe unpacked two burgers and two fries for herself and Beca, and passed the bags around the room before setting Beca's up on the wheelie table next to her; Chloe had learned on her first visit no that food on the soundboard was part of the Ten Commandments of Recording.

She made small talk with the others from her spot on a couch; it was easy, especially after getting to know them better over Labor Day weekend. She knew Beca had work to do and didn't take offense when she immediately got down to business, playing what Chloe assumed was the song they were tackling tonight. She hadn't visited the studio in months when they were just starting to
piece lyrics together and develop melodies.

It was pretty awesome, getting to hear a work in progress, a song that she would [hopefully] hear every twenty minutes on Top 40 radio next year. She was proud - so, so proud. The track had Beca's fingerprints all over it in the way things contrasted and merged and built with Katy's vocals layered over it, and Chloe felt herself tearing up.

She shook her head and pulled out her work for the evening to give herself a distraction.

Sometime later, the door swung open and another chorus of greetings rose. Chloe looked up and watched Katy breeze in, majorly dressed down in a tank top, unzipped hoodie, baggy sweatpants, what she guessed were expensive white sneakers, glasses, and a messy ponytail. Even on the beach she'd been made up and dressed nicely, but apparently, she didn't feel compelled to do so while working.

And Katy wasn't exempt from the entrance ritual, woo-ing as she ran around the room clockwise, high-fiving everyone, including Chloe. She finished her circle with Beca and turned back around; Chloe was surprised that she was the one Katy was looking at.

"Hey, Chloe Beale! You're here!"

Chloe laughed; it was fun having an inside joke - as minor as it was - with a megastar. "Hey, Katy Perry."

Katy leaned back, propping her arm on the top of Beca's head like it was an inanimate surface.

"Excuse you?" Beca said, still facing the board and fiddling with dials and sliders.

Katy smiled and ignored her. "Mini Dre here told me you sing, too."

"Shut up."

"Um, yeah," Chloe said, a little surprised that she was a topic of conversation. "That's how we met. In our a capella group."
"You won a bunch of championships or something right?"

"Yes!" Chloe always loved an opportunity to boast about their accomplishments. "Three national titles and we're the reigning World Champions."

"Ever thought about trying to cut a single?"

"Nah," Chloe said, flattered by the question. "I'm teaching now. I don't think the pop thing is for me."

"You live with this genius and she hasn't written you something? Rebecca, I'm highly disappointed in you."

"Oh I would love to," Beca said, still fiddling with the board and still serving as an armrest. "It's just that there's this horrid bitch that won't get off my back about finishing her fucking record."

Katy smiled and wiggled her arm, messing up Beca's hair, and Chloe giggled, though it was somewhat sobering, realizing the amount of pressure Beca must be under.

"You wanna get the show on the road maybe?" Beca asked, cuing up part of the track they were just listening to.

"And she says I won't get off her back. Catch ya later."

Chloe waved and watched Katy exit through a door and reappear a moment later behind the glass in front of Beca, who was finger combing her hair back into place.

Beca pressed a button and leaned forward. "Let's finish the harmonies on the chorus. I think we're almost there."

Katy slipped a pair of headphones on and Chloe heard her singing scales to warm up.
Beca spun around in her chair. "You need anything? I'm about to go down the rabbit hole."

"I'm okay." Chloe smiled and held up her half-eaten cheeseburger. "Do your thing."
I Wish to Go to the Festival

Chloe was on her hands and knees, chalk in hand as she etched a checkerboard pattern onto the asphalt of the school parking lot.

She was helping a Mechanic set up their Fall Festival booth - a modified version of ring toss that Chloe couldn't help but envision as beer pong for kids, the way they were establishing the rules.

Her own booth was finished already - obviously.

She was proud of it, too. It was the best-looking booth on the grounds, and featured what she was sure would be the favorite game for the kids - a water balloon toss. It was simple, really. Throw ten balloons at a target to burst them, the water collecting money in a bucket below the target. Objective? Fill it to the line and win a prize! She'd spent the last three evenings at school filling and tying water balloons with the help of one of the elementary aides.

The event was a fundraiser, so she had precious little budget for anything, but again she made it work, as she did her classroom. Prizes were a selection of Beanie Babies she had purchased in bulk from an inventory liquidation website. Did kids even like Beanie Babies nowadays? She was pretty sure they did.

Of course, because she was who she was, that wasn't enough - oh no. When the Festival was hitting primetime when all three schools – elementary, middle, and high – had access, she was going to be the target and there would be no bucket and no discernible prize to speak of other than the thrill that came with humiliating a teacher. Her own kindergarteners weren't the intended audience; it was the older kids that would line up for the opportunity. She wasn't unpopular with the other students – since she was new and nice to everyone, students included, she was one of the teachers they said hello to if they saw her in a hallway on their way to pick up a younger sibling.

So if the school wanted funds raised by way of parents buying their kids tickets to play carnival games – and teenagers spending their hard-earned fast food service wages – she would give them a game they couldn't refuse. She was prepared of course; she brought school-appropriate clothes to get soaked in and had an extra change of clothes in her classroom so she could get home without looking like a drowned rat.

Perhaps what she was most excited about, however, was that Beca promised to come to the Festival. She wanted to meet her students, and her coworkers, and see more of Chloe's life. It occurred to Chloe that Beca had yet to see her teach; not that "strangers" observed in classrooms, but she hadn't even seen her interact with her students.
"I think you're all set!" she said, standing and dusting off the chalk from her hands.

"That looks very nice; thank you, Ms. Beale. I appreciate the help."

"No problem!" One more Mechanic down, and she changed into her costume with a smile on her face.

Chloe spotted Beca before Beca spotted her; she was alone, wandering up a row of booths, weaving her way around darting, screaming children wearing capes and princess dresses. When Chloe expected Beca to grimace or wince when one of the youngsters would run right into her, or when one of her own particularly adventurous students actually tugged her hand to say something to her, Beca smiled instead. She even crouched down to talk to the girl named Ashlyn dressed like Queen Elsa, nodding and smiling and saying something Chloe couldn't decipher. It warmed her heart.

She turned her attention back to the pair of students waiting at her booth, tickets in hand. "Iron Man and The Hulk? Is Thor here, too?"

The kids giggled and pointed at their friend a few booths away, dressed like Thor with a cape and a giant plastic hammer on the ground by his feet. Iron Man and The Hulk took turns heaving grenade-sized water balloons at their targets – two of them, Chloe didn't mess around – in a race to fill their bucket first. The Hulk came out the winner, and he left with a floppy brown dog.

When Beca was within earshot, she shouted her name and got her attention. Beca did a bit of a double-take, and laughed, walking quickly to her booth.

"And who are you supposed to be?"

"Seriously? You're literally the only person here who doesn't know."

Chloe's costume had cost her forty dollars and five minutes to change into, and it was a hit with every single student. She hunted through vintage clothing stores for inspiration until she found the discarded wardrobe of what she assumed was a woman who had a pension for the fantasy worlds –
witches, séances, and what have you – and found a green, crushed velvet dress. A brown leather belt from her closet, the bow from a western-themed play set slung over her shoulder, and a brush whipped through her curls to take them from salon quality to absolute frizzy mess completed her look.

"Some…Renaissance thing?"

"I'm Merida, Beca. From Brave. The Disney movie?"

"I know who you are; I was messing with you." Beca smiled. "You look amazing. Like, it's so perfect, with your hair. For real, Chlo."

"Thanks! The kids really love it. Oh, I saw Ashlyn found you."

"Who?"

"Elsa. She's one of mine."

"Oh her! She asked if I was 'Miss Beca.' She recognized me from the picture on your desk, and she said I'm pretty."

Chloe winked. "Smart girl, that one."

Beca seemed to blush a little. "So, what carnival scam are you running here?"

She scoffed. "This is not a scam; it's completely winnable. Go buy tickets and you can try it." She grabbed a floppy horse from the pile and shook it. "Win a Beanie Baby!"

Beca reached into her back pocket and produced an accordion of tickets. At a dollar per ticket, it looked like she'd spent probably fifty dollars.

"Aw…babe. Thank you. It really helps."
"Is there a competition to see who collects the most tickets? Should I give them all to you?"

Chloe laughed. "There's no contest. Two tickets for sixty seconds and ten balloons." She affected her silly carnie fairway worker voice, with a really terrible attempt at including a Scottish accent. "Sixty seconds to prove your speed and accuracy! Fill the bucket to the line and win a prize! How about you, little lady?"

"Ha! Okay, bring it on." Beca ripped two tickets off her chain and stuffed the rest in the pocket of her vest.

After setting up Beca with a pail of balloons, she stepped back and reset her stopwatch. Before she could say go, Beca acted as though she was about to heave one at Chloe, making her shriek and spin for cover. She'd seen Beca stop short, though, and heard the splash of it hitting the ground anyway.

"Aw man, I dropped it! Give me another one."

Chloe turned back around and shook her head. "Sorry, rules are rules. That's what you get for messing around. Ready?"

She clocked Beca, who was as competitive as always as she heaved water balloons at a target, most hitting, some missing. She wasn't even close to reaching the line when she ran out of ammo.

"Oh, that's balls," she said when she realized she'd lost.

"Beca."

"Oops, sorry! Okay, I only lost because I wasted that first one." She ripped another two tickets off and forked them over. "Again."

It took Beca three rounds before finally succeeding, and when she did, she let out a whoop. Chloe handed her a cat, but Beca handed it back.
"I want the wolf."

"You're as bad as the kids," she said, rolling her eyes as she swapped the toys.

Beca stepped aside, making room for the next players, and Chloe almost felt nervous, knowing Beca was watching her, forming an opinion about how well she did her job. But every time she glanced at her, she was wearing a soft little smile, hands stuffed in her pants pockets, twisting back and forth absentmindedly as she watched.

Beca's exaltation about winning had drawn attention to Chloe's booth, and she had a steady stream of takers for almost half an hour. She started to feel bad, all but ignoring Beca for so long. She was so into her game, so proud of her little booth, that she'd forgotten she had backup support. The aide who helped fill the balloons was on standby to cover her. Of course, she had no way to communicate with her and she had no idea where she was, so she sent Beca off to find her. It wouldn't be hard – she was the only adult dressed like Cinderella.

Indeed, Beca returned with Cinderella a few minutes later and Chloe was able to take a break. She needed food, and the bathroom, and to prepare for her grand finale.

"You're seriously going to do this?"

"It builds morale with the students, and we need every dollar we can squeeze out of these poor families. If a few minutes of humiliation can do all that, I can handle that. Besides, it's just water."

Beca and Chloe were in her classroom behind a locked door while Chloe changed out of her Merida costume and into running shorts, a tank top, and a black WeHOPA T-shirt, their lion mascot emblazoned on the front in light blue. She really had to fight with the mess she'd turned her hair into to get it tied into a bun. She slid her feet into a pair of flip-flops and grabbed the beach towel out of her bag to throw it over her shoulder. Her final accessory was a pair of safety goggles she borrowed from a science lab.

"Come on – they're going to make an announcement about it so I can't be late."

Chloe led them back to the parking lot and to her booth, where Cinderella was loading buckets with water balloons.
"Thanks, Ms. Rodriguez! Would you mind sticking around and helping with the line?"

Cinderella agreed and Chloe made a little announcement to those in line that the game had to close for a few minutes, but not to leave. She took down the targets and moved the buckets to the side, worked her big ugly safety goggles onto her face, and waited. Beca was beside the booth, a look of pitiful amusement on her face, iPhone in her hand. She had threatened-slash-promised to capture the event for their friends.

A few minutes later, one of the teachers made an announcement over the portable sound system, offering the opportunity to soak Ms. Beale – one ticket for one water balloon.

Chloe was anxious, but not scared; this was her moment, to truly take one for the team – be the cool teacher to the kids, be the fun colleague to the teachers, and hopefully raise a few dollars in the process.

As she hoped, the announcement was met with some whoops and cheers, and much of the crowd descended on her booth, led mostly by high school boys with fistfuls of tickets.

"Be gentle!" she yelled when one of the boys she recognized as a senior armed himself with two balloons.

A second later, she felt the impact of a water grenade exploding on her stomach and heard a chorus of cheers. She knew how to sell a performance, and she shrieked and jumped in a circle declaring how cold it was, only to catch another grenade in the back in the process. That shriek was legitimate.

The cheers and shrieks worked like a charm. Everyone at the festival eventually gathered at her booth for the chance to pelt Ms. Beale with water balloons, or to simply watch the hilarity.

"Well, well, well – what do we have here?"

Chloe wiped water off her goggles and tried not to frown. Anika Schmidt was next in line, armed with a string of tickets and an evil grin.
"Soak-A-Teacher – did you miss the announcement?" she asked, trying not to sound bitchy in front of their massive audience.

"You're telling me I get to throw things at you, for the betterment of the school?"

Chloe put her hands on her hips. She didn't need this grandstanding. "That's the idea. Let 'er rip; got lots of people waiting."

She knew this was a possibility, that Anika Schmidt couldn't miss an opportunity to humiliate her, to exercise some form of dominance over her. It irritated her to no end, but it was what it was.

"I'm going to enjoy this," Schmidt said as she wound up.

Chloe knew she was aiming for her head; the goggles would help, but she didn't feel like taking multiple direct hits to her face. They stung when they hit her nose. She tolerated it with the students because it made them laugh hysterically. But she wouldn't tolerate it for Anika Schmidt, and she covered the lower half of her face with her hands in time for a balloon to slam into them.

"Aw, come on, don't do that!" Schmidt complained, palming another balloon.

"You're holding up the line," Chloe answered, not moving her hands. It was fun when it was anyone else, but the way Schmidt laughed, as though she was winning some long-fought battle, like she was besting Chloe at something, made it almost unbearable. She closed her eyes and took it.

"Thanks, Beale. That was fun," she said when it was finally over.

Chloe dropped her hands to watch Schmidt walk off with one of the Mechanics, laughing. She looked at Beca, who looked pissed. Chloe opened her mouth to say something to her and caught a mouthful of water as a balloon caught her chin.

When it was finally over – when the booth ran out of water balloons – Chloe was soaked completely, head to toe, and she took a bow and thanked those still watching or waiting for playing. Beca was waiting for her at the side of the booth with the beach towel held open for her.
"Thanks," she said as Beca wrapped it around her shoulders.

"Okay, that was hilarious, and we can talk about that in a second, but was that blonde bitch that trash talked you the girl you told me about? The one who keeps messing with you?"

Chloe knew the look in Beca's eyes. She was pissed. She was offended. She was protective. Part of Chloe thought she should dismiss Beca's question; she didn't want or need a scene, not after she had more or less been the rock star of the event. But the part of Chloe that thrilled from Beca protecting her honor was louder. "Anika Schmidt. That was her."

Beca's jaw set firm, lips in a thin line. "I see." She spun on her heel and walked away with purpose through the parking lot. Chloe followed a few feet behind, anxious. She didn't know if Schmidt was even on campus still, but Beca yelling, "Hey, Anika!" told her she was, indeed, present.

"Yes?" Schmidt was downright pleasant, wearing a smile of genuine surprise as she turned.

Chloe froze, still several feet behind, and sidestepped behind an SUV and out of sight; she was able to see them through the tinted windows, though. She knew she should intervene, keep Beca out of her personal drama, but there was something incredibly sexy about watching her storm off to defend her. She'd done it on the beach to tell Jimmy where he could go, and she was doing it again – the thrill was the same.

"Do I know you?" Schmidt asked, still pleasant.

"You…wow…"

Oh no.

"You're…really pretty."

_Beca, focus!_

Schmidt laughed. "Thank you. Do I know you? You look familiar."
"No! You…you need to leave Chloe alone!"

"Ahh." Chloe heard Schmidt's tone change in an instant. "What do you care?"

"I'm her girlfriend."

"Girlfriend? Jake, how did we miss that? I can do so much more with that information. Our little firecrotch dyke. Where is she? Sending you to try to fight her battle?"

Chloe was incensed. She could ignore a lot of things, but she couldn't ignore slurs about sexuality. She made a move to step out and relieve Beca of her feeble attempt when she heard something she hadn't heard in months.

Beca was yelling.

"Don't you fucking dare talk about her that way! You aren't better than her. You need to make people feel bad about themselves so you can feel better about yourself? Fucking pathetic. Chloe is literally the nicest person on this entire godforsaken planet and she has never done anything to warrant your…your petty, childish, unprofessional behavior. You are a teacher. Grow the fuck up and act like it."

"Hey –"

"And another thing!" Beca wasn't finished. "As captain of the Bellas that buried your precious Das Sound Machine, you really need to figure it out that intimidating everyone isn't how you win."

"Captain?"

"Yeah, that's right. I'm Beca Effing Mitchell, and I swear to God if I hear about you messing with Chloe again I'm…I'm…"

"You'll what?"
"I'll do something!"

Strong finish, babe.

"Come on, let's go before she bites," a male voice said. "She might be rabid."

Chloe heard Schmidt's laugh, but it wasn't as confident as usual. She watched the pair leave and watched Beca's shoulders droop, clearly disappointed in her last words.

"You're getting better with the trash talk," Chloe said as she walked up to take Beca's hand in hers.

"Dammit, she's so pretty," Beca said, pinching the bridge of her nose and frowning.

"I don't know how you were ever able to talk to me," she teased, earning a snort in reply. "But Beca…you really didn't need to do that. And I'm not sure if it did more harm than good. I'm sure I'll find out soon. But either way – thank you."

"I swear to God if she ever calls you that again…"

"If she does, I'll file a harassment complaint. Come on, I'm getting cold. I'll change and my hero can take me home."

Unsurprisingly, by the time they got to Room 17, the pumpkin decoration with her name had been ripped off her door, in shreds on the floor.

Beca's confrontation with Anika Schmidt was forgotten quickly.

Much to Chloe's surprise, the harassment at school lessened considerably. Other than the décor destruction, incidents had been kept to a minimum, mostly executed by way of extended glares or rude sexual gestures in the teachers’ lounge. Neither bothered her. Yes, that is indeed what it looks
like when you go down on a girl. Showing me how it works isn't particularly insulting. But you go right ahead and try. And by the way, your technique is terrible.

Chloe ignored it usually, though sometimes when she was feeling particularly saucy, she winked and gave Schmidt an up-down with gleaming eyes, and a little lick of her lips. It seemed to offend the other woman quite nicely and usually sent her in the opposite direction. Don't dish out what you can't take.

Beca was deep in the final throes of recording, leaving Chloe to do much of the preparation for Halloween at home – not that Chloe minded. She had been looking forward to it all year, more so now that they had actual plans.

Aubrey was coming to visit.

Aubrey coming meant Chloe had an apartment to clean and prep for a guest, and it meant she would have her right-hand man when it came to celebrating Halloween. Beca usually dragged her feet about it, huffing and puffing until she got a couple drinks into her, so Chloe was happy to have moral support.

To make it even better, Halloween was on a Saturday this year. Chloe had the day off, and the next day to recover.

On Wednesday, Chloe took the bus to Beca's studio to get the car. Aubrey had insisted on taking a cab, but Chloe was too eager to see her best friend and promised to pick her up at the airport.

She narrowly escaped a speeding ticket on the way to LAX, the only saving grace being that the car in front of her was speeding even more than she was, and the cop chose to nab that driver instead. It left her heart racing for the rest of the drive.

Chloe glanced at the clock – 7:05PM. Aubrey assured her she would be waiting on the curb at exactly 7:00PM, and sure enough, as Chloe crawled through the mess of cars and people dragging luggage, she spotted her friend standing at the curb in front of the door she said she would be at, looking down the line of incoming cars, suitcase by her side, purse over her shoulder, sunglasses perched atop her head.

Chloe laughed to herself; Aubrey had no clue what to be watching for. She rolled up to the curb and rolled down the passenger window, leaning down to look out. She dropped her voice to its
"No thank you, sir. I'm waiting for someone."

She popped the lock on the door with an audible thunk and normalized her voice. "I'm holding up traffic; get in the car, Bree."

She watched Aubrey's eyes fall to meet hers, and the moment of recognition and amusement hit her. "You bitch!"

Chloe popped the trunk before hopping out, scurrying around the car and into the waiting arms of her friend. "Hi," she said, trying not to cry. "I missed you."

"I missed you, too," Aubrey said, hugging her tighter before releasing her and stepping back to grab her suitcase. "Come on, I want to get out of this airport." She slid her suitcase into the trunk and climbed into the car as Chloe shifted into gear and crept back into the line of cars to exit.

"How was your flight?"

"Barely acceptable. I need to re-evaluate the cost-benefit analysis of flying budget airlines."

Chloe smiled. Same old Aubrey.

"So this is Beca's car?"

"Yep. Nice, right? Wait 'til I get her on the freeway."

"Very nice. I pictured her as more of a truck girl, though. What with all the flannel shirts and piercings and tattoos biker boots and zippers."

"I have piercings and tattoos, Bree," Chloe said, laughing.
Aubrey straightened. "You know what I mean. How is the gremlin doing?"

"Aubrey, please."

"I'm kidding! I'm totally kidding. She's seriously producing Katy Perry's new album?"

"She really is. It's pretty cool."

"'Pretty cool'? That's an understatement. Have you met her?"

"Who, Katy?"

"No, Beca. Yes, Katy."

"Yeah, a few times. We were at her Labor Day party in that pic I posted from the beach. And I go to the studio with Beca sometimes."

"That's amazing. It's all happening for her."

"I never doubted it would," Chloe said proudly. She changed lanes as they exited the airport and she headed toward the freeway on-ramp. "Hold on."

"What?"

Chloe floored it, all eight cylinders of the sports car pumping as they went from 20 to 70 miles per hour in the span of a few hundred feet.

"Chloe!" Aubrey shrieked, clamoring for something to hold onto and finally finding the handle on the ceiling by her door which she clutched for dear life.

Chloe laughed at her friend's terror as she slid into an opening on the highway.
"You're insane."

"And you love me. Now calm down – we're going shopping."

Halloween pop-up stores were a dime a dozen in Los Angeles and Chloe picked one at random.

She locked the Corvette with a beep and she took Aubrey's offered elbow, walking arm-in-arm into the shop.

Her list was small – they weren't hosting a party this year, but she wanted a few basics for the apartment, to start Beca's and her holiday décor collection. It was a little thrilling, realizing that they were going to start sharing ownership over certain property.

• Spider webs
• Orange or red Christmas lights
• Candy bowl
• Candy
• Doorbell/knocker

If her spending money, leftover after paying her share of the rent and bills and setting aside her set amount to save for a car, allowed, she would buy out the entire store. Instead, she had to be satisfied with decorating their door and steps for trick-or-treaters and enjoy the atmosphere of the Halloween party they were going to at a club in West Hollywood. They had buy tickets for it, and it wasn't cheap.

"You have a costume for Saturday, right?" she asked Aubrey as they walked up and down the aisles.

"Aca-scuse me? Did you just meet me?"

"Let me rephrase that – what is your costume?"

"Oh honey, I'm not telling you."
Chloe rolled her eyes. Some things never changed.

"I need one more thing, though. I didn't want to risk packing them in my bag. I don't know what the rules are."

"What do you need?" Chloe asked, curiosity piqued.

"Get in line; I'll be right back."

Aubrey disappeared down an aisle and Chloe waited in the massive line full of last-minute shoppers. She hated that she was one of them; she normally would have this handled in August, maybe September, but her schedule and lack of reliable transportation made it difficult.

She was unloading items from her basket when she heard Aubrey excusing her way to the front of the line, tossing her accessory onto the counter in time to get scanned.

"I'll pay you back."

"That's fine," Chloe said as she dug in her purse for her debit card. She swiped it through the machine and watched her purchases be bagged up, and noticed what Aubrey had added to the pile.

A set of plastic handcuffs.

Chloe shivered despite the heat of the crowded store, memories ripping through her – her experience with Beca, mostly, but the inappropriate thoughts about her best friend followed. She wondered if she could try to make Beca's fantasy come true. She wondered if their friendship could handle even the proposition of it. She wondered if her relationship with Beca could withstand it.

She also wondered what the handcuffs were for.
Chloe and Aubrey were on the couch doing some much-needed catching up when a taxi dropped off Beca.

The front steps were already decorated with stretchy spider webs and evil-looking red lights, and Chloe's favorite element - a novelty door knocker that, when used, sent an ominous gong through the apartment via electronic transmitter.

She could hear Beca's keys in the door jangling and then stopping, and then the knocker gonged, sending Chloe into a fit of excited giggles as she scurried to the door.

"Hi, babe!" she said as she swung the door opened and leaned in for a kiss.

"Hey," Beca said when they parted. "Is that bitch here yet? Oh, hey Aubrey!"

Chloe bit her lip, trying not to laugh in case Beca's comment landed poorly.

"Beca! I'm so sorry to tell you that TSA confiscated the gift I brought for you."

"Is that so?" Beca asked, smirking as she dumped her gear on the floor by the door.

Aubrey stood up and walked over. "Something about it being illegal to transport gardening tools in my carry-on?"

Chloe tilted her head, not getting it.

Beca seemed stuck, too, then, "Ahh. Like a garden gnome. Because I'm short. Good one, never heard that before."

"Was it bad? I considered going with 'mass quantities of ear monstrosities,' but I noticed you've taken to wearing hoops instead of spikes."
"You know, just for you, I think I'll put the spikes back in."

Aubrey laughed and opened her arms, and Beca hugged her. "Hey, Beca."

"Hey." Beca dislodged from the hug quickly, still not one for excessive amounts of physical contact - Chloe being the exception to that rule. "Welcome to our humble abode."

Chloe finally closed the door, satisfied that no one would need an escape route.

"Humble? Beca, this place is really nice."

Beca shrugged and went to the kitchen, grabbing a beer out of the fridge for herself and holding up two others in offering. Both girls nodded.

"My dad helped me. Since I actually stayed in college all four years, he had more time to save."
She twisted the caps off the beers and joined them in the living room, taking the armchair since Chloe and Aubrey had reclaimed the couch. "It's a rental, but I have the option to buy it if I want."

"The neighborhood seems nice. Why wouldn't you?"

"I don't know," Beca said, tucking her feet under her. "I'd like to see more of the city first. Maybe I'll like a different area better, you know? And it would be nice to pick out a place with Chlo. I already had this before...well, before things changed."

Chloe felt her heart skip. It was the first real acknowledgment by Beca that they could have a future together. Finding a new home together was a pretty big deal.

"You moved in with each other literally days after getting together. I guess that stereotype exists for a reason."

"Shut up," Beca and Chloe responded in unison.
Aubrey laughed and shook her head. "How it took so long for this to happen is beyond me. It was obvious Beca's first year that you two had toners for each other."

Beca rolled her eyes. "Oh my God, why do you still have that word in your vocabulary?"

"Call it what you will. Regardless, I'm happy for you both. Now, Chloe - tell me. What's it like teaching little kids? Easier than trying to coach the Bellas, I'm sure."

"I'll never understand how you convince me to dress up every year," Beca said, voice dripping with false disdain. Her eyes were sparkling with excitement and the vodka tonics they were enjoying before heading to the club.

"Because underneath that hard, cold, heartless exterior...is a sarcastic bitch. And underneath that is a girl who actually likes to have fun once in awhile." Chloe worked a purple ribbon into her hair despite Beca's shove, tying it at the base of her neck. It matched her long-sleeved purple dress, which she knew hugged her curves perhaps a tad too much with a hem that fell several inches above her knees, but it was Halloween after all. A lime green scarf and lavender vinyl go-go boots completed her costume. Very briefly she had considered using her Merida costume, but there was literally nothing sexy about Merida; it's not like it was a "sexy Merida" costume, which definitely existed based on a Google search.

But this one was sexy.

Beca tugged at the turtleneck of her orange sweater. "I also don't understand why you get to be Daphne and I have to be Velma."

"Because," Chloe said, looping her scarf so it sat just-so. "It makes sense. This way, we don't have to wear wigs."

"I look like a Class A nerd." Beca took off her prescription-free thick-framed glasses and slid them on again, looking at herself in the full-length mirror.

Chloe turned to look at her as well, taking in the red mini-skirt, orange knee-high socks, and red single-strap chunky heels. "Nerds are hot."
Beca rolled her eyes and picked up her glass from the nearby dresser to take a long drink. "Did you talk Aubrey into being Fred or Shaggy? Or is she getting into a Scooby costume down there right now?"

Chloe laughed, imagining Aubrey as any one of those characters. "No, I don't know what she's doing; she wouldn't tell me." She walked to the top of the staircase to shout, "Bree, you ready?"

"Yeah!" drifted back up to her, a little echoey coming from the guest bathroom on the first floor.

"What about you - you ready, babe?"

Beca tugged at her sweater again, commenting on its itchiness, and nodded. "Yeah, let's get this show on the road."

"So!" Chloe said, excitedly, as they descended. "What has the great Aubrey Posen cooked up this year?"

"I couldn't go as elaborate as I would have liked since I had to pack it, but…” Aubrey stepped out of the bathroom wearing what could quite possibly be the tightest policeman's uniform Chloe had ever seen, complete with a cap and black stiletto boots, and a shirt that was only buttoned halfway. And now the handcuffs made sense.

"Well it's not Shaggy or Scooby, but now we have the cop to arrest the villains when we unmask them." Beca gave Aubrey a once-over and two thumbs up before stepping behind the island in the kitchen to pour another half-inch of vodka into her glass over the leftover ice, swirled it around a few times, and tossed it back.

"Men are afraid of women in positions of power, while simultaneously aroused by them." Aubrey spun a plastic billy club a few times and slid it into her utility belt. It also housed a hot pink plastic water pistol, the handcuffs, and a cell phone holster. "I plan on toying with several male emotions tonight. Also, you guys are kind of adorable."

"Thanks!" Beca rejoined them, hanging on Chloe a little bit, the vodka starting to kick in. "I want to make one thing clear about tonight."
"And what is that?" Chloe asked, amused by Beca's lightweightedness when it came to alcohol.

"I don't care who you bring home, Aubrey. Just keep the noise down and don't fuck on my table. It's from IKEA. It's not made of steel. I don't need you breaking it."

Aubrey's eyebrows lifted, surprised by Beca's directness. "Okay...consider it noted?"

A horn honked, interrupting the awkward silence that fell.

"Oh, car's here!" Beca said, pecking Chloe's cheek before turning grab her purse, already re-packed from her usual bag. Chloe found appropriately retro purses for both of them - Beca's red, hers lavender - at a thrift shop, along with most of the other components of their costumes.

"Car?" Aubrey asked, clipping her iPhone onto her belt as she followed. "We're not driving?"

"Work perk," Chloe explained, falling in next to Aubrey to lock up the apartment. "Beca's label reimburses her for transportation, or they have drivers she can request. She never uses them, but this way we none of us needs to be the designated driver."

"Nice."

"Hurry up, bitches. I know you want to take a selfie before we leave." Beca was waiting by the car, leaning on it, the driver politely standing aside after having opened the rear door.

Chloe fished her phone out of her purse and asked the driver to take the photo. "For someone complaining about 'having' to go out tonight, you sure are excited to get the party started," she teased.

"I'm ready to blow off some steam." Beca ducked under Chloe's arm for the photo; Aubrey on the opposite side. Chloe felt Beca's breath on her ear, making her shiver. "And the sooner we leave, the sooner we can come home."

Chloe swallowed at the suggestive tone and smiled for the photo. She didn't know exactly what Beca was implying - sex, obviously, but just what "type" of sex did she have in mind? Did Beca
expect her to make good on making her fantasy come true? Is that why she was suddenly so excited?

"What are you two whispering about?"

"Nothing," Chloe rushed.

It was nearing 11:00PM when they arrived at the club, and while it wasn't particularly early, it wasn't late either, not by WeHo standards. They showed their IDs to the bouncer at the door and, thanks to those timing standards, the group was able to claim a spot on the floor not too far from the bar. The crowd was already hyped - a mixed bag of elaborate costumes, girls wearing animal ear headbands, guys wearing masks, and the lame-los who didn't bother with costumes. Music blasted, a mix of the typical Halloween jams and pop and hip-hop tracks thrown in to keep up the energy.

It took approximately five minutes for a group of four guys who considered sports jerseys to be costumes, beers in hand, to descend on the trio of girls.

"Sup, ladies?" the one in the Dallas Cowboys jersey asked. "Daphne and Velma? Hot. And a lady cop? Hot."

"Thanks," Beca said bitingly. "But we're not interested."

"Not so fast," Aubrey said, whipping her billy club out of her belt to push the tip of it into the man's chest. "They might not be interested, but that doesn't mean I'm not." One of her most predatory smiles spread across her face and she stepped forward, pushing her chosen prey backward and away from his group - away from the protection of the herd like a lioness.

"That was quick," Chloe said, amused as they watched Aubrey and her guy disappear into the crowd.

The other three men lingered, making her uncomfortable, amusement quickly forgotten. She knew they weren't going to give up so easily, and she was right when the one in a Kobe Bryant jersey decided to be bold and put his arm around her waist and pull her to his side. Chloe tried to step out of it but his fingers gripped her waist, setting off alarm bells in her head.
"Hey," Beca said, pointing. "Hands off."

"Girls alone in a club on Halloween? You must be looking for some fun."

"You're not the kind of fun we're looking for," Chloe said, feeling gross, smelling the beer on his breath.

"Back off, dude," Beca said, voice escalating. She stepped into his personal space, staring up at him. He had nearly a foot on her in height, but Beca was scrappy, especially when she had a few drinks in her. "She's with me."

"She's with you?" The guy looked confused, and then laughed, and then grinned. "You're lesbians?"

"We're together, yes," Chloe said, growing impatient as she tried pushing his hand off her again, to no avail.

"That's hot. I bet you ladies could use a real man in the bedroom." He grabbed his crotch to make his point.

Chloe opened her mouth to tell him to eff off when Beca interrupted her.

"You're right!" Beca said, smiling. "You're totally right. We do need a real man to help us out. Are you the one that can do that?"

Chloe tilted her head, wondering just where she was going with this.

"You know I am, babe."

"Oh, that's great news! One thing, though..." She paused, digging around in her purse to produce a magnifying glass - it was the details that counted when it came to costumes, after all - and crouched down in front of him, aiming it at his crotch and squinting. "Jinkies! My investigation
confirms my suspicion that you are indeed not sufficiently endowed to serve us in this manner. Daphne, I think we can consider this case closed."

Chloe covered her mouth to stop the laugh that was about to burst forth and pulled out of the guy's grip with ease as he sputtered in confusion, looking for support from his buddies who were doubled over laughing.

"Like I said," Beca finished, dropping the lens back into her bag, "we're not interested."

"Come on, bro," one of the wingmen said, still laughing. "Swing and a miss. Leave them alone. Have a good night, ladies."

Chloe was relieved that they departed without further harassment, and she took a long drink of her vodka tonic. "Thanks, Velma."

She felt Beca's arm slip around her waist. "No problem, Daph. You know, it's kind of fun being totally anonymous. Let's not use our real names tonight."

Chloe laughed. "Are you suggesting we...role play?"

"That's literally what we're already doing." Beca gestured at Chloe's costume and then her own. "So, for the rest of the night, you're Daphne and I'm Velma. God, what an un-sexy name. Velma."

"Okay...Velma," Chloe said with a giggle. She was caught a little off-guard by Beca kissing her mid-laugh.

"But it's sexy when you say it." Beca kissed her again and then grabbed her hand, pulling Chloe toward the dance floor. "Come on come on come on! Daphne! It's going down, fade to Blackstreet, the homies got R&B, collab' creations..."

"Oh no, it's on, now!" Chloe said with a grin as Beca rapped along to the intro of "No Diggity." She remembered it like it was yesterday when Beca finally felt confident enough with the Bellas to jump into her first riff-off, and when she could have picked literally any song, she chose an R&B classic and rapped the intro flawlessly. It was one of the many moments Chloe fell head over heels for Beca.
She held Beca's waist as they swayed to the melody of the song, singing along with the rest of the club. By chance, the slow rotation of the people on the dance floor brought Aubrey into her line of sight, and she had to laugh and nudge Beca, pointing her out.

Aubrey had apparently ditched the football jersey and had herself another cop, the two of them dancing more than a little closely. Aubrey noticed them, too, and held her hand up to her ear as though straining to hear them, and then joined in singing the chorus, smiled, and went back to focusing on her policeman.

When Michael Jackson's "Thriller" came on, of course it was Aubrey that somehow managed to get half the club organized on the dance floor to do the infamous video choreography. She barked orders and wielded her water pistol to get people in line, and Chloe was sure she was suddenly in some comedy movie, because in what world do people break out into synchronized choreography? *Outside of the Bellas, anyway.*

Hers, apparently, because she was in the front row, having been dragged into place by Aubrey, along with Beca, to help lead it. As ridiculous as the concept was, Chloe of course lived for a good song and dance number.

When the song ended, people cheered and whistled and more than one person had filmed it with their phone. She made a mental note to check YouTube tomorrow and turned to grab Beca, surprised to see her hugging Aubrey, who looked almost as shocked as she did. Beca said something in her ear and Chloe felt her heart race. Was she doing it? Was she propositioning Aubrey just like that? She watched Aubrey's face for a reaction, and it was one of confusion, and then...she looked at Chloe and nodded.

And Chloe's heart dropped through her stomach to her feet.

Beca turned to her at just that moment, flushed and wearing a face-splitting grin. She was definitely three sheets to the wind. "Daphneeee!!" she called, scurrying over to throw her arms around Chloe's neck and kiss her, a little sloppily. "Are you having fun, baby?" she asked when she pulled back.

Chloe looked over Beca's shoulder at Aubrey, who was watching them, a hint of a smile on her face. Did she agree to it? Was she enjoying watching them make out? Was she into it? Did Chloe want her to be into it? Sure Aubrey looked hot in her uniform with her legs and hips and cleavage and blood red lipstick, but...could she actually go through with it?
"We need to talk," she said to Beca, taking her hand to pull her away from the gyrating dance floor where it was easier to hear.

"What's up, Daph?" Beca said, hands apparently unable to stop moving as they skipped around Chloe's body, holding and caressing. Chloe tried to ignore it.

"I don't think I can do this," Chloe said, having to half-shout it to be heard when she would have rather whispered it.

Beca looked confused. "Do what?" She pouted. "You're not having fun? But you love Halloween."

Chloe shook her head. She had to be honest, and if she was honest with herself, she knew that she could never actually have sex with her best friend. Even if it would make Beca the happiest girl in the world. "I can't do it, I'm sorry."

Beca's hands finally stopped moving. "Babe, what are you talking about?"

"Sleep with Aubrey. I can't do it, I'm so sorry, I know it's your fantasy and she agreed to do it, but -"

"Whoa," Beca said, taking a step back, then grabbing Chloe's hand to pull her out the back entrance of the club meant for smokers. "When did you ask her? And she said yes?"

"You asked her." Chloe gestured back into the club. "Just now. And she looked right at me and nodded."

Beca was sporting her shocked face. "What the hell are you talking about?"

"What?" Chloe asked, growing exasperated.

"I didn't proposition Aubrey."

"You didn't?!!"
"No! Jesus, I was telling her I was going to request a song for the three of us."

Relief flooded Chloe and she pressed a hand to her chest, feeling her heart return to its proper place. "Oh thank goodness."

"We haven't even talked about it since that day. You really thought I would do that to you?"

"You just seemed so excited to be out, and get home, and the way you were whispering in her ear, and..."

"I was leaning in so she could hear me; I wasn't whispering!" Beca looked flabbergasted and Chloe felt like a fool.

"Chloe..." They stepped aside to allow someone else onto the patio. "I never expected us to actually do anything with her. It was just a fantasy. I don't know if I even could, if we tried. I mean...it's Aubrey."

Chloe felt as though the weight of the entire Earth floated off her shoulders. She also felt more than a little like a fool. It wasn't like her to not talk about something, and she'd gone all that time thinking and wondering when she could have simply talked to Beca and saved herself all the trouble and stress. She shook her head.

"I've been trying to psych myself up for this for days and just couldn't do it. You were so good with me about what I wanted to try, Beca; I really wanted to make yours come true."

"Handcuffs aren't quite the same level as screwing your best friend. I never expected you to actually...go through with it." Beca's shock softened, and she smiled a little. "But it's really, really sweet that you were trying to be okay with it for me."

"I wanted to make you happy."

"Chlo." She said, smiling. "You do make me happy. I'm happier with you than I ever have been."
"Gosh, so sappy," Chloe laughed, to stop herself from crying.

"Don't worry though," Beca said, taking Chloe's hand to head back into the club. "I told you I had other ideas you might be down for. So, there's still hope."

"Beca!"

"It's Velma."
Velma had Daphne cornered in a bathroom stall.

Not that Chloe was complaining. In fact, she was almost ashamed at how many times she whispered, "Yes," as Beca asked her if she was okay, if she wanted her, if she was horny, if she was naughty, if she was close. If she was hers.

She had to grab the top edge of the stall to keep herself upright with the magic happening under her skirt.

She was almost ashamed when she knew Aubrey walked into the bathroom in the middle of it, loudly chatting with another girl about their possible selection of mates for the evening. She was almost ashamed when a moan escaped and Aubrey loudly commented that she could recognize Chloe's voice anywhere, and added that Beca better be treating her best friend properly in there - or else.

She was almost ashamed when she moaned again and slapped her other hand against a metal wall to indicate that yes, Beca was treating her like a queen in there; a drunk, horny queen with her thong around her knees and a foot on the edge of a toilet, but a queen nonetheless. A thought flitted around in her blurry brain that she could be mortified about this in the morning, her bestie essentially walking in with naught but an aluminum box separating them, even communicating with each other in the middle of it.

But a third finger made its presence known and Chloe didn't give a hoot. She came apart with Beca's teeth pulling on her earlobe, chuckling proudly in her ear before groaning as Chloe spun them and returned the favor.

"I swear, you're going to get me arrested one of these days," Chloe said as they caught their breath and pulled underwear up legs that were made unsteady by more than just the alcohol consumed that night.

Beca unlocked the stall and washed her hands at the sink, still smiling. "Jail isn't so bad. And you do have an affinity for handcuffs."

Chloe laughed, a big, loud laugh because she'd almost forgotten Beca got arrested at their first Regional competition, and the thought of Beca in the slammer was hilarious. Maybe the vodka and
endorphins made it funnier.

She had more fun on the dance floor after their...release. It was pushing 2:00 AM and they were both dancing with guys who were nice enough to ask permission instead of strutting up and grinding their crotches into their backsides, which seemed to be the M.O. for many of the guys that night. For the most part, these guys even kept their hands to themselves.

It felt weird to Chloe, watching Beca dance with a guy. Beca and Jesse never really danced. Not like she danced with Chloe or this guy. No, their dancing was usually a form of jumping around, maybe while holding hands. There was no grabbing and there was certainly no grinding like there was now.

She was jealous, sure, but kept it in check since she wasn't exactly being so innocent with the cutie with the bright smile and dark eyes in a doctor costume. But it was also sexy the way Beca moved with him, the way she put her hands on his chest or ran her fingers through her hair or made eye contact with Chloe when she did it, smirking, as though she knew she was driving her crazy.

Briefly, she considered joining in Beca's game, but her guy was getting a little too excited behind her with all the grinding happening, and she didn't want to lead him on. So she eased away from him, turning around to excuse herself, and he let her go, miming as though she had broken his heart. She smiled apologetically and stepped behind her girlfriend to hold her waist and fall into Beca and her partner's rhythm.

Beca looked over her shoulder at her, a little amused, maybe a little curious as to why Chloe didn't simply cut in but rather joined them.

"It's kinda hot watching you dance with him," she husked in Beca's ear.

Beca definitely heard her, because Beca's dancing grew less and less innocent; Chloe could feel it in the way her hips moved because her own were pressed into Beca to move in sync. She had to move her arm from around Beca's waist because there simply wasn't room for it any longer. She settled for one hand on her waist and one on her shoulder, using it to pull her hair back. At the moment, Chloe hated that Beca was in a turtleneck; her lips desperately wanted to latch onto her neck and not let go. She settled for pressing them to the curve of her jaw below her ear.

She felt hands on her own waist and looked down, surprised to see guy resting his hands on her lightly. She looked up to meet his green eyes and he was smiling, but not the gross creeper smile most guys flashed when they saw Beca and Chloe display any level of PDA. It was one of those nice smiles that didn't have ulterior motives behind it, despite the fact that he pretty much had two
drunk girls grinding on him.

"That's a good color on you," he said, loud enough for her to hear, voice distinctly pitched higher than she expected.

And she laughed. No wonder he was being so restrained. He was gay.

No sooner had she realized it than another man joined them, announcing he would be stealing him for the night, and their little dirty dance was over.

Beca turned and draped her arms over Chloe's shoulders, still dancing, eyes closed as she felt the music. Chloe watched her, the flush of her cheeks, the way her tongue absentmindedly licked her lips as she tilted her head back and lifted her arms, hands over her head as she moved, taken by the beat. She held Beca's waist lightly and felt her twisting and bending beneath her fingertips. Chloe had always found Beca sexy, to varying degrees, depending on the circumstance; it ranged from adorable-sexy to porn star-sexy, and right now she was somewhere at Beyoncé-sexy, pulling at her sweater because it was really too hot for a turtleneck sweater, or lifting her hair off her neck in a way that dared Chloe to kiss it.

Her hands moved instinctively, slipping under the sweater, and she was reminded that Beca was wearing a camisole under it. It was black, not orange, and would thus break the perfection of their costumes, but she couldn't bear to see Beca be uncomfortable, even though she wasn't actually complaining. So, she did something that under more sober conditions would have likely made them both take pause: she pulled the glasses off Beca's face, hung them on the neckline of her own dress, and whipped the sweater up and over Beca's head in one quick motion, careful to keep the camisole in place.

Beca wore a look of surprise once her face was re-revealed. She looked down at herself and the sweater that Chloe was now trying to figure out to do with as it hung limply in her hand.

"You planning to strip me naked on the dance floor?" she said, shouting to be heard.

"You looked hot," she shouted back.

"You look hot, too," Beca said with a wink as she threaded her fingers through the damp hair at the base of Chloe's neck, tugging a little, making Chloe shiver.
They both knew that wasn't the kind of hot Chloe meant, but the kiss she found herself pulled into made it that kind of hot, and she had to wrench herself out of it after a minute or two because, well...it was hot.

The DJ announced last call and with a gasp and a clap, Beca disappeared, saying something that sounded like market research? leaving Chloe alone on the dance floor with her sweater. She assumed she was running to the bar, but instead she saw her climb the steps to the DJ booth; it was the second time she had visited it and the guy appeared to remember her. Chloe watched them talk for a moment and the guy shook her hand and pulled off his headphones and handed them to her, to which Chloe's jaw dropped.

She knew DJs didn't hand over their booth to just anyone. It took nearly a year before Beca allowed Chloe to play with her gear unsupervised. But apparently, Beca talked her way into it, wearing the headphones just-so to sit on one ear and off the other. Chloe watched her from the floor as she eyed the equipment, familiarizing herself.

Chloe recognized the look on her face, the one she got when her fingers were about to manipulate music. She saw her reach into the pocket of her skirt and pull out what she assumed was a USB stick and pop it into the MacBook. Chloe watched her stare at the screen, and press buttons, and pick up the microphone.

"Happy Halloween, you beautiful people!" she shouted into the mic over the music. "Who's having a good time tonight?"

The dance floor erupted in cheers, Chloe in the middle of it, silent and smiling up at Beca who was never more at home than she was in front of that equipment.

"DJ Squick is giving me the booth for a hot second, so listen up! My name is Beca Mitchell and I'm producing Katy Perry's new record. Anyone heard of her?"

More cheers, and Chloe wondered what she was up to.

The music faded out as Beca's wrist rotated, and Chloe heard the bass line of the song she watched Beca and Katy work on recently start thumping. "I'm gonna play her new track for you because you're all fucking amazing! This is called 'This Girl Says' and it drops February 9th! So don't you fuckers dare record this because no one has heard this yet!"
Dozens of smartphones appeared, videoing, recording. Beca smiling, knowing exactly what she was doing - Beca, the girl who was dragged kicking and screaming into the world of social media by Chloe who insisted she have a Facebook profile was staging a viral, guerilla marketing event.

Beca set the mic down, fixed her headphones to sit properly, and used both hands, mixing the opening of her song with the outro of the previous song until it was only hers playing, the intro repeating until Chloe watched Beca's wrist flick and the bass dropped. A turn with her other hand and the song started properly. It was a little different than what Chloe had heard in the studio. A remix. Beca's remix.

Cheers rose again as the dance floor churned to the beat. Beca's beat. And Chloe watched them as she turned slowly in place, taking it in. Hundreds of people, dancing to Beca's creation as she watched from the booth, hands on her hips, sometimes tapping a key on the computer or fiddling with something on the turntable. Smiling, a faint, faint smile that was almost not a smile at all, but Chloe saw it.

She felt as she did that night in the empty pool at their first riff-off. Watching Beca take over, be confident in doing what she does best. She was glowing. She was watching Chloe, she realized, her smile growing. Chloe felt her toes wiggle, tapping in her boots to the beat. Her feet itched, wanting to move. She wanted to just stand and watch and absorb, but she couldn't. It was too infectious. Of course, it was; Beca created it and Beca was a genius. She was bouncing. Beca was grinning. And then Chloe was jumping, arms over her head, laughing, and singing along to the few lyrics she remembered, and swinging Beca's orange sweater over her head like a helicopter - until it caught someone's hand and was ripped from her fingers, consumed by the dance floor, just as she was.

When it was over, Beca didn't say anything. She didn't address the crowd or take further credit. She mixed her track out, ejected the USB stick, handed the headphones back to DJ Squick who gave her one of those handshakes that pulled each other into a chest bump kind of thing, and Beca hopped down the steps to run back to Chloe, who was ready for her with open arms. The impact nearly flattened her, but the dance floor was too crowded to let that happen, and the people she fell into pushed her back onto her feet.

"Holy shit, dude!" Beca screamed in her ear. Chloe would have winced but it had grown so loud in the club over the course of the night, she knew she was suffering short-term hearing damage.

Chloe held her tight; Beca seemed to be vibrating head to toe, energy pouring off her in waves. When she pulled back, tears were rolling down her cheeks, and Chloe couldn't be certain the same wasn't happening on her own face. And Chloe knew Beca's tears weren't drunk tears. They were real, experiencing the euphoria of hearing her creation blast in a club and seeing people dance to it. They were tears of dreams coming true, and Chloe hadn't emotionally prepared herself for this; Beca playing the song had been a surprise. She had planned to share this moment the first time they heard the song on the radio, but the moment was happening now and Chloe wasn't ready to
catch Beca in the way she would have preferred.

But she did her best, yelling how fucking amazing it was and how fucking proud of her she is and how much she fucking loves her and how she can't fucking believe this is real but she always fucking knew Beca could do it, because yeah, this moment calls for that word's repeated use.

And then someone else slammed into them like Beca had collided with Chloe. Somehow, through the sea of writhing bodies, Aubrey had found them and was plastered to Beca's back in a hug so massive Chloe was caught up in it, too, and there was more yelling and what probably qualified as screaming, and jumping until they finally broke apart, a mess of laughter and running mascara. They followed Beca out of the club as she put her phone to her ear, too far away for Chloe to make out what she was saying, ears muffled once they stepped into the cool, clear night.

It was only then that Chloe noticed that there were four of them waiting on the sidewalk for the car Beca was probably summoning. Aubrey's fellow policeman was stuck to her side, hand roaming a little obviously up and down her back, saying something in her ear as she giggled.

There was part of her that couldn't believe Aubrey was seriously bringing a guy home from the club with her - into her home. But she knew Aubrey and knew she knew what she was doing, and it wasn't like Chloe had never brought someone home with her from a club. But because she was choosy, those selections left in the morning - or sometimes before sunrise - not getting quite everything they hoped for.

So with a look between them that simply acknowledged what was happening, the four of them climbed into the back of the black Escalade, Chloe and Beca taking the middle row captain's chairs, surrendering the rear bench to the law enforcement imposters pawing at each other.

Chloe wondered if she should say something to Beca. What had happened was epic. It was beyond epic. It was the first page of a new chapter in Beca's - in both of their lives. But Beca was quiet in her seat, eyes closed, a peaceful smile on her lips, and Chloe bit her tongue. And tried hard to ignore the wet smacking sounds of a heavy make-out session happening behind her.

"Hey, keep it in your pants," Beca barked suddenly, startling Chloe as she'd started to drift to sleep, head resting against the cool window of the vehicle. She chuckled, heart racing a little at the sudden outburst as she kept her eyes on Beca. She didn't dare look to see what was going on in the back seat; the movement reflected in the window each time they passed under a streetlight was enough insight.

"I was in that bathroom, too. Turnabout's fair play," Aubrey said before she was once again
Chloe felt her face warm at the reminder.

When they got home, she had to smack her hand repeatedly against the window of the SUV, right behind Aubrey's head, to get their attention even though they had stopped, the dome light was on, and conversations were had with the driver. It was with an apology that Aubrey climbed out, face flushed and red lipstick nonexistent. Much of it was on her partner who followed a moment later.

Chloe unlocked the apartment and only turned on enough lights for everyone to see where they were going - Beca and Chloe to the stairs and Aubrey and her man to...well, she assumed the couch.

"I wasn't joking," Beca said from the kitchen, pouring two huge glasses of water to leave on the coffee table as Chloe climbed the stairs. "Don't break the fucking table. I really like it. And maybe put a blanket down first."

Chloe had anticipated coming home to a ravenous, wall-pinning, neck-biting, clothes-ripping experience after their haphazard rendezvous in the club bathroom and all the subsequent kissing and grinding and adrenaline.

But as she washed her face at the sink and watched Beca sit down on the toilet, already undressed, waving her hand at Chloe when she pointed at the door questioning if she should give her privacy, she realized how overwhelmingly tired she was. Beca seemed to be on the exact same page, yawning, eyes closed, barely opening them to shuffle to the sink and bump Chloe out of the way with her naked hip. Which was fine, since Chloe had moved on to brushing her teeth and didn't need the sink at the moment anyway. And the way Beca leaned against her, as though she physically could not support herself, as she brushed her own teeth was really kind of adorable.

So she wasn't at all surprised that they crawled into bed, spooned loosely, and almost instantly fell asleep.

But she couldn't ignore it.

It was insistent, the thumping.
"Jesus Christ," Beca said with an exhale. "Are we going to have to listen to this all night?" There was a screech of wood against wood and Chloe felt Beca tense. "I swear to God if they're on the table…"

Chloe laughed into Beca's hair, pulling her a little closer and trailing her fingers down into the hollow of her hip. "We could give them a run for their money." It was a half-hearted attempt at flirting, and she really hoped Beca would turn her down; she was just so, so tired, but if she bit, she would muster the energy from somewhere.

Beca was quiet a moment, and then, "Babe, I seriously want to, but I don't think I can lift my own head right now."

She slid her hand down and patted Beca's rear end, earning a weak chuckle from the brunette. "Maybe we can wake them up nice and early instead."

Beca sniffed and settled further into her pillow. "I swear to God, you better not wake me up for sex."

Chloe gasped, playfully indignant. "Hell just froze over."

"As long as it's not before noon."

They were up before noon, but not by either girl's volition. They'd forgotten to close the curtains before they went to bed, and the morning light poured in, blinding them painfully in bed.

"Close them," Beca said, voice muffled by the pillow over her face. She slapped blindly in Chloe's direction, connecting once or twice with her face and chest until Chloe gave in and rolled out of bed. "Please."

She regretted it instantly, for as soon as she stood up, her head seemed to want to split in two and her stomach was raring to turn inside out. She sat back down, holding both and clenching her jaw.

"Chlo."
Chloe forced a hummed "uh-uh" as she waited for her stomach to stop churning. She didn't remember how much she had to drink the night before. She knew they were drinking before they left, and more than one guy had bought them a round. Usually, she was more responsible, downing at least a liter of water before going to bed to ward off the hangover, but she was too tired and barely had a swallow of water since rinsing her mouth after brushing her teeth.

And she was hardcore regretting it.

She tried standing again, slowly this time, hoping her stomach wouldn't revolt. She managed to get to the window and pull the curtains, but she had to put in a little extra effort to get the curtain to move, and it was more than it could take, and sent her running to the bathroom.

Beca appeared in the doorway as she flushed the toilet. She was holding her head, too, but didn't seem green in the face. "You okay?" she asked.

She pulled herself up from her knees, palms pressed into the counter as she leaned into it, head down. "Ugh. I haven't puked after drinking since I turned 21." She opened the faucet and leaned down, rinsing her mouth before reaching for her toothbrush. She did feel better, though.

"I nominate you to be the one to go downstairs," Beca said, pulling on a T-shirt. "If I see...body parts...or my table busted, I'll be the next one puking."

Chloe accepted her nomination and worked her way into yoga pants and a tank, moving slowly to not give her morning sprint to the bathroom a sequel. As she descended the stairs, she was met with the quiet sounds of morning news and the scent of coffee which made her stomach rumble in a good way.

"Well good morning, sunshine." Aubrey was freshly showered and dressed, on the couch with a bowl of cereal and a cup of coffee. "I reloaded the Keurig."

"Mmm," Chloe said, having to squint at the brightness of the main floor; literally every blind and curtain was open, natural light pouring in. She pressed the brew button on the machine and leaned against the island, rubbing her temples. When it was finished, she added a splash of milk and her usual two packets of Splenda and shuffled to the living room to ease into the chair. She would have taken the couch, but the chair faced away from the bay window and was thus less painful. "Where's your guy?" she asked, blowing over the rim of her mug to expedite its drinkability.
"He left a few hours ago."

"Gonna talk to him again?"

Aubrey pushed around her Frosted Flakes and took a bite, chewing thoughtfully. "I wouldn't mind. But I'm leaving tonight anyway."

"You give him your number?"

Aubrey smiled, and Chloe knew that look. It wasn't Aubrey's "pump and dump" face - her definition was very different than Fat Amy's. She really liked the guy.

"Maybe you'll end up getting married and you can move out here to LA, too!" Chloe said, already excited by the possibility.

"Oh my God, I just met him! I don't even know his last name."

"I know you know his first name," Beca said, winding her way down the stairs. "Heard you screaming it half the night."

"Beca!" Aubrey snapped, flustered. Chloe laughed and the intensified pounding in her head made her regret it.

Beca ignored the outburst and took her turn at the coffee maker. "What time does your flight leave?"

"4:30."

Beca took a less direct route to the living room, aiming for the front door and stopping short. "Who the hell ate all the Kit Kats?"
Chloe looked over to watch her dig through what remained in the trick-or-treat candy bowl, frowning. She couldn't handle the thought of consuming chocolate at the moment, but she really hoped the peanut butter cups weren't gone, too.

"Oops."

"Seriously?"

"We were hungry!" Aubrey said, defending herself.

"Yeah well, you sure as hell worked up an appetite."

"Oh my - you know what? No. No more of this teasing about sex. We are all adults here. You don't see me giving you a hard time about...about what was happening in the bathroom at the club. I could go on and on and make all kinds of innuendos, but I'm not. Because I'm a grown-up and I respect your relationship and your choices."

Beca seemed caught off guard by Aubrey's reaction, and then she relaxed. "A 'grown-up'? Really, Posen?" She took a seat on the couch next to the blonde, and Chloe was just thankful the tête-à-tête was shifting topics.

Sometime later, while Chloe was half-asleep, she overheard the other women talking about the song Beca shared last night, and it yanked Chloe back to consciousness with a gasp. "YouTube! We need to check YouTube!"

She regretted moving so quickly as she leaned forward and grabbed her laptop, running searches in two separate tabs - one for Beca's song and one for their "Thriller" routine. It took a minute to find their routine - they were not the only group in a club to do that last night, apparently - but there were dozens and dozens of recent uploads labeled with various versions of "Katy Perry - This Girl Says." She scrolled until she found one uploaded by the actual club, assuming it would be the best. Opting to throw the video onto the TV instead, she activated their Chromecast, made the player full screen, turned up the volume on the TV, and pressed play. She plopped down on the floor in front of Beca, grabbed her ankles, and pulled her legs to hang over her shoulders, feet resting against her chest.

And there it was.
Video shot from above the dance floor, zooming in on Beca shouting into the mic, which earned a self-conscious comment from her, and then the song burst forth. She felt tears welling again and she wrapped her hands around Beca's feet, jostling them to the beat.

"You know, Beca," Aubrey started while the song played. "We have our differences and that will never change, but I hope you know how happy for you I am. And how grateful I am that you came into our lives. You really did make us better."

That pulled the sob out of Chloe's throat.

"Dude, you're going to cry at my sentimental moment?" Beca chided, kicking her heel into Chloe's boob.

"Sorry," Chloe choked out, covering her hand with her mouth.

"I appreciate that, Aubrey, Really. And, uh...I'm sorry about all the jokes this morning. I'm glad you had a good time."

Chloe squeezed Beca's feet, trying not to cry. She was hyperemotional, dehydrated, hungover, hungry, and her best friends were working to bury the hatchet even deeper than they had buried it when they won their first national title together.

"I'm really happy you were able to come out here this week." Chloe merged Beca's Corvette onto the 405, heading south to the airport.

Aubrey rolled up her window against the wind. "Me, too. I had a lot of fun. It was really nice getting to see your new life."

Chloe smiled.

"You seem so happy now. And I mean deeply, soulfully happy."
"I really am. I really am."

Aubrey wanted to say something else; Chloe could hear it in the way she took a breath and held it. She gripped the steering wheel and waited for the shoe to drop.

"Are you...thinking about getting married anytime soon?"

Chloe's mouth fell open; that wasn't the type of statement or question she was expecting from Aubrey. "We...we've only been together like five months."

"But it's really more like four years and five months, Chloe."

"Oh my gosh, why are you talking to me about this right now? I can't even figure out how to ask her -"

Aubrey's gasp silenced her. "So you are thinking about asking her!"

"What? No - no!" She wasn't. Not really. Only sometimes. Like when Beca was being so sweet with her students, and when she defended Chloe to Schmidt and Jimmy, and when she talked about wanting to pick out a new home with her. And an average of once per week since the day they met.

"Chloe."

"Bree, don't make me think about this today."

"Okay, okay," Aubrey said, tone light. "I was just curious where you were at or if you knew what you wanted."

"Let's start with the simple things first, maybe. I want my own car so I don't have to take the bus or borrow Beca's. I want the Louboutin Kristali laser-cut patent leather pumps I saw in the window of Saks last week. I want my performing arts school to actually have the things it needs to teach the performing arts. I want a new little black dress. I haven't bought a new dress since Atlanta. Bree, my closet is becoming a sea of khaki pants and light blue polos."
Aubrey chuckled at that. "The glamorous life of a teacher."

"So glamorous."

They drove in relative silence for a bit, Chloe lost in her thoughts. Aubrey's line of questioning had driven a bit of a wedge into them. Every thought she had had to detour around it. She tried to change the topic.

"Do you think you can come back in March? There's going to be a big release party for Katy's album, and I'll be on Spring Break. It'd be nice if you could come out again."

"Oh…Chloe, I don't know. March and April is my busiest time of year, aside from summer. Since all you teachers are on Break, a lot of schools send them to me for team building."

"Oh, well I guess that makes sense."

"I will see if I can make it work, though. I've been grooming someone to be able to cover for me when needed - not that I could be replaced - and maybe she'll be able to handle a few days on her own by then."

Chloe exited into the airport's departures ramp trying not to cry for the third time in twenty-four hours. "We need to Skype more, okay?" she asked, swallowing the lump in her throat.

"We will. I promise."

"Can we make it a thing? Like every Wednesday night?"

"Okay. Every Wednesday." Aubrey's voice was getting thick with emotion, too, and it wasn't helping Chloe stave off her tears.

She stopped at the curb near Aubrey's airline and popped the trunk, lifting her friend's suitcase out for her. "I really miss you, Bree," she said, finally cracking and letting the tears fall. She got pulled
into a hug and she held onto her tightly.

"I miss you, too. My life isn't the same without you brightening every room I walk into with that smile of yours."

"Crest Whitestrips." She felt Aubrey's silent laugh.

"I love you, Chloe. I'm always here for you. For anything."

Chloe nodded.

"And I swear, when you do start thinking about proposing, you better tell me."

Chloe squeezed her hard and pulled back. "You need to stop."

"Like my father always said -" 

"No. No, I don't want to know."

"- if you like it, then you better put a ring on it."

A bark of laughter escaped Chloe, and she pushed the tears off her cheeks. "Good ol' Beyonce Posen."

"I mean it, Chloe. She's good for you and you're good for her. Don't let her slip away when her life explodes with this music thing."

"Okay, stop pressuring me and get on your plane." She pulled Aubrey into another hug until she knew she needed to let her go.
Chloe was a nervous wreck on the drive home. Aubrey had filled her brain with thoughts and worries and possibilities. Was she ready to get married? Was Beca? Was she going to lose Beca when the crazy publicity side of her career happened? Why was Aubrey planting these seeds in her head?

She was grateful that Beca wasn't home when she returned, having received a text that she was running to the studio and would probably be home late because, if all went as planned, she would be wrapping vocals for the album that night. Her absence allowed her to push those yammering thoughts away and focus on her lesson plans for the week.

She woke when Beca returned after midnight and curled into her, holding tight so she couldn't get away from her.
It was November, and November meant it was time to change Room 17's decor. Chloe packed away the ghosts, bats, pumpkins, and witches and replace them with turkeys and different pumpkins and leaves of yellow, orange, and red.

More importantly? November also meant Beca's birthday was looming.

It wasn't like Chloe forgot; she could and would never. But she was so caught up with the Fall Festival and the Mechanics and Aubrey's visit and work in general that it snuck up on her and suddenly it was Monday and her birthday was Thursday and for the first time in her life, Chloe was scrambling to figure out a gift and how to celebrate it.

She was lucky, though. Beca was pretty low-key when it came to her birthday. Chloe always threw a big house party for her - especially for her twenty-first; hoooo boy did that one go down in the Bellas', maybe even Barden's, history books. But Beca spent most of the night telling her it was really too much and she better not pull a stunt like that again.

But Chloe knew Beca and she knew if she actually listened to her and blew off her birthday, she would be hurt - and probably never let Chloe forget it.

If there's one thing Chloe could do, however, was work well under pressure. And she was proud of herself, though not surprised when she had a romantic candlelit dinner cooked up and waiting for Beca to get home on Thursday. And while she really would have liked to have a new little black dress and those Louboutins, she made do with what she had, which was...a little black dress (what? a girl can't have too many of them) and non-laser-cut black heels. And maybe she took her makeup a little smokier for an evening look, having to rifle through Beca's products to find an eyeshadow and lipstick, and maybe she clipped her hair to the side how Beca always says she likes it; she comments on it every single time without fail. And maybe she went to the salon and got a wax. Maybe she was making herself the gift because she didn't have a clue what to buy her this year.

The way Beca looked her over as she opened the door when she got home told her Beca would
"Happy birthday, baby," she said, leaning down to brush her lips over Beca's. So lightly. A tease. They had all night. She heard Beca's exhale when she didn't get the kiss she expected and smiled at her.

"You look really nice."

Chloe crossed her right ankle behind her left and did a little curtsy. "Thank you." She closed the door and took the messenger bag off her shoulder to set it aside and trailed Beca as she followed her nose into the kitchen to peek into the oven and examine the contents of the pots and saucepans on the stove.

"Chicken parm?"

"Your favorite."

Beca grinned and set the lid back on the sauce. "You do love me."

Chloe twisted her hips, making the skirt of her dress flutter. "Maybe a little."

"Only a little?"

Chloe turned to the island where she'd set out a bottle of red wine to breathe and poured them each a glass. "Okay, maybe more than a little."

Beca smirked, holding the glass and swirling it a bit. "How much more?"

Chloe locked her eyes with Beca's and mustered her most smoldering look, the one she knew could turn Beca into a puddle before she even knew what was happening. "You'll have to wait and see."

It worked because it always worked, and she watched Beca's imitation of a fish out of water for a second before breaking the smolder and smiling. "Will you disappear for a couple of minutes? I
didn't know when you'd be home and I didn't want anything to get cold."

"You're kicking me out of my own birthday dinner?"

"Only for a sec!" she laughed, already taking the chicken out of the oven where it was kept warm. "Take your wine and go."

"Fine, I see how it is," Beca teased, sipping her wine as she went upstairs.

Chloe worked fast, plating pasta and chicken and sauce and retrieving the salads she prepped earlier from the fridge. The candles were already lit, but she twisted the dimmer switch until the lighting was just-so and pressed play on the Spotify's "Warm Fuzzy Feelings" playlist, streaming through Beca's Pill speaker - because frankly, she hadn't had time to build her own playlist, but it would do. It even had a few of "their" songs on it. She had to skip the first track because Coldplay's "Fix You" wasn't exactly the type of romance she was looking for. But mostly, it was a good playlist.

"Can I come back yet?" drifted down from the second floor, and Chloe looked around nervously. She really wanted things to be perfect and memorable. It was Beca's first birthday with Chloe and she didn't want to drop the ball more than she already had with not getting her a physical gift.

"Count to thirty and then you can!"

She heard Beca say something indistinct and then start counting out loud like a child playing hide and seek.

She finished arranging everything on the table, scurried into the guest bathroom to check her hair and makeup one more time, and went to wait at the bottom of the staircase to be one hundred percent ready.

What Chloe wasn't one hundred percent ready for was for Beca to reappear dressed for dinner more akin to herself than how she had come home from the studio. She had swapped her skinny jeans, hoodie, and Converse for a white skirt and sleeveless semi-sheer black button-down, and she'd pulled her hair back into a bit of a sloppy French roll, held in place with a claw clip. She was barefoot though.
It always amazed Chloe, how Beca could transform her entire persona with a simple wardrobe change. She could go from moody alt to flirty chanteuse to red carpet-ready diva without much effort. Admittedly she was a little jealous; she really had to try hard to slough off the bright, pretty girl and replace her with mysterious and sexy. She hoped she was succeeding tonight.

"You changed," she observed as she watched Beca descend the stairs, wine in hand.

"I was underdressed."

"You're absolutely beautiful."

A faint blush touched Beca's cheeks and she smiled her gratitude.

"Come on, sit, sit," Chloe said, snaring Beca's elbow to escort her the short distance from stairs to table. She pulled out Beca's chair and scooted it in for her as she sat before taking her own seat to the right.

She watched Beca look over the table spread. "This looks amazing, babe."

"Can I make a toast? I promise I won't be sappy...well, not that sappy," she amended when Beca looked at her skeptically.

"Of course." Beca held her wine glass, smiling at Chloe, eyes sparkling with the flicker of candle flames.

Chloe retrieved her glass and lifted it, sitting up straight and clearing her throat. "To Beca, on your birthday. May this year, and every year hereafter be the best of your life."

She tilted her glass against Beca's and they sipped.

"You know," Beca said as she picked up her fork, "this really has been the best year of my life."

Chloe smiled, hoping maybe she had at least a little bit to do with making Beca's year so great.
Beca definitely had helped make hers the best ever. She would wager that even if they lost Worlds and the Barden Bellas had come to an end, it still would have been the best. Because she had Beca.

"A year ago, I definitely didn't see myself here," Beca continued.

"What do you mean? You've been talking about moving here as long as I've known you."

"Yeah, but moving to LA to make music...that's so broad and generic. I thought I'd be living in a shitty apartment, paying my dues as a DJ at shitty clubs, playing shitty dance music, shopping demos around hoping to catch a break."

Chloe nodded, eyes on wrangling pasta onto her fork and into her mouth while trying her best to look ladylike and graceful.

"That's why that internship was so important to me, you know? I went into it headfirst, hoping it could open doors."

"I still wish you would have told me. I wanted to be there for you." Chloe hoped she wasn't reopening old wounds.

"I wanted you to be there for me, too. You have no idea how much I needed you."

Chloe had a pretty good idea. She'd lost count of the number of times she had gone to Beca needing her support - with the Bellas, with school, with life - and finding her room empty. Or worse, being asked to leave because she was too busy. It still stung when she remembered it, but in hindsight, she understood.

"I'm here for you now," Chloe said. Succinct. Direct. Truthful. Her heart fluttered with the way Beca met her gaze and held it.

"I know you are." She was a quiet, and Chloe felt like the moment was registering with both of them, one of those memories not tied to some major life experience or grand gesture but significant nonetheless. "Okay, enough mushy shit."
"I can always trust you to ruin a moment, can't I?" she said with a sigh.

"I'm nothing if not reliable! So, how was work today?"

"Ugh," Chloe said, waving her fork. "I don't want to talk about school. It was fine. I want to hear about your day." She giggled at the way Beca was oh-so-daintily cutting her chicken, biting it off the tip of her fork. Any other night and she'd probably just stab the entire piece with her utensil and eat it like a chicken-on-a-stick.

"It was cool," she said, after swallowing.

"Did anyone say anything about the Halloween thing? The song in the club?"

Beca's eyes lit up. "Oh, yeah! They loved it, and it really got a lot of mainstream press. I guess it was trending on twitter for a couple of hours? Whatever that means."

"It means more people were tweeting about it than basically anything else on the Internet."

"Well. That's cool then."

Chloe laughed. "Yeah, that might be a little cool. So what happens next?"

"I just started mixing the tracks, now that the vocals are done."

"Mixing? Like your mash-ups?"

The puppy eyes Beca gave her at the question made her heart melt while making her feel a little silly that there was apparently a difference that she didn't know about.

"Kind of, but not really. It's like...playing with everything, adding effects and layers and stuff to round it out and make sure it's perfect."

"Let me guess: it's your favorite part of the process?"
Beca smiled and nodded.

"Do I know you, or do I know you?" Chloe said teasingly.

"You know me, babe. And this," she pointed at her plate, "by the way, is delicious."

"Thank you."

When they were finished, Chloe excused herself to fiddle with her computer, skipping to a song further down the playlist before she turned to Beca and held out her hand. "May I have this dance?"

Beca lifted her eyebrows, looking at her a little sideways before she let Chloe snag her hand and pull her out of her chair and into her arms, one hand at her waist. Chloe kept hold of her other hand, pressing their intertwined fingers to her chest.

"You're too tall," Beca said quietly, looking up at her. And then she wrinkled her nose. "And this song is from Twilight."

Chloe giggled; she really was towering over her, so she stepped out of her four-inch heels and pushed them away with her foot, bringing them more in line. "Sorry. But it's gorgeous and kinda makes me want to cry every time I hear it."

"Please don't cry." Beca shifted her feet and Chloe let her lead, rocking in a slow circle, meandering around living room furniture.

She slightly regretted the song choice - not because it was cheesy, or irrelevant, or from Twilight, but because it so perfectly mirrored how she felt about Beca and she'd waited so long to dance with her to it that it made it almost impossible to not cry.

And all along I believed I would find you
Time has brought your heart to me
I have loved you for a thousand years
I'll love you for a thousand more
She knew it the moment she heard it in the movie theater her first senior year when she'd only known Beca for a few months.

-Time stands still
-Beauty in all she is
-I will be brave
-I will not let anything take away
-What's standing in front of me
-Every breath, every hour has come to this
-One step closer

But she knew. She knew - just like Edward knew he'd been waiting his one hundred-plus years to find Bella - that she'd been waiting her whole life for Beca to walk into it. And when she did, time froze. Chloe didn't know how to move forward, how to move on, how to leave her behind. So she didn't. She put her entire life on hold to stay. And it had been one of the best decisions she'd ever made.

"You're going to cry," Beca whispered, looking up at her with big eyes and a soft smile.

And she knew she would; she would love Beca for a thousand years. For eternity. And she cringed a little internally at how absolutely corny that was, but it was true. Beca had unzipped Chloe's heart and set up shop the moment she walked up to that booth in the quad - Saturday, August 27, 2011; she'd never forget it. She considered it their friendiversary, though Beca usually protested the concept, arguing that, if there had to be such a thing, that date should be her Bellas initiation day.

"Shh," Chloe breathed with a shake of her head, smiling so she wouldn't cry, but Beca pointing it out to her made it even more difficult.

And then Beca was singing quietly along to the chorus, looking up at her, and Chloe had to close her eyes and shake her head again. "That's not fair, Beca." She re-opened her eyes and knew tears were welling. And Beca was smiling and singing, and maybe her eyes were a little glassy, too.

Thankfully, the song drew to a conclusion before the tears fell and the next track was a bit more uptempo, allowing them both to regain bearings enough to think about something other than not crying.

She watched Beca's eyes flick up and down, glancing at her lips and back to her eyes. Chloe
brushed her tongue over them in anticipation, maybe also to tease Beca a little (can you blame her?), and then Beca's lips were on hers, full and soft and peaceful, just pressing, until her head tilted a little and a tongue grazed her lower lip to request access, which Chloe granted without hesitation. It was quiet and languid, and slow, and it fanned the little flame low in her stomach that had been waiting for oxygen all day.

It wasn't time though. Not yet. And she pulled back, smiling as Beca leaned forward blindly, chasing her.

"We haven't had dessert yet," Chloe explained when Beca looked at her questioningly.

Beca shook her head and leaned in again. "You can be my dessert."

Though the statement threw gasoline on that flame, Chloe only shook her head and took a step back. "It's your birthday. You can't not have cake."

Beca whined a little and let go of her. "Chlo..."

"Oh come on. I worked on it all day." She opened the freezer door above the fridge and pulled out a Dairy Queen cake box.

Beca laughed and joined her in the kitchen, peering through the cellophane window. "Wait, did they give you the wrong one?"

Chloe flipped the box open. "What do you mean?"

"You got me a cake with Spider-Man on it?"

"Well, it was either Spider-Man or Cinderella. They didn't have any plain ones in stock. Would you rather Cinderella? There's Reddi-wip in the fridge; I can draw a dress on him."

"No it's - we're going to come back to that Reddi-wip thing FYI - it's fine. It's kind of hilarious, actually."
Chloe retrieved a knife from a drawer and let Beca fetch the plates and forks. "I feel bad. I didn't have time to get candles for it. Can I sing 'Happy Birthday' to you?"

"That's ok. How about..." Chloe watched Beca glance about the room and focus on the table. "How about I make a wish and blow out those candles?"

"Okay!" Chloe said excitedly, happy that Beca wasn't brushing off all the birthday rituals like she always tried to.

Beca leaned over the dining table, lips pursed as she paused, thinking, and then she blew the pair of candles out with two quick puffs of air, leaving the pleasant scent of smoke curling through the air.

"What did you wish for?" Chloe asked as she picked up the knife to slice the cake before pausing and handing it to Beca.

"If I tell you, it won't come true!" The innocence in her tone was so cute Chloe almost said, "Aww!" But she refrained. "You want me to cut it?"

"You're the birthday girl."

After dinner and dessert and wine, Chloe almost felt ready for bed. Almost. She watched Beca as they cleaned up the kitchen together, and the way Beca's skirt moved, and the way the sheerness of her blouse let her bra show just enough to tantalize; it was lace, she noticed, and she bit her lip at the thought of unbuttoning the shirt to see it properly.

She caught Beca around the waist as she passed, pulling her in close. "Ready for the next surprise?" she asked.

Beca's hands rested on her shoulders. "There's more?"

"Maybe," she teased, turning out of their embrace to retrieve the wine and refill their glasses. She passed Beca's to her and took her free hand to lead her up the staircase.
"I was just up here. What did you hide?"

"I didn't hide anything."

Chloe led them to the bedroom where she deposited Beca by the bed and requested she wait there while she disappeared into the bathroom to turn on the faucet in the tub. She really wished they had one of those fancy big jacuzzi tubs, far more comfortable than the standard model, but she was positive neither of them would mind being a little close. She also wished she could be super cliche and toss some rose petals into the water, but the lilac-scented bubble bath would have to suffice. She balanced her wine glass on the edge of the tub and went to retrieve Beca, who was leaning against the dresser, waiting.

"So this is what's next?" she asked, letting Chloe take her glass from her and following her into the bathroom.

Chloe set the glass down with hers and turned off the lights; it was dark, but the plug-in nightlight near the floor cast just the right amount of light so they could see each other. Which was good, because she wanted to see Beca as she lifted her hands and started undoing the buttons of Beca's shirt, one by one until it hung open and she could push it over her shoulders and down her arms to the floor. She'd been right; the bra was black lace, and it was going to pain her to remove it. She glanced down to find the zipper on Beca's skirt, and Beca twisted a little so she could find it at her hip and she gave it a tug to let the skirt fall.

When she reached for the front clasp on that gorgeous black lace bra, Beca caught her hand. "Do I get to undress you, too?"

The question made Chloe take pause, not because she was shocked or excited, but because she realized how long it had been since they had undressed each other. They slept in the nude, or if they didn't, or weren't in bed, they mostly undressed themselves in the name of efficiency. Almost giddy with the realized anticipation of feeling Beca's delicate hands strip her, she turned around and pulled her hair out of the way. "Unzip me?" And she felt the zipper open and the warmth of those hands on her back, easing the straps of her dress down until it rested around her waist, held up by the curve of her hips. Those same delicate fingers unhooked her bra and pulled the strapless garment away with ease. And then those hands were on her waist, encouraging her to turn back, and she had to smirk a little at Beca's struggle to keep her eyes on her face. "You can look; I don't mind."

The permission seemed to steel Beca and her eyes stopped flickering, instead of locking on Chloe's as she gave a push to the little black dress to send it to the floor and then squared her shoulders, staring at her, almost challengingly.
So, Chloe did the next logical thing - reach out and twist the clasp between the cups of Beca's bra and let it pop open and hang loose on her shoulders.

But Chloe didn't care about a challenge or proving she could control herself. She'd proven that with years of self-restraint, and she stared unabashedly at Beca's naked chest until she realized she needed to turn off the faucet or it would be too full for two people. She wiggled out of her last undergarment and tested the water with a toe as she adjusted the hair clip to hold it high off her neck before sinking into the fragrant bubbles and settling back against the wall. She parted and bent her knees, patting the water between them. "Come here."

Beca shook her head a little as she pushed her underwear down, and Chloe could almost hear her internal dialogue about how cliche this scenario was, but the fact that Beca kept her mouth shut meant she liked the scenario, despite her constant efforts to avoid cliches. With most everything when it came to Chloe for Beca, she couldn't resist.

It was a bit of a snug fit as Beca settled between her thighs, careful to not slosh water over the side as the level rose, but it was comfortable, and just as Beca made to lean back, Chloe clicked her tongue and pointed at their wine glasses she'd left on the edge by their feet. Beca passed Chloe's to her and leaned back fully after taking a sip of her own, settling against Chloe's chest.

Neither of them said anything, and it was nice. Chloe felt like they were in some sort of dark vacuum, the only sounds that of the bubbles slowly popping and Beca's light breathing, periodically interrupted by the clink of glass against porcelain as they picked up and set down their glasses. She let her left hand trail along Beca's arm, watching goosebumps rise in its wake all the way up until she wrapped her hand over Beca's shoulder and squeezed, pressing her thumb into the muscle. It drew a groan out of Beca, breaking the near silence, and Chloe giggled, setting her wine aside for good to use both hands, chuckling again as Beca put hers down, too, and sat forward to give her a better angle at her shoulders.

Chloe could do this for hours, really, just have her hands on Beca, skin warm and supple beneath her fingers, drawing out quiet sighs of gratitude and pleasure as she worked her way inward until she could press her thumbs into the column of her neck and upward into her hairline where she stopped pressing and instead grazed her fingernails, drawing a shiver out of Beca as her head fell forward to let Chloe have her way.

She eased Beca to lay back against her again after a few minutes of sighing and whimpering that had sent blood pulsing to a certain region of Chloe's body, and Beca relaxed against her, a puddle in a sea of bubbles as their left hands entwined and rested on Beca's thigh. She trailed her fingers over Beca's shoulder to her collarbone, drawing her nails over it lightly, prompting Beca's chin to tilt upward as she brushed the hollow in the center. Slowly she swept lower, grazing the swells of
breasts, making Beca draw in a quick breath. Fingers traced the firm, pebbling flesh and she heard Beca swallow and felt the hold on her hand tighten.

Her hand retreated, unable to reach any further, scratching lightly between her breasts and back over her shoulder. It kept moving, dragging down her shoulder blade and under her arm, around her ribcage to her waist until fingertips were teasing Beca's inner thighs. She could hear Beca's breathing quicken, and the quiet sound of her licking her lips, and felt the press of Beca's legs into her own as she tried to part them with almost nowhere to go.

Chloe was relishing this; so frequently their lovemaking was fast and rough, overwhelmed and controlled by attraction and lust - not that either of them complained. But not tonight; tonight they both seemed content to take their time, to move slowly, to savor each touch and each shaky breath. Beca's was doing most of the shaking, but when Chloe pressed her lips to the shell of Beca's ear and exhaled, she heard a tremble in her own and Beca's hand squeezed hers again, acknowledging it.

Beca didn't jolt against her like she thought she would when she let her fingers trail between her thighs. Instead, she sighed and adjusted the lay of her head against Chloe's shoulder and tugged Chloe's arm to wrap around her waist, grounding her.

Chloe watched Beca from the steep angle above her, breaths deep and irregular, breasts lifting with the effort. Her left hand itched to reach up and cup one, but Beca's grip was firm, hand pressed flat atop Chloe's against her stomach. And Chloe could feel the butterflies there, the little tremors that surfaced when she pressed her fingers at the perfect angle.

Beca's hips tilted a little, breath starting to catch, fingers twitching against Chloe's. Chloe eased her tension, slowly changing her lazy pattern into something more concise and centered on one particular spot.

She watched Beca's brow knit, mouth falling open as her breathing grew more labored, saw the light pink flush growing along her prominent cheekbones. With a gentle shake of her wrist, Chloe freed her other hand from Beca's hold and slipped it down to relieve her right if its duty so it could slip lower and glide inward.

Beca gasped, loudly. It was the most noise in the room since the faucet turned off. Her hands flailed a little and came to rest on Chloe's thighs, gripping tightly.

Chloe lived for it, for giving Beca this amount of pleasure, both hands on the most intimate of places. The position made Chloe bite her lip. It was more than a little reminiscent of the many
times she'd spent in the bath with "Titanium" playing. The angle was the same, the motions were
the same, the feeling under her fingers was the same, but it was Beca starting to shift impatiently,
not she, and it made for the most pleasant of memories.

Without the usual fanfare, Beca shuddered in her arms, hips twisting a little, fingernails digging
into Chloe's flesh. She breathed through it, air moving roughly from her lips until the tension
dissipated and her hands rested softly again.

Chloe pressed a kiss to her temple and let her hands drift away from Beca to move up and rest over
hers for a moment before picking them up and crossing them over Beca's chest, embracing her with
both sets of arms.

She wanted to say something like I love you or happy birthday, but she couldn't bring herself to
break the solitude surrounding them. So instead she held Beca, lips pressed to her temple or ear or
cheek until she stirred and eased their arms away so she could turn around - something that couldn't
be done without a little awkwardness given the space, but she managed without commenting on
how high Chloe lifted her leg to give her the room to rotate, even though Chloe saw her steal more
than one glance.

She felt Beca tuck her feet into the space behind her hips and she did the same, knees bent so Beca
had enough space and not have a faucet jabbing into her back. Beca caught her hands again and
played with her fingers, just smiling at Chloe with a look of peace Chloe wasn't sure she'd ever seen
from her before.

And then suddenly Beca pulled herself close, and Chloe found herself being kissed quite
thoroughly, Beca's tongue licking and curling over hers in the most exquisite of ways. She felt
Beca remove the clip from her hair and ruffle her fingers through it, scratching at her scalp in a
way that made Chloe's toes curl.

A hand at her jaw grasped firmly, holding her in place for Beca to kiss her so deeply she thought
she might never breathe again. She actually had to tap Beca's hand to get her to let her go so she
could get a proper breath, lungs burning.

She noticed the bubbles were gone now, and the water was barely lukewarm, and despite the heat
Beca was generating with her mouth on her neck, she was chilly and ready to be out of the bath and
in bed. She eased Beca away gently, reaching behind her to pull the stopper so she would get the
message. Beca shifted back a little to let Chloe stand and exit, and Chloe could feel eyes on her the
entire time as she pulled her towel off its hook and wrapped it around her body. She fetched Beca's
as well and turned to hold it open for her, ready to wrap her up as soon as she stepped out, which
she did, hugging her close as she tucked the towel around her frame.
She picked up their wine glasses and set them on the counter by the sink, not trusting them to not get kicked over and broken sometime in the night, and slipped her hand into Beca's to lead her out of the bathroom and into the bedroom. She had turned the bed down earlier in the evening after changing the linens and she nudged Beca to sit down, stealing her towel in the process.

And then she knelt down, earning a whimper from Beca that either meant 'oh no, what are you doing?' or 'why aren't you up here with me?' and either question was acceptable. She nudged Beca's knees apart and wiggled her way forward, hands on her thighs, fingers stroking warm skin.

Beca shook her head slowly, watching her. "Babe, I can't again," she said quietly.

Chloe gave her a little half-smile. "It doesn't hurt to try, does it?"

Beca maybe kind of rolled her eyes, but she was smiling as she did it and shifted her legs to make more space for Chloe between them, and then fingers were pulling at Chloe's hair as she licked at her gently.

Chloe had to moan a little when Beca lifted her leg to rest her knee over her shoulder. Beca might have thought she couldn't be coaxed again so soon, but Chloe was pretty certain she was about to prove her wrong if the sounds and words spilling from Beca's mouth was any indication.

With a sharp gasp and a hard pull on her hair, Chloe was proven right.

Beca fell back once it passed and Chloe sat back on her heels, unable to see more than how her body moved with the deep breaths she was taking. So she stood up, and dropped her towel, and climbed onto the bed to sit aside her waist and bend to bring their mouths together. Beca's arms lay flat on the bed above her head, and Chloe thought how absolutely beautiful she was, vulnerable, open, relaxed, completely trusting, wholly comfortable. Not at all like the Beca Mitchell she met four years ago. This was a newer Beca Mitchell; this was Chloe's Beca.

And she'd never been so grateful.

"Happy birthday, Beca."
Outside the Bubble

Beca's life was less chaotic now that the vocals on Katy's album were in the can. She still had a deadline, but she was able to work at her own pace, not the phrenetic one set by a global superstar who was on a plane every other day.

This meant that she adapted a quasi-standard schedule. Chloe was still out the door long before her, but she was usually home early enough to have dinner together and even watch an episode or two of something off their DVR.

It was nice.

It was domestic.

They actually were able to spend proper time together for the first time since graduating.

The increased time together did take adjusting to by both women. More than once, they snapped at each other over something petty and insignificant. She still felt bad about the toothpaste tube incident.

But that was part of sharing your life with someone. Every day couldn't be an excerpt from a romantic comedy. It was real and was raw. It was exhilarating getting to throw words at each other, because they'd had very little reason to do so thus far. Their only real fights had been over Bellas-related stuff.

And afterwards, they'd be at each other's throats in a different way.

It brought them closer together, really. It ripped down walls and built new, shared foundations.

At first, it scared Chloe. She thought Beca would walk out on her after she repeatedly failed to clean her hair out of the shower drain and why couldn't she just stick it on the wall to throw it away afterward like Beca because, "It's really not that fucking hard to understand, Chloe!"

But what Chloe realized is that they could fight as hard as they loved, and love always came out the champion. It helped her remember that this wasn't some casual roommate or friends with benefits arrangement. It made her realize this was a real relationship. Not that there was ambiguity, but it was growing, evolving. It wasn't all lust and romance. Oh, there was still plenty of that - but sometimes they came home, had dinner, watched the news or trashy reality TV, and went to bed. And that was it. And that was perfectly comfortable.

The domestic, relationshippy factor became very apparent when they spent the better part of two weeks talking about whose family they would visit for Thanksgiving.

It was a big deal for them. Of course both families knew both girls, but Chloe was Beca's first actual girlfriend which made Beca more than a little nervous, and Beca was the girl Chloe had effectively upended her life for. Beca didn't want to deal with discussing her sexuality, and Chloe didn't want to defend her choice to move to Los Angeles.

So they did the most rational thing to decide.

"Heads," Beca called as Chloe flipped a quarter off her thumb. Both girls watched it turn end over end until Chloe caught it and slapped it onto the back of her hand.
"It feels weird to flip a coin to see our families."

"This is what our life is going to be now, though, right? Like taking turns at Christmas?"

Chloe felt the corner of her mouth try to twitch into a smile. Beca was thinking about spending Christmas together - *multiple* Christmases. Together.

"But I guess we need to start somewhere," Beca continued. "I called heads."

Chloe nodded and uncovered the coin. And released the breath she was holding. "Heads, it is."

"Shit," Beca exhaled, hands on her head. "Okay. It's cool. It'll be fine, right?"

"Becs, I've met your family already." Chloe would try to make this easier however she could. She knew Beca would do the same, and she knew she would be just as stressed if the coin had come up tails. "And they all love me."

Beca nodded, a grimace more so than a smile on her face. "I just don't want to deal with everyone's questions about us."

"They all know, don't they? It's on Facebook."

Beca laughed. "Not everyone is on Facebook, Chlo. Or checking my relationship status. And even if they do, it doesn't mean they aren't going to grill me about it when they see me. Except for like three friends and my dad and Sheila, no one knew I was bi until suddenly my Facebook says I'm in a relationship with a girl."

"But...almost everyone knows now, so..." Chloe knew she was missing a point; she just couldn't figure out what it was.

"I know, I know! It's not about telling them. I don't care that they *know*. They're all going to want to know how and when and why and this seems so sudden and they won't understand."

"What's not to understand? We're in a relationship. The end."

"*And* we're living together. I know my family and my friends. They are going to demand to know how they didn't know or if you're the first or if it means I'm gay now or -"

Chloe grabbed Beca's hands so they'd stop raking through her hair. "Beca, stop. It's none of their business and you don't owe anyone an explanation."

"Easy for you to say."

"Hey. You don't have to tell them anything you don't want to. They wouldn't grill you like that if I was a guy, right?"

"No. At least, not in the same way."

"Okay; so don't answer their questions about your sexuality. Why is that anyone's business but yours?"

Beca whined - actually *whined*. "It's not that simple."

"Then I'll be there to deflect their questions into something else. You know I can take over a conversation when I want to."
Beca huffed a little laugh and fell forward to press her face into Chloe's shoulder, letting out a muffled groan of agony. "Why is this so scary?"

Chloe held her close, rocking a little. "Because you're bringing your girlfriend home to meet your family. Have you ever brought anyone home to meet them?"

"No."

"Well, see? This is a big deal, and it's okay to be scared and nervous."

Beca whined again.

"And I'll be right there, by your side, supporting you and defending you and helping you." She heard a muffled statement. "What was that?"

Beca lifted and turned her head, still resting on Chloe's shoulder. "I said I love you."

Chloe wrapped her arms around her waist and squeezed. "I love you, too."

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Chloe's life at school had calmed significantly as well.

She hadn't missed a meeting since "the incident," thanks to her concerted efforts in cracking the Mechanics. A few of them were even semi-friends now. When Anika Schmidt wasn't looking, anyway.

Anika Schmidt, however, seemed to be changing her tactics. She'd recognized Chloe cutting off her resources and decided to take matters into her own hands.

Her first attempt succeeded pretty spectacularly, much to Chloe's chagrin. It had come by way of staging an interruption during testing, when it was Chloe's turn to proctor the exams. She made a prank call to the office - as mature adults do - claiming to be her gynecologist and she was calling to give Chloe the results of her screening.

Of course, when Chloe was summoned to the office to take the call, the line was dead, but the damage had been done. The woman who had taken the call was avoiding eye contact and whispering with her colleague, and by lunchtime, the rumor had circulated its way to Chloe by way of her personal fangirl Mrs. Washington, who wanted to offer some advice on homeopathic treatments for genital warts.

Not only did Chloe now have a rumor and reputation to fix, she knew way too much about Suzanne Washington's personal life.

She had been on the verge of staging epic revenge when Aubrey talked her off the edge, citing the need to be the bigger and better person.

Its impact had been so massive, in fact, that Schmidt didn't try anything else for weeks, and despite the whispering behind her back, life at school was smooth sailing.

It was a relief, being able to focus once again on simply teaching. She'd barely had opportunity and she was a third of the way through the school year already.

And what she discovered - or rediscovered - is how much she truly loved teaching.

She loved the ear-piercing squeals of five-year-olds blowing into recorders to make what they thought was beautiful music. She loved when one of her students would run up to her during
recess, crying about someone stealing his or her turn (not that she loved when her students cried). She even loved the phone calls from angry parents, upset about a note she sent home about behavior, because surely their perfect angel couldn't possibly pull another's hair or steal a pudding cup.

She was a little sad to leave her munchkins for a week, but she was looking forward to a break nonetheless; kids were exhausting.

"That's us," she said when the airline agent called their boarding group.

"Kill me now," Beca said with a groan as she stood up and slung her bag over her shoulder and extended the handle on her small suitcase.

"You need to stop dreading this."

"Sure, let me do that real quick."

"I promise it won't be as bad as you think it will be."

They settled into their seats near the front of the aircraft and Chloe had a brief but pulse-raising flashback to their risqué antics on the flight to Copenhagen. She wondered if she was in for a repeat performance, but Beca was so stressed out and tense, she figured she was probably safe. She pushed the armrest up between them and slipped her arm around Beca's shoulders to tuck her into her embrace.

Chloe would have held her that way the entire flight if she could have, but thirty minutes in, her arm fell asleep and she had to reclaim it. Beca still kept her head on her shoulder most of the time though, hands clasped in one lap or the other.

It took a good two hours before Beca actually relaxed and lifted her headphones to her ears and pulled out her computer, which Chloe took as a good sign. It had been worrying to witness Beca sit in silence for so long.

And still, Beca kept her right hand entwined with Chloe's, manipulating her keyboard with her left. At some point, she'd wrapped her foot around Chloe's ankle, too, to press their legs together. She was worried and seeking and finding comfort in Chloe, and she hoped she could be what Beca needed on this trip.

When they landed, Chloe followed Beca to the car rental area, and questioned where she was going. She didn't remember a rental being part of the plan.

"It wasn't," Beca answered. "But I don't want to be at the mercy of my dad and Sheila the whole time if we need to escape."

Chloe agreed that it was a good idea; she wasn't sure how much family reunion time she would be able to tolerate with a smile either. Family gatherings could quickly become taxing, or boring, or as Beca kept preaching - extremely uncomfortable.

The car they were assigned was no Corvette, but it would do, and Beca drove them to her aunt and uncle's house where she had been forced to agree to stay, despite her insistence that they were more than happy to stay in a hotel.

The house was impressive, and Chloe wondered if everyone in Beca's family was successful - it certainly seemed to be a genetic trait.
"Ready?" she asked Beca as they stood on the stoop, finger poised over the doorbell.

"Is that a trick question? Here goes nothin'." Beca rang the bell instead, and Chloe recognized it as a need to be in control of the situation. She surmised that would be the case much of his trip.

"It'll be okay," she offered, giving Beca's hand a quick squeeze, dropping it as the doorknob turned.

"There's my little Beca!" A woman probably in her fifties greeted them, wearing a sweater with a turkey on it, and pulled Beca into a hug. "And Chloe - nice to see you again."

The last time she saw Beca's Aunt Jeanette was after the ICCA finals in April, and she noticed her attitude toward her now was definitely more reserved than it had been. Last time, she was swept up in a hug. This time, she received a curt nod and a less than subtle once-over. "Hi, Jeanette."

"Well, come in, then, it's cold out here."

Chloe followed Beca into the house, noting the multiple religious icons installed on walls and above doors. Maybe she had been wrong to be so confident that their relationship would be a non-issue.

They left their bags at the foot of a staircase and followed Jeanette into the kitchen where a handful of people were sitting around a table, playing cards.

They greeted Beca with a rousing chorus of hellos and nicknames that Chloe made note of for future use in teasing, and Beca introduced her to the younger cousins she'd never met. "This is Chloe, my...girlfriend," she ground out through a clenched jaw.

"Girlfriend? I thought she was just in the Bellas with you," one of the younger cousins started. "Since when are you gay?"

Beca looked at Chloe with eyes that read 'I told you so,' and turned back to her cousin. "I'm not gay."

"But you just said -"

"It's none of your business, Zoe!"

Chloe had to choke back her gasp. Beca really hadn't been exaggerating about her family's reaction.

A man strode in just then, and Chloe instantly relaxed, seeing Dr. Mitchell. "Is that my favorite daughter I hear?"

"Hey, Dad," Beca said, hugging him longer than Chloe could ever remember witnessing.

"Don't be a stranger; get in here, Chloe," he said, holding his free arm out in invitation.

"Hey, Doc," she said, hugging him, too.

"How was your flight?" he asked.

"It was fine," was Beca's succinct answer.

"Good to hear. Where are your bags? I'll take them up for you."

Chloe was grateful for the excuse to leave the high-tension kitchen and they followed Beca's father up the stairs until he stopped at an open doorway.
"Beca, this is you. Chloe, you're in the room across the hall."

"Wait, what?" Beca said, turning around. "Separate rooms? Dad. We live together. We're adults."

"It's your aunt's house, Beca. Her roof, her rules, and she isn't comfortable with you two sharing a room."

"That's bullshit!"

"Beca."

"No, Dad. I'm your daughter. Why can't you stand up to her? Tell her she's being ridiculous. She would have zero problem with us sharing a room if we weren't together."

"I have to respect her beliefs."

"More than you respect me?!" Beca was on the verge of tears by the sound of it, and Chloe wanted to run to her and scoop her up, but her father was blocking her path.

"Beca, please. It's only a few nights. Can't you be more understanding?"

Chloe heard Beca's sharp gasp, like she'd been slapped, and she had to bite her tongue hard to stop from intervening. She'd promised Beca she would defend her, but her father wasn't the one doing the offending. Not really, anyway. She didn't mind making enemies of distant relatives, but she really liked Beca's dad and he liked her, and she didn't want to get on his bad side. But she didn't want Beca and her father to be fighting all weekend either.

"It's okay, Doc," she ventured, interrupting whatever response Beca was winding up after that gasp. "Thank you for carrying our stuff up for us. We'll be down after we get settled."

Dr. Mitchell turned around with a shrug and a sad smile. "Anything for my girls. See you in a bit."

"Anything but -"

"Beca," she cut her off and finally went to her, having to try three times to pull her into a hug because she kept getting shoved away in anger. "Beca, stop. Calm down."

"I am calm!"

"You're not calm." Beca was almost vibrating with red hot anger.

"I told you, Chloe. I told you. It's going to be like this all weekend. Everyone's going to be judgmental and shit, and act like we're just good ol' gal pals!"

Chloe shook her head and pulled Beca closer. "That's their problem. I can respect your aunt's wishes with the sleeping arrangements, but that doesn't mean we have to stop being a couple around them. What are they going to do if I hold your hand? Kick us out?"

"I wouldn't be surprised," she muttered, and Chloe felt her starting to relax and cool down.

"Well. If they do, then we'll go to a nice hotel and have a peaceful vacation, just the two of us."

"Thanksgiving in a Marriott. Sounds awesome."

"Then let's make sure we survive until tomorrow night so we get our turkey, and after that - fuck 'em."
Beca's shoulders shook with quiet laughter and she straightened, cheeks still flushed and eyes still a little red.

"So. You're going to respect the sleeping arrangements?"

Chloe liked seeing the sparkle returning in Beca's eyes and bit her thumbnail innocently. "Maybe I can sneak into your room tonight?"

Beca smiled. "I never had someone sneak in before."

"Want me to climb the tree and come through the window?"

"I think walking quietly across the hall is sufficient."

"Okay. I'll knock twice. If it's not twice, it's not me."

"Who else is going to knock on my door in the middle of the night?"

"I'm just trying to make it fun!"

"Don't knock, that makes noise. Just come over and close your door so they think you're asleep."

"Okay, okay. So boring."

Beca pulled Chloe forward until she was sitting on the edge of the bed, Chloe astride her lap. "I promise, it won't be boring once you're here."

"Beca Mitchell. You are so far beyond naughty. I mean really." She licked her lips for the kiss she knew was coming.

"Girls, are you hungry? There's pizza downstairs."

Beca stood up so fast she dumped Chloe on the floor. Hard. As soon as she was about to say something about it, Jeanette showed up in the doorway, looking at Chloe curiously. Chloe reached for her shoes, retying the laces as though that was her reason for sitting on the floor.

"Sure. Thanks. We'll be right down."

"Chloe. Is your room sufficient?"

"Yes, definitely!" Chloe pulled herself up from the floor, trying not to wince at the dull ache in her backside. "Thank you so much for your hospitality."

"Sorry," Beca offered once her aunt had left.

"I think I need to withdraw my naughty comment. My ass is killing me."

"I'll kiss it better later. I'm really sorry, I panicked."

"I get it." Chloe snagged Beca's hand. "Come on, I'm hungry.

She tried not to be too bothered by the fact that Beca dropped her hand the moment they walked into the kitchen.
If there was one skill Chloe was well-versed in, it was pretending that she wasn't in love with Beca Mitchell.

Beca didn't ask her to pretend, but after the third pointed look from Aunt Jeanette and the second time Beca blew up at a family member who commented on or questioned their relationship every time they so much as addressed each other with a hint of affection or (gasp) held hands, Chloe chose to shift gears.

Sure, she would have loved to have been able to storm out of the house at the first sign of trouble, but it was Beca's family, and family was important even with all the flaws, and maybe if Beca and she were lucky, they could change the views of those whose views needed changing.

She wanted to be there for Beca, to defend her to those who criticized her or took offense to something as beautiful as their niece or cousin being in love, but they had agreed to survive through the holiday so Chloe holstered her defense and withdrew her public affection to prevent further disagreements. She wasn't happy about it - she was hard-pressed to sit within reach of Beca and not be touching her in some way, but she busied herself with other things, like engaging cousins in conversations about their college plans or hobbies and trading classroom stories with Jeannette (who, as it turned out, was a teacher before she decided to retire early) and Dr. Mitchell. Jeanette even offered some anecdotes about classroom management.

If she couldn't make Beca's family accept their relationship, she would start with making them accept her.

When Jeanette asked if she'd like to help her prep the turkey stuffing to save time the next day, Chloe thought she was really making progress. She caught Beca's attention, who was sitting in the adjacent living room watching a "Friends" Thanksgiving episode marathon with her father and uncle over a six-pack of Dos Equis, and received a very inquisitive eyebrow raise in return. Chloe shrugged and smiled and set to tearing apart the loaves of bread she'd been assigned.

"So. Chloe."

Chloe looked up from her bowl of bread clumps to see Jeanette focused on chopping celery. "Yes ma'am?"
"How long have you known my niece?"

She wasn't sure if she liked where this conversation was going. Jeanette was at every Nationals competition; she knew they knew each other for a long time. "About four years now. We met when Beca was a Freshman and joined the Bellas. She's so talented, you know. She single-handedly took us to another lev."

"And how long have you been...seeing one another?" The way she bit the words made Chloe's insides twist.

"Six months."

"And you're already living together?"

Chloe kept her focus on ripping the bread - it was a nice way to channel her irritation. What she hoped was going to be a nice bonding moment was quickly spiraling toward probable disaster. She tried to save it with an innocuous response. "The timing made sense, what with graduation and all. And we're best friends; it would have happened either way."

She heard Jeanette click her tongue, and she wondered what it meant. Something negative, probably. "Are you sharing a bed?"

Chloe had to forget about the bread for a second. "Jeanette, I really don't think that's any of your business." She wanted to stick 'with all due respect' in there, but she felt pretty strongly there was zero respect due her at the moment.

"If a man also lie with mankind, as he lies with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination. Leviticus, Chapter 20, Verse 13."

She counted to five before responding; she knew if she didn't, she probably wouldn't have been able to stop her hand from flying out and slapping the self-righteousness off Jeanette's face. "Thankfully, neither of us are men," was her chosen response: snarky with a side of I don't care what you think. She considered briefly quoting verse right back at her about wearing clothing of mixed fabrics or eating shellfish but figured logic was a lost cause on this one.
Jeanette set the chef's knife aside - something Chloe realized she was very grateful for - and turned to face her head-on. "Chloe. Beca is not just my niece; she's my goddaughter. I swore in a house of God at her baptism that I would do everything in my power to raise her in the eyes of the Lord. This so-called relationship flies in the face of everything I believe and promised Him."

"Jeanette," she started, copying the same tone. "You seem to be under the assumption that I am not a Christian woman."

Jeanette almost snorted at that. Chloe ignored it.

"The difference, however, lies in that I choose to live my life as I'm pretty sure it was intended - without the burden of judging others, full of love and kindness and understanding, acceptance of everyone and the choices they make and lives they lead. I even accept your choice to be a hateful, ignorant bitch who's more concerned about her own comfort level than the happiness of those whom she claims to love."

She stood up and walked away, expecting the woman to come after her, screaming, perhaps knife in hand, ready to throw her out on the curb.

But no one followed her, and she found herself in the living room standing in front of Beca.

"Better door than a window, Chlo."

She blinked. "What?"

"You're literally right in front of me. I can't see the TV. Sit down."

"Oh." Chloe glanced around, sure that what had just transpired was a daydream. There's no way she would be so rude to someone. She turned and half-sat, half-fell onto the couch next to Beca and let her eyes wander toward the kitchen to see Jeanette staring at her, pale-faced and agape, and then pick up the knife and resume chopping celery.

"You're finished?"
Chloe still felt like she was in a daze. "Hmm?"

"Weren't you helping make the stuffing?"

"Oh, um. Yeah."

"And you're finished?"

"Yeah, I think we're done."

Chloe could feel Beca's gaze linger on the side of her face, but she couldn't bring herself to meet it. She was ashamed, and petrified, and maybe on the verge of tears, and also pretty proud of herself. So she stared straight ahead at the TV screen, laughing at Joey's Thanksgiving pants.

"Beca, do you need anything before bed?" Chloe heard Jeanette across the hall.

"I'm good, thanks."

"Don't hesitate to let me know. Have a good night."

Chloe was sitting on her bed, suitcase open next to her, having stopped digging through it for her pajamas to listen, and she looked up, surprised to see Jeanette hovering in her doorway.

"Chloe," was all she said with a nod. And Chloe felt oddly...respected.

"Goodnight, Jeanette," she replied with a nod in return. She watched the light in the hall turn off as Jeanette departed.

Beca appeared in her place a moment later, hands resting on both sides of the doorframe as she glanced back over her shoulder. "That was awkward."
Chloe shook her head and resumed looking for her sleep shorts. "I need to get ready for bed."

"I'll be sure to avert my eyes," Beca said with a smirk.

"Can you give me a few? Please."

"Wow. Um, ok...sure."

Chloe stood up and closed the door as Beca retreated. She needed time to think, to clear her head. She'd never snapped at someone in that way, not someone who she knew she should respect, someone important to Beca despite all her shortcomings. But she really couldn't handle someone accusing her of wrongdoing, because if loving someone and being loved was wrong, she would rather jump off the planet. People who preached about the sins of homosexuality, picking and choosing which aspects of the Bible to uphold, believe in, and use against others, were her least favorite people. She loathed hypocrites.

By the time she made her way to and from the bathroom to wash up, the light in Beca's room was off, door open a few inches. She turned the light off in her own room and pulled the door closed, careful to not let it click too loudly, and tiptoed across the hall to slip through Beca's and close it behind her. It was dark, but the glow from the streetlights filtered in through the window, illuminating the room enough for her to see Beca curled up in bed under the covers. She wasn't asleep though; her eyes sparkled in the ambient light.

"I didn't know if you were still coming after you kicked me out to change." Beca's voice was quiet, but Chloe could hear the touch of pain in its tone.

Chloe climbed into bed, slowly in case it was a squeaky, creaky bed (it wasn't), and settled under the covers to slide up against Beca's back and hold her like she did every night. "I'm sorry. I needed time to think."

"Think about what?"

"Promise you won't get mad?"
"I can't promise to not get mad when I don't know what it is."

"Okay; promise you won't hate me?"

Beca squeezed the arm around her middle. "I could never hate you."

Chloe took a breath. "Well...your aunt kind of...started questioning me about our relationship. And getting judgmental. And quoting the Bible at me."

Beca flipped over to face her. "She what?"

"She said as your godmother it's her responsibility to...quote, raise you in the eyes of the Lord, and implied I was interfering with that."

"What the Hell? I see her once a year and she thinks she has anything to say about raising me? I'm a fucking adult." Beca made to move off the bed but Chloe caught her around the waist and reeled her back.

"And...and I kind of...called her a hateful bitch?"

"You...what?"

"I'm sorry! I'm so sorry."

"I don't think anyone has ever said anything to her before. What did she do?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing?"

"Nothing. I walked away and sat down with you to watch 'Friends.'"
"That's it?"

"That's it."

"Wow. So you called my Aunt Jeanette a bitch." She couldn't be certain in the lighting, but it seemed like a smile was sliding across Beca's face.

"I...yeah. I did. I'm so sorry, Beca, I don't know what I was thinking. I just got so mad. I'm so sorry, it was really rude of me but she really pushed my buttons and made me feel like I was a bad person and that you were somehow disappointing her and *mmph!*"

Chloe was knocked onto her back with the force of Beca's kiss and she flailed a little, not prepared for it physically or emotionally. "Whoa - what was that for?"

"I thought it was obvious? Defending our relationship and all that."

"You're not mad?"

"No, I'm impressed. That was really badass of you." Beca's demeanor softened a little, and Chloe felt fingers playing with her hair at her shoulder. "And really brave."

"I don't feel brave. I feel disrespectful. What if she tells your dad?"

"Well...I think he'd be impressed, too."

"I don't want him to hate me. He basically considers me his daughter and I'd really like to keep it that way. I don't want an uphill battle to get back on his good side if we ever get mar...tching tattoos." Nice save.

"Matching tattoos?"
"Yeah. I don't need another Mitchell family member accusing me of negatively influencing your life choices."

"Dad doesn't care about my ink. Are you saying you want to get matching tattoos? Because I'm totally down."

"No, I…" Really derailing here. Get back on track. "Maybe someday?" Wait, she actually said yes to that. That could be fun. And meaningful. "I mean, I don't know what we'd get."

"I have a couple ideas." Beca's eyes lit up, and it was fricking adorable. "I was thinking maybe something with, like, a sun and rain clouds? Or if that's too literal maybe we could get the comedy and tragedy faces but trick them out so they really represent us, or maybe we could get bugs because you have your ladybug and I have my hopper so maybe butterflies or something? But those are so fucking cliche maybe like dragonflies? Or -"

"Yes, all good ideas," she finally cut in; as adorable and intriguing as the idea was, there were more important things to address. Like how she'd ended up flat on her back with Beca on top of her. "Let's revisit that kiss first, okay?" Chloe leaned in to recapture Beca's lips; it was a good a way as any to redirect the conversation.

Beca pulled away a few seconds later, and Chloe could definitely make out her grin now that her eyes had adjusted. "I've never done it with my dad in the house before," she whispered, hands already working their way under the bottom of Chloe's tank.

"Beca. Gross," she said, half laughing, half biting back a moan as a hand slid up and over her breast.

"Oh come on. You probably got the chance all the time."

"What are you implying?"

"That you had sex when your parents were home."

"What is with you and these situations?" Chloe laughed, letting Beca tug at her until they rolled and she was on her hands and knees, hovering over Beca.
"You're going to try to tell me it's not exciting to risk getting caught?"

"That's not what I'm - oh my God, Beca, seriously?" Beca's hand had disappeared down the front of her sleep shorts to tease her.

"That's not what you're what?" Beca's eyes were wide, and she was grinning, and Chloe knew she was having a blast making her equal parts aroused and uncomfortable.

"That's not what I'm saying." She bit back another moan. "I just...I really don't want to make a worse impression than I've made already."

"If anyone comes snooping around, they deserve what they see."

"I'm less concerned about what they see than I am their opinion of me."

"Well, Aunt Jeanette already dislikes you."

"And I'm sure your dad would be super happy to catch me fucking his daughter in his sister's guest room at Thanksgiving." She should have known better than to use that word. Beca's eyes darkened immediately and the fingers that were lazily touching became a lot more active.

"So you're going to fuck me?"

"Beca, honestly."

"You can keep acting like you don't want to, but something tells me you do." With that, Beca withdrew her hand and brought it to her mouth to suck on her middle finger.

The action made Chloe groan, her resistance quickly failing. "You're incorrigible."

She nodded, grinning around the finger in her mouth. "I'll even do you first."
"Oh really? That's so romantic. You really know the way to a girl's heart."

"Yep. And into her pants." Beca slid down and lifted Chloe's shirt to sit up and snag a breast with her teeth, making Chloe's elbow buckle.

She caught herself and shifted her weight to her left hand and threaded the fingers of her right through Beca's hair to pull her closer, hissing from the sensation. "Yeah, that's definitely one way to it," she breathed. She felt hands roaming her torso, sliding up to her neck followed by fingernails dragging down her stomach to scratch at her hips. She really didn't want to get caught, but there was also something really sexy about doing it in someone else's home, with parents around. She suddenly felt like a teenager.

Her shorts were nudged over her hips until they got caught up on her thighs with her stance, and she looked down at Beca pointedly. "Now what?"

"Take them off, duh," was Beca's cheeky response as she pulled her own tee up and over her head.

Chloe rolled her eyes and backed up off the bed to push her shorts down. She tossed her shirt aside as well as she climbed back up on her knees. She made to bend forward but Beca stopped her with a hand to her chest, and then she felt hands wrap around her thighs and pull incessantly until she had to walk her way up on her knees.

"Really? We're doing this here," she said as Beca scooted down a little, grinning up at her.

"Why not?"

"Why not?" Chloe bit her lip and leaned forward to cross her arms against the headboard. "Because you know what it does to me."

Beca's muffled laugh told Chloe she knew exactly what it does to her, and the hands on her thighs tugged her down closer.

And what it did to her was make her forget what words were, or how to be quiet, or what her name was. But she couldn't forget, at least not the part about being quiet, and she dropped her forehead to
rest against her crossed arms, biting and pulling on her lower lip as she looked down and watched Beca, who was lost in what she was doing. Her hips itched to move, and Beca must have sensed it because she was encouraging it, hands nudging her thighs until Chloe gave in and rocked her hips. She forced herself to keep a slow rhythm; if she let herself go as quickly as she wanted, there'd definitely be no keeping quiet.

Any other scenario and the thought would make her giggle, but at the moment, Chloe thanked her lucky stars for all the tongue dexterity exercises they had to do for the Bellas because Beca definitely mastered a whole lot of skills when it came to making music with her mouth.

There was licking and pulling and Chloe whimpered Beca's name, only to get shushed in response as she dared increase the tempo of her hips until she gave up altogether and sat back to rock with abandon, the back of her hand between her teeth as she channeled every ounce of energy that wasn't between her legs to control what was coming out of her mouth and her left gripping the headboard in equal amounts support and to keep it from hitting the wall. There was way too much to think about with what was happening between her legs, and she seriously missed being home where it didn't matter how loud she was or if the headboard knocked into the wall, and Beca's little moans of enjoyment weren't making things any easier.

She couldn't do it all, so she stilled her hips and opted for looking down to watch Beca take her the rest of the way, which only took a few seconds when a pair of fingers slipped in unceremoniously.

"Beca...fuck!" she gasped when ecstasy washed over her and she had to bite into her hand again, and briefly she wondered if she would have teeth marks in the morning.

When it passed, she twisted and tried not to flop too noisily onto the bed next to Beca, breathing hard. "I can't believe you."

"Are you really complaining right now?" Beca was on the move, working her way on top of Chloe to hover over her on her hands and knees, a full switch of their earlier positioning.

Chloe had to swallow, still catching her breath. "Not complaining, per se."

"Good. My turn." And Beca was on the move again, working her way up just like Chloe had and making her shift toward the center of bed since there wasn't enough room for her knee alongside Chloe's shoulder.
"Can you give me a minute?" she said, laughing a little at Beca's eagerness.

"'Kay." Beca sat back, using Chloe's chest as a seat, making it all the more difficult for her to get her breathing back under control. But she didn't mind because it was sexy and sensual and silly. She could make out the features on Beca's face above her in the darkness, head rocking side to side and fingers tapping against her thighs to some beat in her mind as though she was waiting in line for a burrito and not for Chloe to regain her bearings so she could...well, you know.

The deep breath she took must have been interpreted as a green light, for Beca was up on her knees again, looking down expectantly. "You okay?"

Chloe rolled her eyes at the lack of patience, but she loved it just the same and tucked her arms under Beca's thighs to guide her forward and down. "Yeah, I'm good."

She heard Beca sigh and settle against her, and smiled at the, "Yeah you are," that drifted down.

Chloe had every intention of getting dressed after their little escapade, but Beca wouldn't let her get out of bed to find her pajamas and finally, she relented, allowing herself to be spooned until Beca rolled away from too much body heat so they could sleep. The tiny voice told her that was probably a bad idea, but Beca had assured her repeatedly that no one would walk into a guest's room unannounced.

So when a knock rapped on Beca's door, Chloe didn't know what to do. It had stirred them both, and she held onto Beca, both of them staring at the door until another knock came and the doorknob rattled.

Chloe remembered she definitely didn't lock it when she came in the night before and panicked, yanking the covers over her head to lay still as a board.

"Beca, you awake?" Dr. Mitchell's voice eased into the room.

"Dad! I didn't say come in!"
"Sorry. They're making breakfast if you want to come down and join us."

"Thanks," Beca snapped.

"See you in a bit." There was a pause and Chloe wondered if he left. A teasing, "Good morning, Chloe," preceded Beca's door clicking closed.

Chloe threw the covers off her face to savor the cool air, but her face was still burning. "Oh my gosh, he knew I was in here!" She sat up, noticing their various discarded pajama pieces strewn around the bed and blushed even harder.

"And obviously he didn't care; calm down." Beca hooked her arm around Chloe's waist to pull her back to bed.

"But yesterday he said -"

"Yesterday he said he had to respect my aunt's wishes by separating us. Which still pisses me off, but he doesn't care about us, he cares about not pissing off his sister. And he's not going to tell her."

"Honestly I don't care if he told Jeanette, after how she talked to me yesterday. I just don't need her coming to check on you, too."

"Chlo - baby, come on, it's still early."

"No. Nope! You can't 'baby' me. I'm not risking two walk-ins, let me up." She batted Beca's arm away and slid out of bed to scoop up her pajamas and pull them on, tossing Beca's toward her. "I'm going back to my room. I'll see you at breakfast."

It would be bad enough facing Dr. Mitchell downstairs.

Beca was waiting outside the bathroom door when Chloe emerged; she had locked the door this time, not risking anything.
"Finally! Jesus."

"You could have knocked."

"I didn't want you to have a stroke. PTSD and all."

"You seriously could have just knocked. I'd have let you in."

Beca gasped, and Chloe knew she was being mocked. "And risk someone catching you sharing space with your girlfriend?"

Chloe rolled her eyes hard and tried to push past Beca, getting caught by the arm that came up to gate the doorway. "Oh my God, shut up."

"What's the password?"

She rolled her eyes again. She didn't know why she was feeling so punchy this morning, but for once, Beca was the one bringing the fun and games. She pressed forward, Beca's forearm pressing back against her stomach. "What password?"

"You shall not pass."

"You know that's from a movie, right?"

"The Lord of the Rings was a book way before it was a movie. Who do you take me for?"

Chloe didn't have the heart to tell Beca she totally found her DVD of The Fellowship of the Ring in Beca's laptop drive one random day back at Barden. Beca clung to her anti-movie motto even though everyone knew by now she'd finally cracked and admitted that at least some movies were okay. "How am I supposed to know what the password is?" she asked with a sigh.
Beca smiled and leaned against the doorframe, getting comfortable in her corralling of Chloe. "If you know me, you can figure it out."

Chloe flipped through her mental Rolodex of all possible Beca passwords. She started with the password she used for everything.

"Titanium."

"Nope."

Rats. "David Guetta."

"Nope."

"Remix."

"Wrong again."

Chloe drummed her fingers on Beca's arm, thinking harder. "Bellas?" She would never.

"You're funny."

"Dude, seriously?"

"Yes, I'm serious."

"No, is that the password? 'Dude, seriously.'"

"Obviously not."
"Toner?"

"I feel like you don't know me at all."

"Aca-Wiedersehen?"

Beca rolled her eyes at that one. "I'm seriously questioning our relationship right now."

"For someone so impatient to get in the bathroom, you sure aren't making it easy for me to leave." Chloe thought harder, squinting at Beca's little lopsided smile. Clearly, she knew what she wanted from Chloe.

"Fuck."

"Nuh-uh."


Beca laughed at that. "Even if it was, I'd say no just to hear you keep swearing."

"Ahh, you're infuriating!" Chloe said, laughing too as she shook her fist. She decided to try drastic measures - and grabbed Beca to dip her and place a big, wet kiss on her lips.

Beca gave her the thumbs up.

Chloe decided to face the music downstairs alone. If Dr. Mitchell was going to comment on something, she didn't need Beca there fanning any flames.

"Good morning," she said as she entered the kitchen, following the scent of frying bacon.
"There she is," Dr. Mitchell said with a smile over a cup of coffee. "Happy Thanksgiving."

"Happy Thanksgiving to you, too. And you," she added, acknowledging Jeanette at the table.

"Where's Beca?" Dr. Mitchell asked, and Chloe felt her face warm. She tried to cover it with busying herself with preparing a cup of coffee.

"In the shower."

"Sleep well?"

Chloe knew Beca's dad was messing with her - she was sure of it. Really, she was grateful he'd been so cool about their relationship from the beginning, treating both of them like mature adults, but it was still her girlfriend's dad teasing her about sleeping with his daughter. She felt like maybe he wouldn't be so cavalier if she was a guy, but maybe; he was pretty liberal, after all. Whatever; that was irrelevant.

She dumped sugar into her coffee and stirred. "Yes, thank you."

"Really?" Jeanette interjected. "The mattress in that room has never been acceptable to anyone. But I can't bear to throw out a perfectly good mattress." She looked pleased with herself, and Chloe was fairly confident that she was assigned the shitty bed on purpose. Not that she'd been in it beyond getting in and rolling around to make it appear slept in.

"Oh, I can sleep anywhere. You should see me on a plane. Curl right up and I'm dead to the world."

"I see. Well, help yourself to breakfast," she said, waving her hand toward the counter with various breakfast delicacies arranged.

Part of Chloe hesitated, knowing she planned to indulge at dinner, but...it was Thanksgiving after all, and what was Thanksgiving for if not for eating? Other than giving thanks, obviously. So she sat down at the table next to Dr. Mitchell with a full plate of eggs, bacon, and hash browns.
She hoped Beca would hurry; she could small talk with the best of them, but she would really like her other half present for it.

Chapter End Notes

I'm curious how many of you have dealt with homophobia within your families and how you dealt with it. Share your stories with me if you like.
Surprisingly - or maybe unsurprisingly - the day progressed without massive amounts of drama.

Even Beca and her short fuse seemed on better behavior. Maybe there was something about the smell of roasting turkey and the sounds of football that put people in a good mood. Chloe and Beca's uncle Roger got along quite well; it seemed he didn't subscribe to quite as intense a doctrine as Jeanette, though he had remained conveniently quiet whenever the topic arose. Chloe couldn't really fault him; Jeanette was his wife, and it was natural for him to side with her, or remain neutral. She knew she would always do the same for Beca.

Roger's only disagreement with Chloe was that she was a Cowboys fan and Roger was a fan of anyone that wasn't the Cowboys, which led to the rousing debate she found herself engaged in about who she claimed was the best player in the NFL while Roger claimed that title belonged to someone else, following a penalty call against Chloe's player. Beca’s two cousins were in on the debate, too, one siding with their father and the other with Chloe.

And she saw Beca on their sideline, amused at the exchange because she knew Beca rarely witnessed this side of her - the competitive, argumentative side, yes, but not when tied to athletics.

"Beca, tell them I'm right!" she said, exasperated after the terrible call against the Cowboys.

"Oh, yeah. Totally. She's totally right, Rog. That call was mad bogus. That was obviously not goaltending." And Beca would always take her side.

"Goaltending! Baby, that's basketball!" She winced when she heard it come out of her mouth, the fun draining away immediately. She braced herself for it, for some comment to make its way to her from the kitchen because there was no way Jeanette didn't hear that; she'd basically screamed it.

But there was nothing, no sound but Roger guffawing at Beca's iniquity and her dad trying to explain what "offsides" meant to his daughter, and the teenagers rolling in laughter and embarrassment that their cousin Beca didn’t know the first thing about football. Even Zoe, who couldn’t understand how Beca was “suddenly gay” had no comment to offer - beyond scoffing and declaring the unacceptableness of Beca’s ignorance to the game.

"Dude, I don't care!" was Beca's repeated response as she waved her hands to deflect the words, laughing just as hard as her father.
And Chloe was able to stop and take in the moment, this moment of pure joy, of seeing Beca interact with her family positively, of them teasing her good-naturedly, of calling Beca her baby as if it was her name, and feeling like she was part of their family as Dr. Mitchell clapped her on the back to tell her to sit down since she'd launched herself off the couch at the bad call.

Jeanette’s absence, busy in the kitchen as she was, and general silence supported by the acceptance of Roger and Dr. Mitchell emboldened Chloe. She missed Beca, sitting a whole four feet away alone on a loveseat that was positioned in a disconnected L-shape with the couch Chloe shared with Dr. Mitchell. Uncle Roger had his recliner, as it was his recliner. At halftime, after everyone took their obligatory bathroom breaks and a stroll through the kitchen to drool over the meal in progress - except Chloe who chose not to enter voluntarily into Jeanette’s sacred space - she decided to join Beca on the loveseat, reneging on her decision to not act couply around others in the house today.

It was nice. No one commented on it, even when she really gave in and turned sideways to use Beca as a backrest instead of the furniture - except Beca who had something to say every time Chloe jolted up at a play or touchdown, only to fall back against her with a thud time and again. But Beca’s arm would drape over her shoulder to rest against her collarbone, fingertips grazing Chloe’s bicep absentmindedly, and no one said anything. She even caught Dr. Mitchell taking a picture of them on his phone and texting it, presumably, to Sheila who was en route from the airport after a delayed flight. She made a note to ask him for that picture later, because she was certain they looked pretty damn cute right now.

Jeanette finally made her presence known in the room, summoning her teenagers to help finish dinner and set the table. Chloe didn’t miss the look they received, but she stared right back, not loosening the grip she had on Beca’s forearm over her chest. And she really wasn’t one to be disrespectful, but if Jeanette didn't have the nerve to say anything, why should she act as though she did?

An hour and a year's worth of gloating rights later, Chloe's team came up short; by the sound of it, Roger wouldn't let her be hearing the end of it any time soon.

A reprieve from the torment came with Beca's stepmother's arrival.

Chloe had spent considerably less time getting to know Sheila than Dr. Mitchell; she was away on business a lot. But she was a pleasant person, not at all the monster Beca made her out to be back when she was a Freshman. The agonizingly slow deconstruction of her walls and resentment and, probably most importantly, time and maturity, allowed Beca's relationship with Sheila to grow; Chloe knew there was no way she could or would replace Beca's mother - but Sheila never tried to, and Beca eventually stopped thinking that she was.
"Sheila!" was Beca's exuberant greeting, sliding out from behind Chloe to rush to the door and hug her. "I thought you'd never get here."

Chloe followed, waiting a few steps behind to give them their space.

"Hey, Beca," Sheila said, smiling as she returned the embrace. "There were a few times I questioned it, too! Atlanta's airport on Thanksgiving is probably the closest thing to Hell on this planet."

Chloe giggled and it caught Sheila's attention.

"Chloe - there you are. Stunning as always."

She blushed furiously and fussied with her hair; just because she was confident about her physical appearance didn't preclude her from accepting compliments without difficulty when it came to this particular scenario. Boys (and some girls), sure, no problem. A comment on her appearance wasn't exactly how she expected to be greeted by Beca's stepmother.

Beca backed out of the hug, smiling at Chloe. "Yeah she is."

She shushed Beca and smiled at Sheila. "Hi, Mrs. Mitchell."

"How many times do I have to ask you to call me Sheila? Now get over here." She beckoned Chloe into a hug which she slid into, still blushing a little, earning a wink from Beca.

"Where's your dad?"

"On the couch. Where else?"

"I should have known!"
Thanksgiving dinner - every family had their traditions. Chloe's family ate at 2:00 because for some reason, that's when they had dinner on Thanksgiving. Probably so they would be finished by the time the Cowboys game kicked off.

By the time Beca's family sat down, it was pushing 7:00 and Chloe's stomach was ready to eat itself. She avoided snacking after her hearty breakfast, and the smells of turkey, fresh bread, sweet potatoes, and pumpkin pie had infiltrated her senses.

She took a seat at the table in the safest spot she could manage; Beca was perpetually assigned to the corner so the lefty didn't battle elbows with anyone, so Chloe grabbed the chair to her right. She would have liked Dr. Mitchell or Roger to claim the chair next to her as a buffer, but as she expected, the men ended up opposite each other at the heads of the table, their wives around the corner from them. At least she was in the safe half of the table with Beca and her parents. A cousin ended up next to her, Marshall, the sixteen year old boy who she knew had a crush on her, since he rarely wasn't looking at her. It was cute, if not a little disconcerting at times.

"This all looks amazing, Jeanette," Chloe offered, a small verbal olive branch to try to get through the meal drama-free.

"Thank you. Roger, lead us in grace?"

Chloe glanced at Beca, whom she knew really didn't prescribe herself to religious practices of any kind, but she simply held out her hands for Chloe and her father to take, closed her eyes, and bowed her head. Chloe followed suit, frowning a little at Marshall's sweaty palm.

Roger said a prayer, your typical pre-dinner prayer, but he tacked on something extra.

"And may You give us the strength we need to live life by Your example, loving and accepting of all who come and go in our lives."

Chloe glanced at him after the amen, trying not to look too surprised in case the added phrase wasn't directed at Jeanette and her antiquated thinking. The wink Roger sent her told her it was, and she smiled at him, squeezing Beca's hand before dropping it to help start passing the feast around the table.
"Hey, Bec," Zoe said from the other end of the table.

"What's up?"

"So is it like, for real, that, like, you're working with Katy Perry?"

"Like, totally."

"Shut up, legit?"

Beca leaned to Chloe, stage whispering. "I don't understand the language of the youth anymore."

Chloe smiled. "I think she means, 'dude, seriously?'"

"Oh!" Beca straightened. "Yeah. I'm producing her new album."

"Shut up. Like, you're Pharrell?"

"That's what I'm doing, yeah."

"Holy shit!"

"Zoe!" Jeanette admonished.

"Sorry. So, like, you've met her?"

Chloe chuckled under her breath.
"Yeah, we pretty much spent 24/7 together for a few months. You can ask Chloe."

Chloe scoffed at that. "Don't remind me. She's so nice though. Did you see the video of Beca playing the lead single in the club at Halloween? It was all over the Internet."

Marshall chimed in, "My boy Mikey posted something about Katy Perry's new song on Facebook last week but I didn't watch it! That was you, Beca?"

Beca squirmed in her seat a little. "Um, yeah. That's our new song."

He pulled his phone out of his pocket, tapping the screen until Jeanette jumped on him. "Marshall. No phones at the dinner table. You know the rules."

"But Ma, our cousin’s famous on the Internet!"

“And she’ll still be famous on the Internet after dinner. Put away the phone.”

She felt Beca relax next to her, clearly relieved that she wasn’t going to be the topic of conversation all night. Generally speaking, Beca was only okay with that if she was the one doing the talking, and it was about the music, not about her.

"How are you liking LA?" Jeanette asked Beca.

"It's cool. Big. Busy. But we live in a quiet area so that helps offset it, you know?"

Chloe saw Jeanette's lips press into a thin line at the reminder that there was a "we" and that "we" shared a home.

"Chloe."
Chloe jumped a little. "Yes ma'am?"

"How are you dealing with Beca's busy schedule?"

"I'm sorry?" she asked, confused by the question.

"She's absent quite frequently I gather. How do you occupy your time?"

Chloe shifted in her seat, feeling eyes on her, some curious, some sympathetic. "Well, school keeps me pretty busy. I'm sure you remember how it can be. Lessons to plan, parents to meet, in-services and whatnot."

"And the late nights, home alone?"

Chloe held the woman's gaze. She felt every red flag in her brain spring alive. "What about them?"

"Don't you homosexuals prefer a promiscuous lifestyle? Who else are you inviting into your bed?"

Chloe was so stunned by the question, she couldn't respond. She sat there, jaw dropped, staring. But she didn't need to; Beca did it for her.

"Jesus Christ!" Beca snapped, slamming her fork down. "Are you fucking kidding me? What the hell kind of question is that to ask someone?"

"Rebecca Mitchell, you do not use that name in vain in this house!"

"Jeanette Van de Camp, you do not speak to Chloe that way! What is wrong with you??"

"Beca," Dr. Mitchell started, but she ignored him.
Chloe briefly considered hiding under the table, caught in the crossfire as she was. But she was still too stunned to react.

"The question you should be asking is what is wrong with you? Your behavior is both socially dysfunctional and a complete affront to the Lord."

Beca scoffed, almost laughing. "Are you serious right now?"

"Of course I am."

"Why do you think it's okay to say things like that? To anyone. Especially me."

"Because it's true."

"According to who!"

"The Lord. And Mike Huckabee."

"Dad? You're literally going to sit there and let her talk to us like this?"

“Jeanette,” he started. “Beca is your niece. You need to respect her decisions. And Chloe is part of this family. She deserves your respect, too.”

“Hardly! She's a floozy corrupting my niece.”

“Jeanie, please,” Roger tried, resting his hand on his wife’s forearm, only for it to be shaken off. “You’re being very rude to our guests.”

“I am being rude? These harlots flaunt their sin in my house and I’m the rude one?”
Beca gasped. “How is calling me a whore not rude?!”

Sheila’s palm slapped the table at that, shaking everyone’s plates. “Harlots! For the love of God, Jeanette, she’s your niece! And Chloe is a perfectly respectable woman.”

“Respectable! Please. Just look at her. He knew. He marked her. Red hair is the mark of a sinner.”

Beca tossed up her hands. “Now her hair is an issue?”

“As your aunt, I worry for your well-being. Knowing her history, you should get tested; it’s the right thing to do.”

“Jeanette, honestly,” Dr. Mitchell said - ineffectively.

Beca nearly hit the ceiling, but somehow remained in her seat. Her arm shot out in front of Chloe’s face, finger pointing at Jeanette. “Knowing her history! You don’t know...you shut your fucking mouth! You do not talk about her that way!”

Chloe kept her head down; she felt terrible. Her presence caused this explosion to happen. She was being dragged through the mud simply for existing. Her relationship with Beca was creating a rift in her family. She’d never felt so insulted or guilty or angry. And she’d kept her mouth shut long enough.

She shouted a quick, “Okay!” to claim her spot in the argument. “Jeanette, please,” she started, setting her fork on her plate with enough force to make it rattle. “I recognize that you disagree with Beca’s relationship with me. It’s your opinion to have, but it’s not going to change anything. I love Beca, and she loves me. You can think what you like about me, but I will not sit here, today of all days, after I sacrificed time with my own family,” she heard her voice crack, her eyes started to burn, “to be here with Beca and be subjected to your homophobic, name-calling, Bible thumping insanity.” She slid her chair back, screeching against the floor, itching to jump up and leave.

Beca pushed her chair back, too, standing. “That’s it. We’re leaving.”

“She, sit down,” Dr. Mitchell said weakly. “It’s Thanksgiving. We’re family.”
“You’re really going to say that to me? Maybe you should tell your sister. Come on, Chloe.”

Beca strode out of the kitchen and Chloe followed, almost jogging to catch up with her halfway up the stairs and into Beca’s room. Beca had her suitcase on the bed in a flash.

“That fucking bitch, I can’t...Chloe, I literally cannot. I...harlots! And...what she said about…” Beca’s rant dissolved into an angry, frustrated growl as she stuffed what little she had unpacked into the luggage.

"Beca."

Beca paused long enough to look up from her frantic stuffing to reveal gray rivulets down her cheeks. Angry tears. "Go pack."

Chloe felt a hiccup in the back of her throat at the sight, her resolve to not let her own tears breaking at Beca's. She turned and ran down the hall to the bathroom, grabbing her toiletries to dump them into her suitcase, taking deep breaths as she tried to calm down. There was yelling downstairs. The rattle of china and silverware. A door slammed.

She'd never been called a whore before.

Sure, a few jealous girls called her a slut in high school, but a whore? And by Beca's aunt. Because she was so misunderstanding and morally offended, she equated Chloe's loving, committed, monogamous relationship with Beca as whorish.

Chloe felt like she'd been slapped, her entire body stinging, and she really wished she was wearing waterproof mascara. She wiped a tear off her chin and slammed her suitcase closed.

Beca was waiting in the hall, jacket on, suitcase in hand. "Let's go."

Beca flew down the stairs, heading straight for the front door only to be blocked by her father, Sheila standing anxiously to the side. Chloe almost ran into Beca from behind with her momentum.
"Move, Dad."

"Beca, let's take a breath and talk about this."

"There's nothing to talk about! I'm a big whore and we're not welcome here. Move."

"Beca."

Chloe saw Beca's shoulders tense further. "Please move."

Sheila touched Dr. Mitchell's arm lightly. "Honey, let them go."

Dr. Mitchell stepped aside, brow furrowed with worry, and Beca launched herself at the door to jerk it open, being caught by her elbow at the last second by Sheila.

"Let me know where you're staying, okay?"

Beca stared at her for a moment, considering, and then nodded tersely before running down the steps, car keys in hand toward their rental.

Chloe moved to follow and was stopped by Sheila as well. "Chloe, sweetie, I'm so, so sorry."

How could she respond? She couldn't say 'it's okay,' because it was the furthest thing from okay. She couldn't say 'it'll be fine' because it was pretty evident it wouldn't be. She couldn't even say she understood, because she would never understand how people like Jeanette existed in the world.

So, she followed suit with Beca; she nodded, and left.

She tossed her suitcase into the trunk with Beca's and fell into her seat, watching Beca's hands shake as she fumbled to get the key in the ignition. She reached out, placing her hand over Beca's
once she got it started. They were both running on adrenaline and anger.

"Beca, we need to breathe for a second."

"I need to get out of here."

"We will. Look at me. Please."

Chloe almost wished she hadn't asked her to; she'd never seen Beca so scared and angry in her life.

"I don't know what's happening," Beca said, suddenly gasping as if she woke up from a nightmare. But it was all very real. And she was in no state to drive, not now. Chloe killed the engine and took the keys, just in case she decided to try it.

"It's okay." Now is when she could say that. "You're okay. Breathe." She wanted to gather Beca up in her arms and squeeze her tight, but that would probably only make it worse.

Beca took another gasping breath, eyes wide, tears still streaming down her cheeks. Chloe breathed with her, in and out. In and out. Keeping their eyes locked until Beca stopped shaking. She took Beca’s right hand in hers, just holding it, thumb stroking over knuckles softly.

“Okay?” she asked, watching Beca blow out a slower breath of resolution.

She nodded. “Um, yeah. I think.”

Chloe unbuckled her seatbelt and hit the latch on Beca’s as well. “Okay. Let’s get out of here. Trade me.”

“What?”

“I’m driving.”
Seeking Solace

They drove half an hour until Chloe pulled into a Holiday Inn. The ride had been quiet, almost painfully so after Beca killed the volume on the radio to send them into silence. Beca plus silence never equaled good, and if she didn't want music, she definitely didn't want conversation. Chloe kept her conversation to herself, reliving the events of the past two days and thinking of all the terrible things she wishes she would have said to Jeanette.

She'd never felt so offended, so attacked. And she couldn't remember ever seeing Beca so hurt and broken. The expression on her face when she looked up from her hurried packing, mascara running, eyes wide in fear - she didn't know if she could ever erase it from her memory. And she knew two wrongs never make a right, but if she wasn't so damn nice, she had some really good, terrible words to hurl at that woman.

However, she was better than that, and would always choose diplomacy, even if it meant she lost the battle. But in a way, it was still winning.

"I'll go get a room. Wanna wait in the car?"

Beca nodded, not quite making eye contact, and Chloe slipped out of the car, returning a few minutes later with key cards in hand. She moved the car to the correct area of the parking lot and watched Beca step out to get her suitcase, movements robotic. Chloe was nervous she was in shock, as stone-faced and still as she was. Even when they got to the hotel room, Beca abandoned her luggage by the door and slid onto the bed to lie on her stomach, face to the wall. She didn't bother to take off her coat or shoes.

"Honey..." Chloe said softly, toeing off her own shoes to join her on the bed, lying on her side, close but not touching except for the arm she rested cautiously across Beca's lower back.

"Do you want to talk?"

Beca shook her head.

"Don't shut down."

Beca's arm came up from where it hung over the side of the bed, middle finger held high.
Chloe winced and squeezed her a little. There was Beca shutting down, and then there was Beca needing to be sad; this was the latter, and the finger wasn’t so much a ‘fuck you’ as it was a ‘please leave me alone.’ "You're right, I'm sorry. I'm going to find something open that will deliver and get us unpacked."

She pulled her phone out of her pocket, not quite ready to leave Beca's side yet, to find a restaurant that not only was open on Thanksgiving after 9:00pm, but also delivered. Thankfully, a number of Chinese places fit the bill and she called in their usual order. She wished she could have a bottle of wine delivered, too; they both sure as hell could use it. She was slow to move, itching to roll over and wrap herself around Beca, but it wasn't time yet. She knew well enough by now Beca needed space after an emotional overload.

So she pushed herself out of bed and busied herself with unpacking their suitcases into the dresser and closet. Beca never understood why she insisted on unpacking in hotel rooms; "You're here for like two days; you'll just have to repack it." "If I'm paying for a hotel, I'm going to use it!"

It didn’t take long to do, and she checked the time and decided she had enough flexibility before their replacement dinner arrived, and while she purposely found food to be delivered, they did have a car, and she knew Beca would appreciate a few minutes of solitude.

"Hey, Bec?"

No response other than the twitch of a foot.

"I'm going to run down the street. I saw a grocery store on the way and need to grab something."

A flick of a hand was a wave goodbye and Chloe tried not to sigh too loudly. It was hard for her to ignore emotional distress, especially Beca's. She wanted to wrap her up in a cocoon of love and safety and understanding and never let anything bad happen to her, to keep all the mean people from ever hurting her Beca.

She was as quick as she could manage, grabbing a cheap bottle of white wine at the store and filling the plastic shopping bag with ice at the hotel machine before returning to the room.

It was a bit of a relief when she entered. The television was on, and the food had arrived and was set out, little white cartons lined up along the desk. Beca exited the bathroom as Chloe dumped the
ice into the ice bucket and shoved the wine bottle into it.

"Bless you," Beca said, paused in the little foyer, the first words to make it past her lips since they left her aunt's house.

"Hey, sweetie," she said, offering a gentle smile and resisting the urge to smother her in a hug. She looked Beca over with an attentive eye; she'd washed her face and tied her hair back. Her coat was gone and feet bare. She had shed the cardigan she wore to dinner to leave her in black jeans and a simple white tee. It was almost a complete reversal of Chloe's own attire of white jeans and oversized charcoal gray sweater; yin and yang, and a thought about how they always complemented one another so well flitted through her mind.

Beca joined her at the desk, leaning against her a little until Chloe slipped an arm around her waist and pressed a kiss to her temple. "Hi," Beca said quietly, and Chloe felt an arm slide around her waist, too.

"Hungry?" Chloe asked, reaching with her free hand to pop the top on one of the containers.

"Starving."

A hungry Beca was a good sign and she reclaimed her arm to get to work, flipping the other three boxes open to find Beca's beef and broccoli. She stuffed a fork into it and passed it to her, and smiled as she watched her hop onto the bed and shove pillows around to sit back against them and tuck into her food.

Chloe found her sweet and sour pork and brought it and a container of fried rice to the bed, setting them on her end table to fetch two cups of water for them, unwrapping the flimsy plastic hotel cups.

"What are we watching?" she asked, settling next to Beca in bed, legs outstretched. She hoped it was nothing; she was missing one of her family's traditions at the moment, and even if all other traditions had been obliterated at the dinner table tonight, one might be salvageable.

"Dunno. Just turned it on for noise. You can change it."

Commercials were airing, and Chloe grinned, leaning over Beca to snatch the remote from her side
of the bed, surfing until she found the right network. Commercials were playing there, too, but she knew the movie would be back soon. She shook her feet excitedly, wondering where in the story they would drop into, and when the commercials ended and the black and white landscape of Kansas appeared, she squealed; the film was just getting started. "Yay!!"

"What is this?" Beca asked with her mouth full.

Chloe scoffed. "I'm not even going to justify that with an answer. If you don't know now, wait thirty seconds."

On cue, Dorothy appeared, strolling along the dirt road unwittingly toward Professor Marvel's wagon while a nasty thunderstorm brewed in the background.

"No, really. What is this?"

Chloe couldn't believe her ears. What girl in the English-speaking world didn't know The Wizard of Oz? She felt her jaw drop and whipped her head around to launch into Beca about the levels of unacceptability happening right now, only to be met with one of Beca's shit-eating grins.

"Gotcha," she said, laughing before popping another piece of broccoli into her mouth.

Chloe breathed a sigh of relief. "Thank God."

She turned her attention back to the TV, but not completely. It was reassuring for Beca to be teasing and laughing, a sign that she was recovering from her overload. She could hear the sadness in her voice, though, hiding, woven into her words. She ached to get her to open up and talk, but she knew Beca would, eventually, and Chloe needed to be patient and have her ears open and ready for it. More than once the deluge happened without warning, while laughing about Emily tripping over her feet in rehearsal and suddenly Beca was on the bleachers, sobbing and giving everyone but Chloe anxiety that someone had died when in reality it was Beca breaking down over an exam she bombed - she really did care about doing well in school - or any multitude of things a person could get upset about.

Beca just waited so long to let it out that when she finally did, it was a tidal wave. But Chloe knew how to swim. And kept a life preserver handy just in case the current was too strong: strong arms to just hold her and let her cry, which was sometimes all Beca needed.
After doing a decent job at making dinner disappear, Chloe cracked open the chilled wine, using the same flimsy plastic glasses, and handed Beca her cup as she climbed back into bed - not before shedding her jeans in the name of comfort after eating so much. Beca curled into her and Chloe tucked an arm around her shoulders to pull her closer and then sent her fingertips into Beca's hair, earning a shiver of gratitude.

"I don't understand how people can be so hateful," Beca said after a few minutes, voice quiet.

Chloe mentally checked her life preserver and pulled the tie out of Beca's hair to run her fingers through it more easily. "Neither do I."

"I mean, I get that she believes what she believes. But...but why did she have to be so mean?" Beca's voice cracked and Chloe held her breath, but the heart-wrenching sobs didn't start.

"I don't know. She doesn't understand it, so she's afraid of it."

Beca sat up and looked at her, eyes a little glassy. "What is there to be afraid of?"

"I wish I knew."

"We aren't hurting anyone."

"No, we aren't."

Beca huffed, weakly punching the bed with her fist. "She makes me so mad."

"Beca...it's not worth the energy. Some people refuse to understand. We can tell them how we feel...but you can’t change a zebra’s stripes. You told her how you felt tonight, and I know it wasn’t easy to do. I’m really proud of you."

Beca opened her mouth as if to disagree, but it closed with a click of her teeth and she laid back down against Chloe. "I think I'm more sad than mad."
"I don’t blame you."

"She's my aunt."

"It's not fair."

Beca shook her head. "And my dad didn't even do anything. He just sat there. Told me to sit down and listen to her bullshit because 'we're family.' Family. Yeah right."

"Your dad..." Chloe chose her words carefully. "Your dad loves you, and...he's not perfect. No one is."

"But I'm his daughter. He should have defended me."

Chloe heard her voice crack again and felt her shift closer. "Yes, he should have."

"I would never do that to my kids."

Chloe paused; it was the first time she had ever heard Beca mention the concept of having children someday. Whenever it was discussed amongst the Bellas, she was flippant or indecisive.

"Of course you wouldn't."

Beca was quiet for a long time, and her steady breathing made Chloe wonder if she'd fallen asleep. But eventually, her soft voice floated up to Chloe's ear.

"You'd totally be the hardass, strict parent."

Chloe quirked an eyebrow down at Beca looking up at her from where she was using Chloe's lap as a pillow. She felt her pulse pick up a little at the comment. "I would? How do you figure?"
"If you had to co-captain with yourself for three years like I did, you'd understand."

Chloe laughed, taking mock offense. "Hey, what's that supposed to mean?"

"It means you're the one that barked orders and kept everyone in line and I'm the one that tried not to laugh at you doing it."

"That was rarely helpful, you know."

Beca grinned. "I know."

"So if I'm the strict one..." she let it dangle, not one hundred percent certain that Beca's look into her crystal ball was specifically referring to their joint parenting style, or if it was a generic statement about Chloe.

"I'm the one that lets them get away with everything after you tell them 'no.'"

Chloe's face warmed, and she smiled. "Is that so."

"Yep. Sorry in advance for all the junk food and toys and staying-up-past-bedtimes."

Chloe knew she was grinning way too big, but try as she might, she couldn't wrangle her smile in line. "I didn't know you wanted kids."

Beca shrugged, almost spilling her wine in the process with the awkward positioning. "Someday. I'm not in any rush. I mean, I'm twenty-two. And this whole producing thing seems to be working out okay."

Chloe snorted a laugh at that. Yeah, it was maybe going well for Beca.

“So I kind of want to see where that will go. I'm pretty sure I'll fuck them up though. So. Fair warning.”
"Now what makes you think that?"

"Because I know me."

"Not like I know you. And even if you do mess 'em up, it's okay. I'm pretty sure we're all a little messed up thanks to our parents."

"I guess."

Chloe could hear worry twinge Beca's tone, and it honestly surprised her. Concern about the kind of parent she would be didn't exactly fit Beca's standard operating procedure. "Beca, look at me."

Beca rolled her head a little, meeting Chloe's gaze.

"I think you'll make a great mom," Chloe continued, tracing a fingertip along Beca's hairline.

"I hope so."

They fell into comfortable silence, the movie offering a nostalgic soundtrack as they cuddled. The conversation had sent Chloe's mind into overdrive though. That was the conversation she'd been waiting and wanting to have with Beca for months. It wasn't that she didn't want to "waste her time" on a relationship with Beca if they didn't want similar things for their future; no time with Beca was ever wasted. But the emotional drain of not knowing - or if she didn't want children - was something Chloe didn't want to experience. Building a life with someone was hard enough, let alone if you're haunted by thoughts that it's all temporary, because as in love with Beca as she was, she didn't know if it would be enough to overcome the maternal drive she had since she was a child herself. She had more baby dolls than she could count when she was five. She went through home decor and toy catalogues at thirteen to design her ideal nursery. And she didn't tell anyone, not a soul, but she had a baby shower pre-registry list saved in her computer, ready for when the day came. That same drive is what led her to captain the Bellas, be their house mother, and now teach.

Frankly, Chloe Beale knew her purpose in life was to be a mother. And she spent the better part of the last six months worrying and wondering if her purpose in life could be changed to simply love Beca, and to fulfill that instinct with her students.
It seemed now, however, that she no longer needed to compromise. And with that information, she knew she could sit back and be patient, and be content that they were on the same page.

"Some Thanksgiving, huh?" Beca said with a sigh, interrupting Chloe's thoughts. "I'm sorry I ruined it."

"Beca." Chloe lifted her head to look down at her. "You didn't ruin anything."

"None of this would have happened if we'd gone to your family's instead."

"Stop. We would have come here eventually and it was either now or later. But you didn't ruin anything."

"Then why do I feel like I did?"

"Because you actually care about other people, Beca Mitchell."

Beca shoved Chloe's shoulder a little. "Shut up."

She chuckled. "But at least we're together for it."

Beca nodded and curled into Chloe's side, and she could finally wrap Beca up in her arms like she'd been itching to all night.

"Happy Thanksgiving, Beca."

Beca snorted. "Yeah. Happy."

"I'm happy with you."

"God, you're so cheesy."
Chloe pressed a kiss to Beca's forehead. "So?"

"Happy Thanksgiving, Chlo."
"Hey Ichabod. Have a nice Thanksgiving?"

Chloe glared at the snowflake she was stapling to her classroom wall, recognizing both the nickname and voice. "I still don't understand why you've started calling me Ichabod."

"Because of your wart issue. Toads have warts."

Chloe rolled her eyes; of course the genital wart rumor she started would never die. "Anika, Mr. Toad is the toad in Ichabod and Mr. Toad. You could at least get that detail correct." There was a beat of silence, and Chloe smiled in satisfaction as she kept stapling her paper snowflakes.

"Whatever. How was your break?"

Chloe wanted to get sassy and ask why Anika Schmidt cared. But she remembered her commitment to killing with kindness. "It was fine." Schmidt was the last person on the planet she would share her personal drama with. "Yours?"

She saw a shrug out of the corner of her eye. "My boyfriend dumped me. In front of my parents at dinner."

Chloe hesitated, breaking her staple-staple-snowflake rhythm. Why was Schmidt sharing anything about her life? Especially something so personal. "I'm sorry to hear that," she broached cautiously, censoring the "I can't imagine why!" that wanted to spill forth.

"Yeah." Schmidt actually sounded...sad.

Chloe turned to look at her and try to get a read on her intentions, but she really did look sad, and tired. Chloe was no fool, though; she spent four months learning how to protect and defend herself from the woman hovering in her doorway, apparently looking for sympathy, and she wasn't going to give in that easily, though she definitely identified with her less than ideal holiday.

"Why are you telling me this?"
Another shrug, and Schmidt wrapped her arms around herself. "I don't really have anyone to talk to anymore. And...and you're...nice."

Chloe's eyebrows shot up at the compliment that was surely not easy for her to give. Of course, the reason Schmidt didn't have many friends anymore was because Chloe had successfully turned them all against her and her conniving ways. Suddenly she felt guilty.

But not guilty enough.

"I don't think I'm the right person to talk to you about this. For reasons we both know. But I am sorry you're going through a hard time. I need to get back to this, so I'll see you later, okay?"

She didn't let herself watch the woman leave, because as horribly as Anika Schmidt had treated her, she was still a person looking for comfort, and Chloe never hesitated to offer it to someone. Except now. She couldn't risk the myriad consequences that could come with it - revealing too much about her personal life and relationship, for example - that could be twisted and used against her. She was also starting to have to take into consideration Beca's imminent rise to fame, sure to come upon the album's release. She didn't need Schmidt going to TMZ to talk about Beca Mitchell's homophobic family, for example.

She would keep her eye on Anika Schmidt. Perhaps she had a heart after all.

Though Chloe couldn't be certain.

When she got home, Chloe excitedly heated up leftovers and plopped down in front of her laptop, which was already ringing with the Skype incoming call tone. It was Wednesday.

"Hi!" she chirped when the video call connected and Aubrey's wide smile appeared.

"Hi! How are you?"
"That's a loaded question."

Chloe recounted the events from Thanksgiving, including the fight with Jeanette and the discussion with Beca about kids, to the possible change in her dynamic with her sworn enemy, and Aubrey listened, and nodded, and tutted at all the right times, waiting until Chloe's thirty minute monologue ended.

"Wow. Okay. You weren't kidding."

Chloe sighed and shook her head.

"Let's start with the low-hanging fruit. Don't let that Schmidthead pull the wool over your eyes. Like my father always said, fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, you're an asshole."

Chloe laughed. "I'm not. I'm also not totally opposed to burying the hatchet. I'm not rushing into that though."

"Good girl. Now, what's this talk about children?"

Chloe smiled, a moment of shyness washing over her. "Beca brought it up when we were talking about the fight with her aunt, and how her dad pretty much let it happen. She said she wouldn't do that to her kids."

"I thought she didn't want kids? I don't remember her mentioning it, but I only spent the one year with her."

"No, me neither. Whenever the girls started talking about it, she would make a comment or crack a joke, always against it, or she'd just avoid the conversation altogether."

"Well?"

"Well what?"
“Does that mean you’re talking about settling down? I’m still waiting for you to come to me wanting help with some grand proposal.”

Chloe felt herself blush head to toe, almost faint at the thought. It was one thing to dream about, but sometimes the thought that it could be real slammed her in the gut and the emotions that came with it were confusing. It wasn’t that she didn’t want to marry Beca; it was one of the few things in her life she was now one hundred percent sure of. It was just...really scary. "No! It was just a conversation. I mean...I mean yeah. It was a conversation about us...being parents...together. But it was vague and...nonspecific. And Beca wants to wait awhile to have kids anyway, so." Aubrey was grinning at her. "What?"

"You two are too adorable and maddening to handle. Honestly. It took you three years to realize you’d been in love for three years. Is it going to take another three years for you to realize you shoulda put a ring on it?"

"Bree, please. I have enough going on in my life. I don't need to throw a wedding into it, too. Stop bringing it up." If she was honest, she was actually pretty terrified that, if she did work up the nerve to propose, Beca would turn her down, citing things were moving too quickly, she was afraid of commitment, she didn’t need a piece of paper to be in a committed relationship, etc.

Aubrey held up her hands. "Okay, okay. I’ll stop asking, but in my defense, you opened this door by sharing the whole kids conversation with me. But I'll be expecting regular updates on all progress. I'm a busy woman; I need to clear my calendar if a wedding is happening."

"Aubrey!"

“Theoretically, though - would you want gold or platinum rings?”

Chloe pressed her fingers to her brow, shaking her head. “Oh my God. I don’t know. I guess platinum. We both wear silver more often than gold.”

“You guess? Send me a pic of what you like. Let me find what I’d want, too. How have we never done this before?”

Chloe smiled and shrugged, still hiding the upper half of her face. She knew exactly what style of engagement ring she wanted: a platinum-banded princess cut diamond, preferably with smaller diamonds inlaid into the band. Beyond the metal, she hadn’t the foggiest idea what Beca would
want. Was she a princess or asscher cut? Maybe round? They spent a few minutes in silence, Aubrey Googling and Chloe pretending to Google as she dug deep into one of her many super private folders with misleading folder names, one that lived next to her baby shower registry folder, and pulled up the picture of one of her favorite engagement rings, should she ever have the chance to pick it out for herself, and they swapped images. She tried to not grimace at the pear-shaped, gold-banded atrocity Aubrey chose.

“*Oh, that’s pretty! I like it.*”

“Yours is nice, too,” she lied, as a friend should. The sound of keys in the door made her scramble to close her windows full of engagement rings, just in time for Beca to enter.

“Chlo, I’m home!” she called, not looking up from her iPhone to notice Chloe sitting on the couch until she said hello. “Oh! Sorry,” she said, sliding her phone into her pocket. “Hey.”

“Hi, you.”

“*Is that Beca?”*

“Who else would it be?” Beca asked, leaning over the back of the couch and into the frame of the webcam, grazing her lips against Chloe’s cheek in the process. “Hey, Aubrey.”

“*Busy day in the studio?”*

“Yeah. Was a good one though. We’re almost finished. Ahead of schedule, actually.”

Chloe felt, then saw in the little window on her screen that showed her camera’s view, Beca’s arms drape over her shoulders to cross just below Chloe’s chin, and she smiled at it. She knew it would never get old, Beca coming home to her or vice versa, and for the moment, the concept a rejected proposal felt ludicrous. She didn’t realize she’d tuned out their conversation until Beca gave her a little shake, snapping back her attention.

“I’ll let you guys talk. Did you eat?”
Chloe sighed at the loss of the embrace and watched as Beca made her way to the kitchen. “There’s still chicken in the fridge.”

“Wonderful,” Beca said sourly; she despised leftovers.

"Yoo-hoo, over here."

“Sorry,” Chloe said, forcing her attention back to Aubrey.

“You two are nauseating. Aren't you tired of staring at her longingly yet?”

“Fuck you, Posen!” rang out from the kitchen, followed by laughter from all three women.

“Anyway. How’s school?”

Chloe was relieved that the conversation was moving on to the more standard aspects of their lives: the crazy antics of her students, what Aubrey was doing to fill her time during her lodge's off-season, the fact that Aubrey was still talking to her policeman from the Halloween party.

"What!" Chloe shrieked. "You're just going to slide that in there like it's a comment about the weather?"

Aubrey giggled and gave a shrug of her shoulders.

"Oh my gosh, you really like him! You never giggle like that."

She scrunched her face. "I kinda do."

"Wow! That's awesome, I'm happy for you. You're going to try the long-distance thing?"

"For now. Thank God for Skype, am I right?"
The look of implication on Aubrey's face put images in Chloe's mind that she really didn't need and she shook her head, laughing. "TMI!"

"Oh whatever. It's not like you and Beca have never used it that way."

"What? We have not!"

“Not yet,” Beca chimed in from her post in front of the microwave as she watched her dinner reheat.

"Liars, both of you!"

"No! No. We don't...I mean, we haven't needed to. We haven't been apart." Chloe felt herself warming again. She and Beca were hardly shy with one another in the bedroom, but the concept of using video chat to...to do that was equal parts intimidating and intriguing. She'd let Beca see her...do that in the past, in particularly heated moments, but she had never seen Beca...explore herself, other than in her imagination. If they were together, Chloe was more than eager to be the one doing the exploring for Beca. She swallowed hard at the upgraded images filling her mind.

"If you say so. I'm just saying: it's really helpful when you can't be together in person."

"Okay, moving on," Chloe said with a smile. "When will you get to see him again? Is he going to visit you? And you're obvs going to come here more often!"

"Eventually, yes. He's still in school there."

"Cradle robber!"

"Oh hush. And you're one to talk! But he's our age; it's law school and he's graduating in May."

"Wait wait wait; back up and tell me everything."
Aubrey’s new guy - Eric, Chloe remembered from having heard it repeatedly Halloween night - was following in his father's footsteps of becoming an attorney. A position in his father's law firm was waiting for him as soon as he passed the bar exam, he played intramural soccer, and had three older sisters, which Chloe figured gave him the survival skills necessary to forge a romantic relationship with Aubrey Posen.

“So when’s the wedding?” she asked, proudly turning the tables. "I'm a busy woman. I expect regular updates." She avoided referencing the fact that Aubrey was just harassing her about marriage, since Beca was eavesdropping by circumstance.

“Oh, fuck you.”

Chloe cackled, savoring the small victory. She noticed Beca sitting at the table, eating, smiling at her in amusement with a little curiosity. She held her finger up, indicating to Beca she’d be done soon. “Hey, Bree, I need to let you go.”

“All right. Same time next week?”

“Should be fine. I’ll let you know if it’s not.”

“Okay. Love you. Talk to you guys later.”

“Bye!” Beca called.

“Love you, too. Bye.” Chloe disconnected the call and closed her laptop. She pushed herself off the couch to join Beca at the table, but not before giving her a quick, chaste kiss between bites. "How was your day?”

Beca pointed at the couch, to remind Chloe of the conversation she just had with Aubrey. "Busy. Things are going really well though."

"Anything new for me to hear?"

Beca nodded, chewing. "Remind me later. How about you, how was your day?"
"You'll never guess who came to me looking for sympathy."

Chloe wasn't sure where the year went, but Christmas was looming and she was determined for it to be more decorative than their Halloween and more positive than their Thanksgiving.

After the Turkey Day Disaster (as they had come to refer to it, or TDD for short), they agreed to forego another family reunion. Despite the fact that Chloe's family would be a non-issue in regards to homophobic outrage, they were still recovering emotionally from the drain and neither felt like jumping back on that horse. Beca was also hesitant to give up so much time to travel - they'd lose an entire day flying Los Angeles to Miami, and her deadline of December 30th was non-negotiable. Of course, Chloe making the call to her mother to break the news that she wouldn't be home for Christmas for the first time in literally forever wasn't easy, but Chloe inherited her caring, understanding personality from her mother and all it took to make her accept the decision was to say they "just didn't have the energy after what happened."

And like that, it was settled. They would have a quiet, intimate Christmas alone; she was adjusting to the concept, never having had anything but a massive family reunion for the holiday. She and Beca were together-alone all the time, but there was something particularly romantic about planning it for Christmas. There would be spiked cider and hot cocoa and if Beca thought she could escape singing Christmas carols together she was mistaken; but there would be no eggnog. The concept of it made both their stomachs turn. They didn't have a fireplace, but if they did, there definitely would be lovemaking in front of it. Then again, it was Los Angeles and it was probably going to be eighty degrees on Christmas and a fire would have been ridiculous anyway. She definitely had a few holiday-inspired thoughts about that, though (the lovemaking, not the fireplace).

So she took Beca's car to school so she could go shopping on her way home, and she couldn't help but feel kind of badass rolling into the faculty parking lot in a Corvette and park it next to the minivans and sedans.

She had been able to save up a little holiday cash and she was beyond excited to hit up the Christmas department at Target. Since it was their first independent home, neither she nor Beca had much to speak of when it came to decorations, and she piled lights and garlands and gift wrap into her shopping cart. They didn't have a tree yet, but she was beside herself with anticipation of going to a tree lot to pick one out together next weekend.

Christmas gifts were something on which Chloe prided herself. She spent three hundred and sixty-five days per year paying attention to her friends' and family's hints about what they wanted and
needed. She kept a list in a note in her iPhone.

The only person without a gift next to their name? One Beca Mitchell.

Chloe gnawed at her thumbnail as she reviewed her list in the shopping mall parking lot; she had failed to get her a proper birthday present - not that Beca had minded that essentially being worshipped was her gift - but Chloe wanted to get her something special, something memorable.

It was their very first Christmas together together.

And sure, she had a cheesy "Our First Christmas" picture frame ornament in a shopping bag, but that was far from appropriate for such a memorable occasion.

It wasn't that Beca was particularly hard to shop for; Chloe knew all her sizes, best colors, most flattering cuts, and her preferences and favorites in pretty much anything from food to music (not music equipment, however), but she wanted to hit a homerun. And Beca hadn't dropped any hints about something she really wanted or needed.

Deciding to hope for inspiration to strike, she strode into the mall ready to melt her credit card if need be.

Not that it would come as a surprise to anyone, but Chloe loved to shop. More than once she'd been physically dragged out of a store by friends who were going insane from boredom. She was alone this afternoon, however, and only the 10:00pm closing time would force her out the door.

A few hours and a few hundred dollars later, her list was checked off, with that one exception. She decided to start fresh and dropped off her shopping bags in the car and tackled the mall one more time, wandering in and out of shops, waiting for that inspiration to hit.

The trouble with Beca was that she was particular about the things most important to her. Chloe could buy her an entirely new wardrobe and, generally speaking, she would be fine with it. But something such as, say, a new pair of headphones or one of her fancy boards with all the buttons that light up? Forget about it. Beca had so many requirements and opinions that it was impossible for Chloe to memorize.

She considered briefly a gift card so she could go buy her own, but gift cards were for grandparents
to give their grandchildren and so very uninspired.

When she passed the jewelry store which anchored one wing of the mall, she paused.

She shook her head at herself; no, she wasn't going to buy an engagement ring and propose on Christmas. However...

She let herself wander in, and she knew if not for the business caused by the holiday shopping season, a salesperson would have swooped on her immediately. She pointedly avoided the rings, angling toward watches, bracelets, necklaces, and earrings.

Beca had come a long way since her thick eyeliner and intimidating earrings. She still liked to embrace the darker shades, but she'd lightened up quite a bit since they first met, in more ways than one. Chloe liked to think she had something to do with that.

She slowed down at the watches; Beca didn't have a nice watch, but she also knew watches clanged against her laptop when she used it and it drove her nuts. That put bracelets out of commission, too.

She considered the necklaces, but they were all over-the-top feminine, full of hearts and swirls as charms. Not Beca at all.

But Beca did like earrings. Her collection was impressive. But Chloe knew one specific category of earring was missing from her collection.

"Can I help you?"

Chloe smiled at the saleswoman who sidestepped from helping another customer who was hemming and hawing their purchase. "I'd like to see those," she said, tapping her finger on the glass above a pair of simple diamond studs.

"Lovely choice." The woman retrieved the earrings and the box they were mounted in and slid it over the counter to Chloe. "They're each a quarter-carat, set in white gold, with screw-on backs to help prevent accidental loss."
She tried not to wince; she knew diamonds well enough to know that a half-carat's worth wouldn't be cheap. But they shone like, well, like diamonds, and diamonds are forever, and a girl's best friend.

"Christmas gift?" the worker asked politely.

"Mhmm." Chloe picked up the box, examining them.

"Someone special?"

Chloe looked up, smiling. "Yeah. How much are they?"

"Five twenty-nine, and we offer free gift wrapping."

Chloe tried not to scoff. Fifty cents' worth of gift wrap was not a selling point when considering whether or not to spend five hundred dollars. Maybe it was to those less adept at wrapping.

"Okay, I'll take them. I don't need the gift wrap, though."
I'll Be Home For Christmas

Chapter Notes

So, for fun, I decided to play around in a home design program and draw Beca and Chloe's North Hollywood condo, so you awesome nerds can have a better visual of the world I've built here. CLICK to see it (there's the Main level and the Bedroom), and play around with the 3D views!

"Come on!" Chloe said excitedly, hopping out of the car. "And don't even think about forgetting your hat." She bounced on her feet in the parking lot, grinning at Beca who first rolled her eyes and then spent a good thirty seconds getting her Santa hat to sit on her head just-so, using the car window as a mirror.

"I should have picked the antlers," she said, finally happy with how the fluffy white ball lay.

"Snooze, you lose!" Chloe smiled, giving her head a shake so the jingle bells sewn onto her stiff fabric antler headband rang. "Plus, you look adorable in that. Come here."

She grabbed Beca's hand and pulled her in for a kiss and an unannounced selfie in the process. "Now let's go," Chloe prompted, leading them through the entrance of the Christmas tree lot set up in the parking lot of a home improvement store.

After the third or thirteenth selfie Beca was lassoed into amidst the rows of pine trees, she confiscated Chloe's phone. "How about we actually pick out a tree while we're here?"

Chloe gave her a pout, but let her take the lead.

"Shit, I just realized I have no idea how high our ceiling is," Beca said, pausing between sections marking six-foot versus seven-foot trees.

"Eight feet."

Beca smirked. "Now how do you know that?"
Chloe shrugged a little sheepishly. "I looked up the place online when you gave me address, before I was coming with you."

"And why?"

"So I could maybe daydream about being there, too, okay? Geez, stop interrogating me," Chloe said, laughing.

"Ah ha. Thanks for reinforcing my theory."

Chloe followed Beca down the aisle of six-footers. "And what theory is that?"

"That I was the frequent subject of your daydreams."

Chloe giggled and took a leaping step to catch Beca around the waist and nip the shell of her ear. "And my night dreams. Particularly the wet ones."

She felt Beca squirm in her arms, and then freeze at the word 'wet' and let out a puff of air. "Stop," Beca laughed breathlessly.

Chloe pressed her lips to Beca's neck, feeling it warmer than usual, and then released her. "How about this one?" she asked, pointing at a tree they'd paused in front of.

Beca grabbed a branch of the tree and shook it, staring at the ground. "No, look how many needles just fell off it. Maybe one of these," she said, repeating the action on a few trees down the line until she nodded, pleased with the results of one.

Chloe smiled, watching her scientific evaluations, and how serious she became about it like she was suddenly some coniferous tree expert. "Okay, I'll go find someone to help us."

"I swear to God, that thing better not scratch the shit out of my roof," Beca said, hands on her hips as a team of workers prepped their tree to be tied on top of her car.
"Wait!" Chloe said, suddenly remembering, and dove into the car to pull out a blanket she brought from home and unfurled it over the car's roof.

Beca grinned. "Genius. Go ahead, guys."

"Jesus...just do it already, Chloe!"

"I'm trying!" Chloe huffed, stretched out on the floor on her stomach under the Christmas tree, trying to get the bolts screwed tightly enough in the stand against the tree trunk so it would stop leaning. In the process, Beca's arms were getting scratched to Hell on branches and needles as she tried to hold it straight.

"How did our dads make this seem so easy?" Beca said. "I'm itchy as fuck."

"I remember my dad cursing at least as much as you are." She twisted a screw harder, fingers aching. "Okay, try it now."

She watched Beca's arm withdraw through the branches above her, and the tree seemed stable.

"Is it straight?" she asked, unable to tell from her vantage point on the floor.

"Straight-ish."

"I give up. Good enough. Will you get me some water to put in this thing while I'm down here?"

Chloe demanded a ‘union break’ after the ordeal of just getting the tree inside and upright. They were both frustrated and high-strung, and it was far from the magical tree-trimming mood she cherished.
So after thirty minutes, comprised mostly of making out in the armchair with Beca in her lap to break the tension followed by a glass of white wine, Chloe queued up a holiday playlist and retrieved the shopping bags of decor she brought home a few days earlier.

But not before throwing Beca’s Santa hat at her and sliding the reindeer antlers headband into place.

“This again?” Beca asked, settling the red and white fuzzy cap on her head.

“It’s our first Christmas together, Bec! We have to be fun.”

“Something tells me the reasoning for this is going to change every year. This year, because it’s our first. Next year, because it’s our second. After that, because it’s our first anniversary or whatever.”

Chloe slowed her unpacking; Beca knew full well their first anniversary together would be in May, not two years from now. Unless it was a different kind of anniversary she was talking about. Like a wedding anniversary. She glanced at Beca, bent over the shopping bags on the floor to dig through them until she found the boxes of lights, nonplussed by her own comments, as though it was a given that they would always spend the holidays together.

Chloe, meanwhile, blew out a slow breath to settle her heart back into her chest where it belonged, as opposed to her throat.

"Aw dude, you got colored lights?" Beca asked holding up the boxes with a frown.

Chloe gave her head a little shake, snapping back into the moment and making her antlers jingle. "Of course!"

"Huh. I'm more of a white light person myself." Beca opened the boxes anyway, plugging each string into the wall to verify they worked.

"We can do white next year if you want?" Chloe asked, appreciative that Beca kept moving forward with the decorating despite her slight disappointment.
"Deal." Beca stepped into the corner next to the tree with a balled string of lights in her hand. "Get across from me. I'll pass them to you."

They wove the lights back and forth, stopping halfway through to turn off the lights in the room to check distribution and connect the second string to the first.

"What do we think?" Beca asked, taking a few steps back to survey their work.

Chloe mirrored her, nodding. "Looks good to me."

"Cool. I'm going to go grab my box of Christmas stuff upstairs. You have one, too, right?"

Chloe nodded. While it wasn't much, they each received a box from their families with the Christmas keepsakes and ornaments from their years at home. She was excited to have a peek into Beca's childhood and share one with her in return.

Beca returned a minute later, boxes balanced on top of the other, earning a tut of disapproval from Chloe for risking falling down the stairs as she rushed to grab the top box so Beca could see where she was going.

She had purposely waited to open her box until now, and she was positively giddy with excitement. So many memories were tied to Christmas, and most of them would be inside that box. She plopped on the floor with it, legs outstretched in a V with the box between them as she used scissors to slice the tape on the seam.

"You better give me a story behind every single thing in that box," she said as she passed the scissors to Beca.

"Now why do you have a Michigan J. Frog ornament?" Chloe asked, touching the bright green cartoon frog wearing a top hat dangling from Beca's finger on a hook.
"He's my mom's favorite. My grandma had taken me shopping and I saw it in the store and, I'm
told, I threw a fit until she bought it for me to give to my mom. But when I had to wrap it, I threw
another fit that I wanted to keep it. And because I was a spoiled brat, my grandma bought another
one for me to give Mom so I could keep this one."

"Oh my gosh, that is amazing," Chloe said, laughing as Beca hung the frog on the tree. She gasped
at the ornament Beca retrieved next. "Is that Harry Potter??"

"Shut up," Beca mumbled, hanging the boy wizard riding a broom onto a branch.

"I never knew you liked Harry Potter!"

Beca shrugged, and Chloe could see her blushing a little. "The books were okay."

"I lived for Harry Potter! How has this never come up between us? Which was your favorite?"

"Deathly Hallows." Beca seemed to be relaxing again, glancing at Chloe sideways.

"Yes!" Chloe clapped. "Me, too!"

"Really? I thought you'd be more of a Goblet of Fire kind of girl."

Chloe gasped, mockingly indignant. "You should know me better than that by now."

Beca smiled, staring at her a moment, and Chloe felt like she was being judged. Sorted, perhaps. "I
stand corrected." Beca paused again, and Chloe could see her lips twitching as she debated saying
whatever was rolling through her mind. Chloe just waited, hands on her hips, until Beca made up
her mind. "Hufflepuff?"

Chloe nodded proudly. "And you're totes Slytherin."

"Well. Obviously," Beca said as she went back to her box. She shared more stories as she worked
through her keepsakes, Chloe's favorite being one about how one year her grandmother gave her a
doll, and she was thirteen, and she was not only too old for dolls and never liked dolls to begin with, the only thing she had asked for was a skateboard. A photo existed, taken by her father, of Beca posing with her new doll, with a look so upset and disappointed, a smile so fake and forced that her dad actually refused to send it to his mother because Beca looked so ungrateful. She was ashamed of her behavior now, but could laugh about it. And she promised to find the picture next time she went home.

Which wouldn't be any time soon.

"You have your stocking, right?" Beca asked, pulling a traditional red and white Christmas stocking out of her box, her name sewn across the fuzzy white edge in gold thread. It was relatively plain when compared to the sequined snowman one Chloe retrieved from her box. It made Beca laugh and shake her head, and since they didn't have a fireplace to hang them by, she tapped two nails into the wall next to the tree and hung them there, side by side, Beca and Chloe.

"I think we did a pretty good job," Chloe said, arm draped around Beca's shoulders as they stood in front of the decorated Christmas tree. It was a new, and nice, amalgamation of their memories and traditions. The sun was long set and they hadn't bothered to turn the lights on, and the room was bathed in the glow of the tiny multi-colored lights. Beca had shed her Santa hat when it became too warm, but Chloe still had her antlers, jingling every time she moved her head. Like now, as she nodded at the tree.

Beca's arm tightened around her waist and Chloe felt her lean into her a little. "Yeah we did."

Christmas Eve at the Beale-Mitchell home was an exciting time. They agreed that Eve would be their day of fun and Day would be their day of lounging.

That didn't preclude them from being lazy on the 24th, however.

Chloe woke up to the smell of bacon and an empty bed. She smiled and stretched before freshening up and padding downstairs to see what Beca was up to. She could hear "Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree" playing, and the distinct tone of Beca’s voice singing over the track.

"Smells good in here."
"Good morning, sleepyhead," Beca said with a smile over her shoulder, antler headband jingling. She was standing in front of the stove in black and white polka dotted sleep shorts and a black tank top, turning bacon in a skillet. Chloe noticed the mixing bowl and a few telltale ingredients on the island behind her.

Chloe smiled at the headband Beca took upon herself to don. "Pancakes?"

"Yep."

She eased in behind Beca, hugging her from behind with a kiss to her cheek. "Need help?"

“Not really. You can set the table whenever.”

Chloe watched her girlfriend from a seat at the island, mixing and pouring batter, flipping pancakes with practiced ease and stacking them onto a plate with her little headband jingling all the way. It was sweet, and cute, and romantic, and festive, and Chloe felt the butterflies she'd finally started to become accustomed to stir up again, making her heart race as she pictured the scenario with the addition of rambunctious children weaving in and out of the kitchen, annoying their mother as she tried to make breakfast.

"Chlo?" A spatula waved in her face. "Earth to Chloe."

Chloe shook the images out of her head, coming-to to see a smiling Beca, dish towel over her shoulder, antlers on her head, spatula wielded not unlike a sword, and a smudge of pancake mix on her cheek, and she wasn't positive, but it might have been the most beautiful Beca ever looked. "Sorry."

Beca's smile was touched by a smirk, and Chloe knew she'd been busted daydreaming. "Set the table?"

Chloe hopped to her feet. "Right!" She pulled plates and silverware out of cabinets and drawers as Beca set her plates of pancakes and bacon on the table, followed by a bottle of maple syrup, her cup of coffee, and as Chloe poured them each a glass of orange juice, made Chloe a cup of coffee of her own.
"Where's your head this morning?" Beca asked, taking a seat.

Chloe shook her head, smiling. "It's here. I'm just happy."

"Okay," Beca said with a matching smile. "I'm happy, too. Hand me your plate?"

Chloe handed it to Beca and watched her dish a trio of pancakes and a few strips of bacon onto it before doing the same for herself. "This looks really great, babe."

"Well. You haven't tasted it yet."

"I've eaten plenty of your pancakes, and they're always yummy."

"These are special pancakes."

"Special?" Chloe glanced at her plate, the syrup bottle poised to drizzle over them. She had assumed the brown spots were from cooking, but then she noticed the sweet, warm scent. "Chocolate chip?" she asked excitedly.

"Mhmm."

"You do love me!"

Beca made pancakes semi-regularly. Even in college, she would make them for the entirety of the Bellas house and whatever boyfriends and girlfriends were taking up residence on that particular day. She would sometimes cook for thirty people, and her traditional New Year's Day pancake feed was legendary at Barden; show up any time after noon and get pancakes, bacon, juice, and coffee, all for a small donation at the door, which went to a charity of the Bellas’ choice.

But in all those breakfasts, and sometimes breakfast-for-dinners, Beca had only made them with chocolate chips a handful of times, usually when Chloe was stressed or sad. Each time the rarity occurred, it moved Chloe, because it was a reminder that the generally closed-off Beca Mitchell really cared about people, and cared about her in particular.
"I hope my love for you hasn't been in question all this time. I would have made them a lot sooner."

Chloe let the syrup drizzle. “Of course it hasn’t been. But I wouldn’t have been opposed to you making them before now.”

“Good.” Beca held out her fork, poised in the air with a triangle double-stack of pancake speared onto the tines. “Bon appetit.”

"So what did you get me?" Chloe asked from the couch as she watched Beca place a conspicuously small package under the tree. Beca had disappeared upstairs for a fair length of time when Chloe offered to clean up breakfast, returning with a few gift wrapped packages of varying sizes. Not that Chloe had been paying attention to the gift count under the tree, and she definitely hadn't crawled around more than once before Beca got home to see if anything new was added. The gift count remained fairly constant, the three presents she was giving Beca supplemented by packages sent from their families and a few from colleagues and friends. They each had box from Aubrey, and a pair of professionally wrapped ones that arrived via courier yesterday with tags that said they were from "KP." Chloe might have been dying that Katy Perry sent her a Christmas gift.

But time and again she'd come away disappointed; she loved to snoop. She had even stolen a few lingering glances in Beca's dresser drawers and between stacks of clothes on the closet shelf, finding nothing. She surmised Beca was hiding things in her car, or at the studio, but wasn't sure when she'd snuck them into the house.

"And why are you just bringing them down here now? I was starting to think you didn't get me anything."

"Christmas isn't about getting presents."

"No, but it's nice to." She batted her eyelashes at Beca, who rolled her eyes in response. "But if that's how you feel, I guess I'll return yours."

Beca straightened from her crouch. "Let's not be too hasty."
"Uh huh. That's what I thought."

"Are you going to help me?" Chloe asked from the kitchen. She had a ham in the oven, sweet potatoes waiting to be peeled, vegetables to steam, and because she wasn't Supergirl, a store-bought pie in the freezer. "Or are you going to sit there and watch?"

"I made breakfast." Beca said it matter-of-factly from her seat on the couch, her computer on her lap.

"The sooner we eat, the sooner we can open presents," she sing-songed.

It worked, and Beca snapped her laptop closed and skittered into the kitchen, pushing the sleeves of her flannel shirt up to her elbows. "What do you want me to do?"

She pointed at the sweet potatoes on the counter. "Peel."

Making Christmas dinner together, for just the two of them, was as quaint and cute as breakfast had been, but there was an air of formality with it now. They weren't in pajamas with messy hair. They were showered and dressed, hair done, a little make-up so they looked decent for the photos Chloe insisted - and Beca predicted - they would be taking in front of the tree. At the moment, Chloe wore an apron to protect her outfit, and she posed for the photo Beca took (of her own volition).

Beca took care of setting the table this time, lighting the candles Chloe placed there earlier in the day and dimming the lights so the tree provided most of the lighting. And as they sat down to eat, they were both a little quieter than usual, a little more peaceful than usual, communicating more with looks and glances than words, because it felt almost rude to break the relative silence, save for the sounds of Christmas carols on the audio system and serving spoons against plates.

It wasn’t until their plates were full that Beca lifted her wine glass and held it toward Chloe to prompt a small toast. “Merry Christmas, Chloe.”

Chloe smiled, trying hard to take a mental picture of the moment, of Beca in her red and black plaid flannel, hanging open over a simple white v-neck, and her side swept brunette hair, held in place with a clip that honest to goodness was decorated with a fake sprig of green holly – it was Chloe’s
clip that somehow migrated into Beca’s collection – with “I’ll Be Home for Christmas” floating through the air, and the multicolored lights of the Christmas tree twinkling in the background, and the red candlesticks on the table between them, and the meal they made together, in the home they shared, in the life they were building together.

“Merry Christmas, Beca.”

“You’re the younger one; pass ’em out,” Chloe said, folding onto the couch with her feet tucked under herself.

“Is that how this works?” Beca asked, bending to snag gifts from under the tree and start a pile for each of them on the coffee table.

“That’s how it works in the Beale Family. What do you guys do?”

“Someone just does it. It’s not like, an organized thing.”

“I suppose next you’re going to tell me that you all rip everything open at the same time, so no one gets to see what anyone else received.”

Beca paused in front of the table, the KP gifts in hand. “How do you do it?”

“Oh my gosh,” Chloe said with a groan. “We take turns! Going around the room, one at a time, so everyone can see. And so it lasts more than thirty seconds. You know, to really appreciate and share the sentiments behind the gifts.”

“So the youngest is passing out the gifts, and we’re going to be taking turns opening them. What part gets to be the Mitchell Family tradition?”

“We had sweet potatoes instead of regular potatoes.”

Beca scoffed. “That was hardly a compromise. You like them, too.”
“Okay, what do you want? I don’t know what the Mitchell traditions are, so I can’t suggest something.”

Beca set the gifts down and made another trip, thinking. “You can’t laugh.”

Chloe smiled, biting back a too-wide grin. Whenever Beca prefaced something with a request not to laugh, it was always an adorably cute thing.

“We don’t have a piano here, so I can’t play, but…”

Chloe clapped her hands against her knees excitedly. “Yes. Whatever it is, yes.”

“We, um. We sing. Carols. And I’d play them on the piano. Or my mom would.”

“That’s so cute!” Chloe squealed, bouncing in her seat. “We can totally sing carols together. As if I would laugh at that? Did you just meet me?”

Beca huffed and resumed her task, placing the last two gifts on the table and sinking into the couch next to Chloe. “It’s just so cheesy.”

“I love cheesy. If I knew the neighborhood better, I’d be dragging you caroling tomorrow.”

Beca shook her head, but smiled. “No door-to-door business. Can we do it a cappella?”

“Can we do it a cappella?” Honestly. Beca.”


Chloe laughed and leaned over to peck Beca’s lips, and settled back to pluck a gift from her stack, smallish, kind of coffee cup-sized. “Me first.”
“I do all the work, and you get to start? That’s how the Beale tradition works?”

“The youngest passes them out, and the oldest goes first. It teaches the children patience.”

Beca rolled her eyes and waved her hand in a go-ahead motion.

Chloe knew what she’d chosen was one from Beca since it was gift wrap she purchased herself, but she checked the tag anyway, giving her a little smiley pout before slipping a finger under the seam in the paper and tearing. The box inside was undeniably for jewelry, and the size of the box made her take pause – whatever it was, it was big, and from Michael Kors. She cocked an eyebrow at Beca and cracked the lid of the gray box back, revealing a really, really nice watch, all gleaming chrome and brushed aluminum. “Beca…”

“Is it okay?” Beca was looking at her intently, watching her reaction. “I didn’t know if you’d like a small face or a big face more. I went with big, because you like to make a statement with your accessories.”

Chloe laughed, slipping the watch onto her wrist to admire it. She was a little amused, having considered getting a watch for Beca as well. “It’s perfect. And too nice. Thank you.”

Beca waved her hand dismissively and snatched a gift off the table. “My turn.”

Chloe noticed it wasn’t one from her, and she tried not to be disappointed. It was from Aubrey – she made Beca read the tag aloud as was Beale tradition – and under the paper was a box, which contained a gift certificate to a famous tattoo parlor in the city, one Chloe didn’t know but Beca gasped excitedly about (something about one of the artists winning a reality tattooing show). There was a notecard with it, and written in Aubrey’s slanted, sharp script was,

For ink only. No more ear monstrosities.

Love,

Aubrey

Beca laughed, reading it to Chloe before setting the note and certificate aside, away from the pile of discarded gift wrap that they’d established on the floor between them. “Maybe we can get those matching tats you wanted,” Beca added.
“That could be cool,” Chloe said with a smile, plucking what she knew to be Aubrey’s gift to her from the stack. “Let’s see what she got me, if she got you more ink.” Chloe’s gift wasn’t the same size or shape as Beca’s, but it was also a plain brown box that contained an envelope and a note. She started with the note, reading it to herself.

Chloe,

It’s okay to know what you want. And it’s okay for that to be scary. You have nothing to be afraid of. I promise. Go buy yourself something nice for a special occasion.

Love you,
Bree

She squinted at the note, not understanding what Aubrey was getting at. Hoping the envelope could shed some light on the mystery, she opened it to find a gift card to Fredrick’s of Hollywood, which was…a lingerie store, to put it tamely. She’d passed it once or twice shopping, and assumed it was where the higher class exotic dancers purchased their “work uniforms.”

“What is it?” Beca asked, leaning forward to try to see.

“Um,” Chloe cleared her throat, a little flustered. “I’m not totally sure.”

“You don’t know what it is?”

“No, I do, I just….” She handed the gift card to Beca and heard her whistle a cat-call.

“This seems more like a gift for me.”

Chloe smiled at the tease, and held up the note to read it again, this time out loud.

“Huh. Weird,” Beca said when she was finished reading.

“I don’t understand what she’s talking about.” Actually, by now, Chloe had a pretty good idea what Aubrey was talking about – what she kept bringing up every time they talked, the last time
involving detailed discussion of engagement ring preferences. She wasn’t going to tell Beca about that, though.

“Sounds to me like you’re afraid of getting what you want and she doesn’t think you have to be.”

“Wow. I never would have deduced that,” Chloe deadpanned as she set the note aside to think about later. Maybe she would ask Aubrey about in a day or two when they talked again. “Your turn.”

“Changing the topic, I see. But okay.”

They took turns, working through gifts from parents and grandparents. Chloe had a couple from school – one from the Principal and one from the effervescent Mrs. Washington; she’d brought home a dozen adorable gifts from her students the week prior, before they went on winter break. Beca had several from her production team, and when it was Chloe’s turn again, she grabbed the fanciest box from her dwindling pile.

“This is literally from Katy Perry,” she said gleefully. “Yours looks the same. Should we open them at the same time?”

“And break Beale tradition?” Beca said with a laugh, grabbing hers, too.

“On the count of three. One, two…”

“On three or after three?” Beca joked.

Chloe laughed. “Just open it.” She hated ripping the pearlescent paper; it seemed so expensive. Both hers and Beca’s revealed white velvety boxes, and they pulled the lids off simultaneously, finding little hotel key card-like sleeves with plastic cards in them. Chloe slid hers out of the sleeve. It was an American Express gift card, and the amount written on the back of the sleeve was enough to make her gasp. She looked up at Beca, who was having a similar reaction. “Beca…she can’t…”

“Uh…wow…” Beca mumbled, turning the card over and over between her fingers.
Something under the discarded lid next to her caught her eye and Chloe picked it up to see handwriting on the underside of it.

Chloe Beale,

When the time is right, take Rebecca somewhere nice. Thank you for sharing her with me.

All my love,
Katy Perry

“What does your box say?” she asked, pointing at the lid in Beca’s lap.

“Rebecca,” Beca read aloud with a little roll of her eyes. “‘Take that beautiful woman of yours somewhere she deserves. Thank you for being my magician. Love, Katy.’ Wow. What did she write in yours?”

Chloe held hers up for Beca to read. “Pretty much the same thing. Beca, this card has ten thousand dollars on it.”

“Yeah…” Beca breathed, looking at the back of her own card again. “So does mine.”

“Well…” Chloe fell back against the couch, more than a little stunned. “I feel like we should have saved hers for last. No matter what you open next, it’s going to be a real disappointment.”

Beca shook her head at the joke. “It won’t be disappointing. Remind me to call her on Saturday so we can thank her.”

“How do you thank someone for giving you twenty thousand dollars?” Chloe said, laughing in disbelief.

“I’m going to go with…fervently. Now which one of these do you want me to open next?” She pointed between the two gifts remaining in her collection, one of which contained the diamond earrings.

“The bigger one. Let’s get the disappointment out of the way and finish strong.”
Beca clicked her tongue. “I’m not going to be disappointed, Chlo.” She turned the shallow rectangle of a box over to find the seam in the paper and ripped it. “Hmm, I wonder what this could be?” she said cheekily, as it was obviously a clothing box. She lifted the lid and opened the white tissue paper to pull out a sleeveless black silk blouse, ooh-ing enough to make Chloe feel like it really wasn’t a disappointment. “It’s gorgeous, honey.”

“There’s something else,” she said, pointing back to the box when Beca didn’t seem to notice. “Move that tissue.”

“Oh?” Beca pulled the tissue paper aside followed by the red pleated skirt Chloe picked out to go with the blouse. “Ooh, I love it!” She stood up, letting the box fall forgotten to the floor to hold the skirt up to her waist to test the length, which landed just above her knees.

“Yeah?” Chloe knew she would love it – monetary value disappointment or otherwise – because Chloe was amazing at picking out clothes for Beca. She considered it one of her many talents.

Beca gave her hips a twist to make the pleats flow a little. “Totally. Thanks, baby.”

Chloe smiled. “You’re welcome.”

“Okay, go, go,” Beca said, waving at the two gifts from her Chloe still had to open. One was a particularly tiny cube, and one was a rectangle with a good amount of weight to it. She opted for the rectangle, giving it a testing shake since she’d had zero opportunity to snoop. It was kind of bendy.

“It’s not going to make noise.”

Chloe shrugged. “Worth a shot.” She ripped the paper to reveal an expanse of rich, dark, aged leather. Curious, she pulled the wrapping off completely. It was a leather-bound journal, she assumed, which she confirmed by unwinding the strap that encircled it three times to reveal blank, sepia-toned pages.

“I know you keep your journal on your computer. But you can’t take that everywhere. And I thought about getting you, like, a tablet or something, but—”
“It’s perfect; thank you.” It really was perfect. She used to keep a hand-written diary – journal – in high school. It helped keep her grounded when she was dealing with teenage drama, her first job as a barista at a corner coffee shop, the uncertainty of getting into Barden, and her first real relationship and subsequent first real heartbreak. She was forced to convert to a digital journal when, in her first year at Barden, when she was required to live in the terrible freshman dorm with a terrible roommate and her journal was stolen from under her pillow by said roommate, with particular sections dedicated to things like intimate moments with her ex-boyfriend or how she had a crying fit over not getting the shoes she wanted getting photocopied and taped all over the walls in the dorm.

It was a great moment, in that it was legendary at Barden University for a semester and it taught Chloe to be more aware of her personal, private information. Chloe considered herself an open individual, and anyone who knew her would agree, but she was open only about what she decided, and it was no one else’s right to divulge such information.

So, she began keeping her journal digitally, on a journaling website, under cyber lock and key. Not her tumblr – that was public and for fun and indulging her reality television vice. Not even Beca knew where her digital journal lived. She knew it existed, but never asked about it.

“Are you sure? It's not stupid?”

“Bec. Of course I’m sure. I miss writing. I could have gone back to it when I moved into the Bellas’ house, but never got around to it.”

“Okay. Cool. The lady at the antique store said it belonged some novelist. They’ve had it on the shelf for, like, twenty years or something crazy.”

“Really?” Chloe asked, looking at the journal with more attention, flipping through it again to check for any notes on the pages or covers, and to enjoy the smell of aged paper and leather. “Did she say who the novelist was?”

“No. And she might have been bullshitting to get me to buy it. Let’s say it was J.K. Rowling.”

Chloe laughed. “Because J.K. Rowling would totally give a random empty journal to a Los Angeles antique store.”

“Totally.”
“Okay, time to finish strong?” Beca asked, snagging her last gift from Chloe off the table to toy with the bow.

Chloe nodded, biting her lip.

Beca popped the tiny bow off and ripped the paper off, revealing the little jewelry box. “Chlo…” she said hesitantly, staring at the box in her hand.

“Just open it,” Chloe said, not sure what to make of Beca’s hesitation. The box did look just like a ring box, and Beca’s reaction was laced with confusion and surprise.

Beca pried the lid open, releasing a loud breath. “Earrings,” she said, sounding relieved.

“Yeah.” Chloe sat up and resettled closer to Beca. “Earrings. What…did you think it was?”

“Nothing,” Beca said with a quick smile as she pulled the card through which the earrings were mounted out of the box. “They’re beautiful.”

“They’re real,” Chloe offered, feeling proud of being able to give Beca something so nice, especially after Beca gave her such a nice watch.

Beca unscrewed the backs and popped each earring out, immediately exchanging them with the simple plastic black spheres in the first piercing in her earlobes. “I love them. And now I have real bling.”

Chloe laughed, throwing her head back, laughing loudly at the word ‘bling’ on Beca’s lips. “Yeah, now you have some bling. You’re on your way to becoming a Kardashian.”

“Maybe I can combine our AmExes and get a chain?” Beca made a rectangle with her index fingers and thumbs over her chest where the emblem of a massive gold chain could lie. “What should it say? ‘Beca’?”
“‘Shawshank’ would be more badass.”

Beca laughed at that. “Shawshank it is.”

“It might just have to be ‘Shaw,’” Chloe continued, sliding her ridiculous Katy Perry gift into her back pocket. “You’ll have to rip this out of my cold, dead hands.”

“That can be arranged,” Beca said, lunging for Chloe and making her squeal as she landed astride Chloe's thighs and pulled her into a kiss.

Chloe squeaked under it, not expecting it, and certainly not expecting the ferocity with which it came. Her hands flailed a moment and then latched onto Beca's hips to tug her closer and anchor herself between Beca and the couch. Her lips parted at the flick of a tongue against them and then past them, bringing heat with it. They weren't quite finished with the gift opening - Chloe was acutely aware that there was still one tiny box from Beca to open - but the splendid way her mouth was being assaulted told her it would have to wait.

She pushed the plaid shirt off Beca's shoulders quickly, suddenly impatient to feel more than cotton beneath her fingers. The moment she reached for the white tee, Beca's hands beat her to it to jerk it up and over her head, breaking their kiss.

But the moment the shirt was gone, Beca's mouth was back, this time on her neck, and Chloe whimpered, hearing Beca's appreciative moan in response. She felt hands everywhere, and part of her wanted to ask what had gotten into Beca, but a bigger part of her told her to shut the hell up, sit back, and enjoy it. And then she felt a hand wiggling into her back pocket to pluck the gift card from its hiding place.

“Hey!” she protested, glaring at Beca who sat back with a grin, holding the card high in the air above Chloe’s head. “Give it!”

“You can’t reach something I have!” Beca laughed. “I’m gonna enjoy this for a sec.” She wiggled the card out of Chloe’s reach, and her weight on Chloe’s lap kept her from popping up to snag it. “You need to learn to pool our finances someday. Why not start now?”

Chloe snatched at it again, fingers getting nothing but air, and the only thing keeping her brain from tripping over Beca’s last sentence was the flame of competition Beca was fanning, grinning at her in knowing victory. “Because,” she said, grunting with the effort of reaching, “I’m supposed to take you somewhere nice with mine. And you’re supposed to take me somewhere nice with
“And if we combine them, it’ll be an epic fucking trip.”

Chloe paused at that, considering.

But Beca laughed and handed the card back to her. “I’m serious about combining them, but only if you want to. I’m not gonna steal your money.”

“I know you aren’t.” Chloe leaned to the side and flicked her wrist to flick the card onto the coffee table. “Now was this meant to be a distraction?” She bounced her hips to jostle Beca in her lap. “Or is it going somewhere?”

The smirk that took up residence on Beca’s face answered that question, and she watched her slide backwards to kneel on the floor, hands pushing up Chloe’s thighs until they reached the waistband of her jeans.

“I guess it’s going somewhere,” she breathed, lifting her hips to let Beca pull her jeans down and off, discarded in the pile of gift wrap.

Chloe was at Beca's mercy and she submitted willingly. She unbuttoned her own shirt to get cool air against her heated skin, not bothering to remove it completely. Beca's hands were back on her legs, blazing a very determined trail higher, and Chloe felt like melting under the intensity of her stare as fingers reached the apex of her thighs to press against lace that was doing absolutely nothing to hide how aroused she was.

Beca's gaze flitted down her body and back up, wetting her lips all the way. “You're so hot.”

Her ego wasn’t the only thing being stroked, and Chloe bit her lip at the comment. All she could do was wait and be teased, and Beca was doing an amazing job at teasing at the moment. Chloe knew what Beca was doing, building her up to the point of desperation, the point when she would finally give in and beg for it, and she let her head fall back against the couch to accept it as an inevitability. There were hands on her thighs and lips on her stomach, and then there were lips on her thighs and hands on her knees pushing them further apart, and a tongue pressing against lace, and passing comments about how good she felt, and tasted, and sounded.
“Bec…” she managed, body feeling wound as tightly as a spring.

“I love when you say my name.”

“Beca, please,” she tried, tilting her hips upward, groaning in frustration when Beca anticipated it, moving with it to keep her mouth exactly where she decided it would be.

All Beca did was chuckle, low and throaty, and flick her eyes up to meet Chloe’s as she dropped a shoulder to lift Chloe’s knee over it, but she still kept just enough distance from where Chloe really, really needed her to be.

So she utilized the only weapon she had in her arsenal that could rattle Beca’s determination, and reached down to pull the useless strip of lace to the side and out of the way. “I need you.”

The move got Beca’s attention, eyes dropping to follow Chloe’s movement, and she heard the catch in Beca’s breathing, and she knew she would get what she want now. So she closed her eyes and waited, feeling the warmth of breath against her heated body, and as soon as she opened her mouth to really start begging, the soft wetness of a tongue swept over her, and her begging came out more as a nonsensical groan of appreciation.

There was something about these moments that Chloe always found magical. Not in the cliche sense that sex was great (of course it was), but there was something so extremely intimate about giving and receiving this way that made her feel exponentially closer to Beca. It was proof that the emotions and attraction weren’t a one-way street, because she wasn’t the only one moaning and whimpering, and it was Beca whispering naughty things about how much she loved doing this to Chloe, and how good she wanted her to feel, and how badly she wanted to make her come.

It was the last whispered desire that pulled Chloe over the edge, fingers grabbing the only thing they could reach to pull at brunette locks, harder than she intended, blinded by white heat and ecstasy.

“Fuck, Beca…” she finally managed when it subsided. She kept her hold on Beca’s hair, tugging until Beca protested and then acquiesced, climbing back into Chloe’s lap. “Kiss me.”

Beca’s kiss was so hard and so wet, it managed to surprise Chloe, despite expecting it. But it was hot, and sexy, and her free hand moved automatically to unzip Beca’s jeans and push into them without preamble. She gasped into Beca’s mouth at the wetness there, another exquisite reminder
that Beca really wanted all of this as much as she did.

Beca nodded, acknowledging Chloe’s action and reaction, and reached back to unhook her own bra and toss it aside.

A hint of regret at pulling Beca up so hastily flitted through Chloe’s mind at the lack of mobility within the tight space of Beca’s jeans. But Beca didn’t seem to mind, hips already moving to make up for what Chloe couldn’t accomplish. Chloe broke away from their kiss, taking a much-needed gasping breath. She detangled her fingers from Beca’s hair and gave her shoulder a push, encouraging her to sit back and take what she needed.

And as much as Chloe lived for actively participating in Beca’s pleasure, there was something so incredibly sexy about being able to sit back and basically be an object, something firm and warm for Beca to move against. It wasn’t impersonal; it was highly personal, as it was a walls-down, doing-what-feels-good moment for Beca, who had her hands in her own hair to lift it off her neck as her hips moved quickly, grinding into Chloe’s palm, her panting breaths starting to break into moans every time Chloe gave a little extra push upward. Her eyes were closed, and Chloe capitalized, free hand moving over Beca’s breast to hold it steady despite the increasingly vigorous movement so she could get her mouth on it, catching taut flesh between her teeth to draw a sharp whimper from Beca.

And then Beca was falling forward, heavy against Chloe as she moaned in her ear, hips jerking out of rhythm and body rolling. Chloe clapped her arm around her back, holding her close as she came down until she stilled, slouching in her lap, and Chloe felt lips at her neck again, not aggressive, but gentle and lazy. Chloe wriggled her hand out of Beca’s jeans and grasped her thigh to stand and lift Beca with her briefly, just long enough to turn to lie down along the couch. Beca stretched out over her, head nestled against her chest.

“You missed one,” Beca said, eventually breaking the silence as she pointed lazily at the tiny cube of a gift still awaiting Chloe's attention.

“Mm, I guess I did.” Chloe stretched her back, feeling it crack in all the right places, and reached to swipe the package off the coffee table. “What is it?” she asked, having to hold it up in the air and above Beca's head to see as she unwrapped it.

Beca wiggled back a few inches and propped her head on her fist atop Chloe's sternum, looking up at her with big stormy eyes. “Guess you'll have to open it and see.”

Chloe had been nervous earlier in the evening. She pointedly avoided selecting it to unwrap out of
fear of disappointment; her imagination was quick to run away from her and had convinced her that a diamond ring was in the box, and as much as she wanted it, it was terrifying and she felt wholly unprepared if her imagination was correct.

“Is-” her voice caught and she cleared her throat to try again. “Is this something I want to open while we’re naked on a couch together?”

Beca shrugged. “Why not?”

Chloe blew out a breath, channeling as much energy as she could spare into keeping tears from showing up prematurely. Her hands were shaking, and she hoped Beca didn’t notice, but the soft smile she was wearing told Chloe she noticed, but, thankfully, wasn’t commenting on it. She counted to three, and cracked the box open.

And exhaled.

Beca was grinning, bopping her head back and forth on her fist.

“Wow…” Chloe said, managing to laugh despite her nerves.

Beca plucked the box out of Chloe’s fingers and set it on her chest before reaching for Chloe’s ears to remove her earrings. “Great minds think alike.”

Chloe smiled, glancing down at the diamond studs Beca had given her, nearly identical to those she’d given Beca. “They’re beautiful. Thank you.”

Beca was still smiling at her, swapping out the old earrings with the new. “You’re welcome.”
Chloe woke up Christmas morning with a kink in her neck and a dull ache in her quads, and she groaned through a happy stretch in bed. She was chilly, the duvet being nowhere to be found - at least, not without a great deal of effort - and she rolled to curl into Beca for warmth.

“Merry Christmas,” she whispered, nudging Beca awake with a nose to her cheek.

She saw the frown and furrowed brow that always preceded Beca waking, followed by a twitch at the corner of her mouth that qualified as a Beca Mitchell morning smile. “M’ry Christmas,” was her sleepy reply as she tugged Chloe's arm tighter around her middle. “’s cold.”

Chloe chuckled, pressing a kiss to Beca’s cheek. “I seem to remember someone kicking the blanket off last night, saying something about it getting in the way of her, quote, sexytimes?”

Beca vibrated with silent laughter and pressed backwards into Chloe's embrace. “Well, it was.”

“I didn't say it wasn't.” Chloe pressed another kiss to Beca's hair, taking in that same fruity floral scent that followed her everywhere. The quilt really had been a pain in the ass that night, being in the way and getting tangled in feet and legs during certain vigorous activities. It was when it was bunched uncomfortably under Beca's back with Chloe between her thighs that the blanket was banished once and for all to the floor. Now a cold foot worked its way between Chloe's ankles and she shivered at the contact. “I'll keep you warm.” She threw a leg over Beca's and reeled her in further, covering as much of her small frame as she could.

Beca vibrated again. “Appreciate the effort, Chlo, but my feet are still ice cubes.”

“Fiieee,” Chloe said with a dramatic huff, rolling away to peer over the side of the bed, spotting the duvet on the floor a few feet away. She climbed out of bed, feeling the pleasant strain in her muscles that would remind her all day of the night they had, and grabbed the blanket to toss onto the bed.

When Beca didn't move or say anything for a good minute, Chloe wriggled up to her again. "Are you still sleepy?"
Beca seemed to burrow further under the covers. "Comfy."

Chloe chuckled and snuggled into her. "Are we going to sleep all day?"

Beca hummed, and an ice cold foot worked its way between Chloe's again. "'s a good idea."

Chloe wasn't sleepy, but she was definitely comfy as she held Beca against her, feeling chilly toes brushing against her feet, seeking warmth. She was eager to get up and start their Christmas Day, which was scheduled to include a holiday movie marathon and, since they became preoccupied the night before and didn't get to it, the a cappella caroling that Beca requested. Not that Chloe's arm needed to be twisted to agree to it. But as Beca's breathing evened out and slowed, the tiny light snores that signaled she was asleep had their Pavlov effect on Chloe, her eyelids getting heavy until she slipped back to sleep, content to not move a muscle for the rest of the day.

Deep in the recesses of her mind, Chloe heard her name. She clung to sleep with all her might, but something was tickling her nose. She brushed it away, hearing a giggle somewhere. Then something was tickling her stomach and it felt nice. Soft and relaxing. Until it got bold and slid right down between her legs, yanking her awareness up and out of slumber with a gasp.

"Wakey, wakey, sleepyhead."

The intrusion disappeared and there was a mix of disappointment at the loss and annoyance that it had woken her without the decency to make good on the brief promise of something exquisite as a reward for waking. She grunted, pushing her hips forward in request and snuggling further into her pillow. She didn't know if she wanted sleep or sex, but she would accept either. Or both.

She felt a bop on the end of her nose.

"Now who's comfy?"

"Bec..." It was a nondescript whine, and she heard that giggle again.

"It's almost two o'clock. Do you wanna keep sleeping?"
Chloe frowned a little. She kind of hated wasting her day in bed, but it was never really wasted if it was with Beca, and it was a holiday after all. She felt those tickles on her abdomen again, and her frown quirked into a smile, and finished with a quiet gasp as the feather light touch drifted down again, slipping between her thighs.

"Or do you wanna maybe do something else?"

She laughed airily, cracking her eyes open finally to see Beca propped on her side, looking down at her with a soft smile. "How do you have gas left in your tank after last night?"

"Oh please. As if you're running on empty?"

Chloe's little smile turned into a grin and she pressed her face into her pillow to hide it, playing coy. "Are we going to actually do something today?"

The touch grew a little bolder, fingertips dipping inward to draw a groan out of her. "Is this not something?"

Chloe huffed and rolled into her back, mock annoyed. "Well, get on with it then."

When it was almost three o'clock, they managed to talk each other into leaving the bed, only to tumble into the shower under the very false pretense of water conservation.

When it was almost four o'clock and they discovered they both had missed calls from parents and grandparents, they mutually agreed to be responsible adults long enough to call everyone back to wish them a Merry Christmas.

When it was almost five o'clock, Beca broke out the unfinished white wine and poured them each a glass, declaring it caroling time. Chloe's stomach was already rumbling from not eating anything (of actual nutritional content) all day and she accepted it warily. It would hit her hard if she wasn't careful. It would be one glass and then she'd be digging into the leftover ham and potatoes.

"Can we start with 'Grandma Got Run Over by a Reindeer'?" Beca asked, bouncing on her feet, grinning.
Chloe had to laugh; it was like she was looking into a mirror - at least, as far as the excitement and mannerisms were concerned. She wondered how much of it Beca had absorbed from her versus how much of it was always there, only to be revealed to the safest, most trustworthy of individuals. Either option was acceptable, she decided. "That's your idea of a Christmas carol? That song is terrible."

"Hey, this is Mitchell tradition time!"

"Okay, okay," she acquiesced, still laughing. "This is your thing, but we better get some 'Hark! The Herald,' too. Take the lead, cap."

And so it went, Beca calling out Christmas tunes, some traditional, some a little wacky like whatever she shared called "Walkin' round in Women's Underwear" to the tune of "Winter Wonderland." And Chloe ate up every second of it. She missed singing with Beca. She missed the way they sang to each other, having to focus intently to harmonize without knowing whether the other would go up or down or modulate a key.

What started in the kitchen moved to the living room until they were curled up on the couch together with the bottle of wine. And it was only when she excused herself to use the restroom and the room tilted upon standing that Chloe realized they still hadn't eaten.

Beca laughed at her slight weaving as she made her way through the kitchen to the guest bath, and back out to yank open the door of the fridge. And the way Beca was half-hanging off the couch told her the wine had gone straight to her head, too.

"We need to eat, Bec."

"Bring me food?" Beca asked, arm dangling over the arm of the couch.

Chloe pshawed. "Get off your butt and get it yourself. I'm not your maid."

"Maids clean," Beca said, dragging herself to her feet to lean against the island as Chloe fixed herself a plate to pop into the microwave. "Butlers bring you stuff."
"Well I'm not your butler either."

"You can pretend to be my maid."

The tone made Chloe spin to look at Beca, who was biting her lip at a failed attempt to hide a smile. "What?"

"You could get one of those little French maid costumes. Walk around here, pretending to dust things. Bending over to pick up what I've carelessly dropped."

"Oh my gosh," Chloe laughed. Beca might have had a buzz going, but she was totally serious in her suggestion. Chloe had never really engaged in role play; it had never really come up with her past partners but she was into it. "I'll think about it," she said noncommittally, not giving in so easily.

"You still owe me a fantasy," Beca reminded her. She pushed away from the island to join Chloe at the counter. She lifted her arms above her to cross her wrists, and then dropped her loop of arms over Chloe's head and pushed into her. "I gave you yours," she whispered.

Images of Beca handcuffed to their bed flashed through her memory and she felt her breath catch and saw Beca's classic smirk sink into its rightful place. Chloe swallowed thickly, not willing to let Beca take the upper hand of this particular flirtation.

"You gave me half of mine," she said, nodding firmly when her voice didn't quaver and betray her excitement. "Or did you forget what I really wanted?" What Chloe really wanted was to have Beca at her mercy, for her to give up control, cuffed to the bed. To fuck her hard.

She admonished her conscience for having such dirty thoughts on what was one of the holiest days of the year. But they'd already ushered the holiday in with a bang - or three - so what was one more lascivious thought?

Beca's smirk faltered, tongue flashing out to wet her lips. "I didn't forget." Her hips rolled up against Chloe to give a little thrust, as if to prove her point.

Chloe did her best to ignore the contact and the fire it lit in her belly, and leaned back to gain a shred of breathing room. "I kinda think you did. You said you were going to buy one. Three months ago."
"I did buy one." Beca said it so simply Chloe thought she misheard. But Beca just smiled at her and bumped her hips again. "I was waiting for you to say you wanted it."

Chloe huffed, excitement washing over her. She was intrigued that Beca had visited a sex shop to buy a strap-on and frustrated she didn't share that important information. "I already said I wanted it. If I knew you had it, I would have asked to use it."

“We could use it right now.”

Chloe’s head was swimming, and it wasn’t just from wine on an empty stomach. As soon as she started to lean down to capture Beca’s lips, the microwave dinged, breaking the tension and reminding her that she really was starving. Plus, it was fun to draw out the anticipation. It made it all the more intense. She took a wide step to the left, out of Beca’s bubble, and pushed the button on the microwave to open it door.

Beca turned and leaned against the counter, arms crossed. “You’re choosing food over me?”

“I’m hungry,” Chloe said with a nonchalant shrug. “Plus, we need our energy for what I have in mind.”

She heard Beca exhale roughly and she smiled to herself. She loved getting Beca flustered. It wasn’t as easy nowadays as it had been when they were younger; she used to be able to make her stutter and trip with a well-timed wink. Beca was confident in her sexuality now, especially so with Chloe, and it was a hard-fought victory when Chloe could successfully rattle her, even a little, outside the bedroom. In fact, Chloe was the one to fluster the easiest now, which was quite the adjustment to accept.

Not that Chloe was complaining.

There was a hiccup in the plan. The combination of food and wine and the peaceful comfort of being snuggled up together on the couch watching Miracle on 34th Street snuffed out the fire they had teased to life in the kitchen. Chloe was full, and comfortable, and fighting sleep, and more than once she felt Beca’s head slip lower on her shoulder and then jerk up, bobbing as she kept drifting off.

“Hey, Bec,” she whispered, wiggling her shoulder a little to get Beca to lift her head.
“Hmm? I’m awake.”

Chloe chuckled. “Sure you are. Let’s go to bed.” She felt around on the cushion until she found the television remote under the blanket to turn it off.

“Mmm.” Beca’s hand, which had been curled up in Chloe’s for the last hour, moved and slowly moved up Chloe’s leg to wedge between her thighs, hindered by the crossing of her legs. Beca pushed, weakly, a couple times, and then stilled.

Chloe couldn’t help but smile at the failed effort. She uncrossed her legs and lifted Beca’s hand away to ease out of their tangled embrace, giving her arm a gentle tug. “Come on, I can’t carry you to bed.”

A frown creased Beca’s brow as she sat on the couch like a bump on a log. “I’m not that heavy.”

“I didn’t say I can’t carry you. I said I can’t carry you to bed. I don’t want to decapitate you on the stairs.”

The frown disappeared, and a hint of a smile replaced it, eyes finally opening to look up at Chloe. “So carry me to the stairs.”

“I’m not carrying you to the stairs.”

“Pleeease, baby?”

Chloe laughed. “Don’t ‘baby’ me. I’m going to bed. You can sleep here if you want.”

She turned and left, turning off lights as she went until she was moisturizing her face in the master bathroom upstairs and Beca shuffled in, hair messy and staticky and eyes droopy with sleep.

“You made it!” Chloe said, happily teasing.
Beca grunted and bumped Chloe with her hip, out of the way of the sink so she could wash her face.

“You ready for our wild night?” she asked, knowing full well Beca was about two seconds from sleeping on the bathroom floor.

The brunette nodded, splashing water on her face, but the nod was slow and hesitant.

“Where have you been hiding it? I’ll go figure out the harness while you finish in here.”

Beca’s fingertips were slow over her face, massaging lather onto it, and Chloe simply leaned against the bathroom doorway, enjoying Beca’s dedication to trying to see the moment through despite her level of consciousness.

“My carry-on suitcase.”

“Ahh,” Chloe said, now understanding why she hadn’t discovered it in all her Christmas gift snooping and searching. She hadn’t thought to look inside their luggage, tucked into the back of their closet mostly hidden by clothes. “Okay.” She turned and left, intent on finding it and, at the very least, putting it somewhere that was easier to access at a moment’s notice than inside a suitcase in the back of a closet. She didn’t intend on actually using it, not tonight, but Beca didn’t know that. And Chloe did love to test Beca’s commitment to things.

She pushed hangers of Beca’s clothes to the side to find her small suitcase, which lived inside her larger suitcase, and sure enough, when she unzipped it and tossed it open, a black plastic bag was inside. She picked it up, noting its weight, her hand landing on what was definitely a phallic shape. She wasn’t even nervous, knowing it wasn’t happening tonight; now she was curious and excited. She set the bag aside and pushed the suitcases and clothes back into place, sitting on the floor of the open closet as she emptied the contents of the bag into her lap.

The most eye-catching item was the translucent purple toy encased in plastic clamshell packaging. It wasn’t some scary monstrous thing, but it wasn’t small. It was a little bigger than the vibrator Beca owned, and something about that, knowing Beca bought this, to be used on her, that she wanted something...more substantial, was exhilarating and made Chloe regret her plan to allow Beca the sleep she clearly needed. She didn’t want to have to wait to use it. But she knew it wasn’t the right time. Damn it.
The other item in the bag was a box, the photograph on it very clearly illustrating its contents. She pried the top of it open and turned it over to shake out a tangle of black straps. She picked it up, giving it a shake to let gravity help her identify up versus down. It took a moment or two, but eventually she identified which straps went where, and at the sound of the toilet flushing, she hurriedly cracked the clamshell of the toy open and took it out, stuffing all the packaging into the bag and scurrying to the bed to drop the contraption into the drawer of her nightstand. She whipped her shirt over her head and stepped out of her jeans, stripping off her bra as she climbed into bed and flipped onto her side, head turned toward the bathroom door to wait.

“Finally,” she said when Beca appeared, stripped down to her shirt and panties. She flipped the covers of Beca’s side of the bed down and patted it. “Join me?”

Beca still looked sleepy, and Chloe found it absolutely adorable. And even though the past few minutes got her motor revved up, she knew she would have no trouble ignoring it. She slipped under the sheet and laid on her side, mirroring Chloe.

“I have something for you,” Chloe said teasingly. She reached out and traced her fingertips along Beca’s arm until she could encircle her wrist and guide it down, under the sheet, toward her waist.

And despite the drowsiness, she could see interest and excitement flicker in Beca’s eyes as she shifted a little closer to Chloe. She wondered if, maybe, she should have gone for it, if the excitement would have roused Beca enough for it.

But the relief evident on Beca’s face when Chloe simply pulled Beca’s arm around her waist and she felt curious fingers sweeping around as though searching for something and finding nothing, reaffirmed her decision to save it for another day.

“Tease,” Beca said, smiling as she scooted fully into Chloe to slip her knee between Chloe’s and wrap herself up in the embrace.

“It’s in my nightstand.”

Beca looked up at her, biting her lip a little. “Do you like it?”

Chloe gave a half-shrug. “I mean. It’s for you. So, if you like it.”
Beca released the hold on her lip. “Don’t think I’m not using it on you, too.”

The dying motor in Chloe’s belly roared to life at that, and her hips gave an involuntary push forward. “Beca…”

“Do you not want me to?”

“I…” Chloe had never thought about it. Her focus, her thoughts were almost always on pleasing Beca, on making up for the years of opportunities lost. Her fantasies were of doing everything she could to draw the most exquisite sounds from Beca, to make her crumble under her touch. She certainly thought of the reverse as well, but she was all about giving.

And suddenly the possibility of being on the receiving end of... it, maybe even having the cold metal of Beca’s handcuffs around her own wrists made Chloe dizzy.

“Yeah,” she finally answered, nodding. “Yeah, I want you to.”

Beca smiled, craning forward to capture Chloe’s lips in a brief but thorough kiss. “Tomorrow?”

Chloe’s heart was already pounding. She breathed an airy, “Okay,” and let Beca flip over to back into her and settle in for the night.

'Tomorrow' didn't happen, much to Chloe's dismay.

Of course tomorrow arrived right on schedule, but the cocoon of romantic holiday solitude was broken by responsibilities demanding attention. Beca was called into the studio bright and early, waking both of them, to completely rework a track at the last possible minute. She was gone the entire day, leaving Chloe home to think about what they could have been doing.

She distracted herself easily enough. Winter break from school didn't necessarily equal a completely work-free vacation. She had lesson plans to prep for the first week back in January. She had decor to plan for the next couple holidays - Valentine's Day and St. Patrick's Day - and taking the bus to her favorite classroom supply store to shop took up a good few hours of her day.

When she declared her work done for the day at eight o'clock and Beca still wasn't home, she
opened Skype on her laptop to check if Aubrey was online.

Seeing the little green check mark over her icon, Chloe clicked the video camera icon and waited for her call to be answered.

“Chloe! Merry Christmas!”

“Merry Christmas, Bree.” The video feed was pixelated at first, and she waited and watched as it cleared. “What are you up to?”

“Reviewing some financial paperwork for the Lodge. I didn’t expect to see you until Wednesday.”

“I can hang up if you like?” Chloe asked, teasing. “Unless you’re actually busy, I didn’t mean to interrupt you.”

“No, I could use a break. How was your Christmas?”

“Awes! Thanks for the gift certificate.” Chloe thought back to the times she walked past Frederick’s of Hollywood, and all the times she was intrigued by it. She was certainly no stranger to sexy lingerie, but the retailer was legendary. So much so that she was actually a little intimidated to enter it, and thus, never had. “Though I find it maybe a little odd that my bestie wants me to buy lingerie?”

Aubrey smiled. “Did you read the note?”

“Of course. But to be honest, I don’t really get it. I feel like it’s some secret message and I don’t have the decoder.”

“All I was saying is that you might want to treat yourself to something pretty.”

“Yeah, that wasn’t the part I didn’t understand. I’m talking about not having to be afraid of what I want?” She watched Aubrey press her lips into a tight smile, and she knew, without a doubt, her best friend was keeping something from her. “What do you know that I don’t know?”
“Nothing,” Aubrey answered, a little too quickly to be natural. “Literally, all I’m saying is: it’ll be okay. Just good, general life advice.”

“Life advice plus skimpy lingerie?”

“I’m sorry for giving you something to make you feel pretty!”

Chloe rolled her eyes at Aubrey’s mild offense. “Oh, whatever. Thank you; I’ll pay them a visit soon.”

“You’re welcome. And!” Aubrey held up her index finger for a moment and then disappeared out of frame, returning a moment later holding up the designer blouse Chloe had sent her. "Thank you. I love it."

"You're welcome."

"So. What else did you get? Anything particularly interesting?"

"Oh my gosh, Bree. You'll never guess who gave me a present!"

Chloe excitedly went through the inventory of her gifts, stunning Aubrey with the details of what Katy had sent the two of them. She showed her the vintage journal Beca gave her, and pulled her hair aside to lean her in close to the webcam and proudly show off her new earrings.

"She got you earrings?"

"Yep! And it’s so funny. I got her earrings, too. Almost identical to these. Different stores is all. I went to Kay, she went to Jared."

"That's so sweet. And I approve of your continued positive influence on her style."
Chloe laughed. "I gave her diamonds; I didn't make her take out her cartilage piercing."

"I don't see why not."

"Because I like it. I don't tell her what to do. Unlike some people," she said pointedly.

Aubrey waved her hand, dismissing it. "Everything I ever said was for her own good." She paused. "So, did you get anything else? From Beca?"

"No..." she answered, suspicious at the repeated question. "Bree, I have the distinct impression that I'm the only person in my life not in on some big secret." She watched Aubrey's face for a reaction but got nothing notable.

"Why do you say that?"

Chloe brought her hand to her mouth, chewing at her thumbnail, a bad habit she broke years ago but cropped up when she had a lot on her mind. Maybe she was reading too much into everything. Maybe her best friend just wanted her to be confident to chase her dreams, whatever they may be. Maybe she wanted her to have something sexy to wear because it was fun. Maybe Katy Perry wanted her producer to take her girlfriend on an epic vacation after working her so hard for so long. Maybe Aubrey made her talk about engagement ring preferences because that's what girls their age did. Maybe Beca brought up kids and future family holidays together because...well, she couldn't really pinpoint a reason for that one.

"Chloe! Thumbs down!"

She jumped, whipping her hand away from her mouth at the sharp admonishment, which had been a major factor in breaking the habit their second year at Barden. "Sorry."

"Well? Why do you think you're not in on a secret?"

Chloe shook her head. "I feel silly."

"I doubt you have reason to. Why do you say that?"
She laughed, and rolled her eyes. "I actually thought the earrings Beca got me were going to be an engagement ring."

"Aww! Chloe."

"It looked like a ring box and she was talking about anniversaries, and your note - hell, even Katy's note - sounded all ominous like, 'buy some sexy lingerie to wear on your big fancy honeymoon!' So dumb. I mean why would you of all people know if Beca wanted to do that? No offense."

Aubrey's face was unreadable, though her brows shot up at the comment on the unlikelihood of Beca sharing anything of importance with her. "I think I'll take a small amount of offense to that," she said with a sarcastic smile and scrunching of her nose. "But you shouldn't feel silly."

Chloe's pulse picked up a little at that. "Why not?"

"Because I can understand how you'd read into those things and see what you wanted to see."

Chloe frowned at that. "I'm not some girl who's poring over bridal magazines, daydreaming my life away wondering when I'm going to get married." Never mind the fact that she totally didn’t have those hidden folders on her computer filled with dream engagement rings and nursery decor, and there definitely wasn’t anything related to china patterns.

"But you do want to get married."

"Well, yeah. Eventually."

"To Beca."

"If she'd have me."

Aubrey sat back in her chair, and Chloe could see her thinking. "What did I write in your gift?"
"To not be afraid to know what I want."

Aubrey nodded. "That's all I'm going to say about it."

Chloe scoffed, throwing her hands in the air. "Some b.f.f. you are! How is that supposed to help me?"

"Some things you have to figure out for yourself."

"Bitch," Chloe breathed, not really meaning it. Not really.

"I've been told," Aubrey said with a shrug.

The house was painfully quiet. The neighborhood was still calm following the holiday, and with Beca still at the studio at 10:00pm, Chloe was stuck home alone with her thoughts.

It wasn't the most pleasant experience.

She sat in bed, tinny, bottomless music floating from her iPhone since she forgot Beca's Bluetooth speaker downstairs. Her gifts from Beca lay in a semicircle in front of her - the journal, the earrings (well, their box, as the jewels were secure on her ears where they would remain for the foreseeable future), the watch. Aubrey's note and the lid from Katy's box were there, too.

She stared at everything, reading the notes over and over. She wondered why Beca hadn't written her a note, too. Especially if this was supposed to all point to what Chloe refused to believe it to.

Because Beca was a wild spirit.

Not in the same way she was. But in her own perfectly Beca way. She rebelled against social constructs. She wanted to forge her own path. To make her own rules. To play the game her way and win.
And, Chloe assumed a long time ago, that it all equaled a full rejection of societal norms, including but not limited to a nine-to-five job, children, and marriage. A glance at the time on her phone to see it pushing 10:30pm reaffirmed the first point.

But Beca recently made it pretty clear that she did want kids someday. And she worried about being a good parent. And she discussed parenting with Chloe. Like, together. Beca as the softie that would spoil them, and Chloe as the disciplinarian. Beca had thought about it enough to come to that conclusion in their roles. To worry about how she didn't want to treat her children - their children - the way her family treated her.

And she lost count of all the times Beca made mention of the future, as though it was an accepted truth that she would be with Chloe always. She talked of wanting to pick out a new home with Chloe when the time came, to make sure Chloe was happy, too. She talked of alternating families for the holidays. She talked of anniversaries.

Chloe had tried to brush it all aside, dismissing the comments as misspoken, or out of context, or fantastical because it made her nervous. It made her think that maybe Beca and she were on the same page. But it also made her worry that she was misinterpreting Beca’s comments. Setting herself up for disappointment. For making a fool of herself. Willfully.

She gasped.

She felt like a moron.

Everything made sense. Everything clicked into place. The lightbulb above her head illuminated.

She was nervous and put away her gifts with trembling hands, shaking her head at herself. Both at her sudden rush of adrenaline and her straight-up density.

She left the journal out while she washed up for bed. And she laughed at herself in the mirror. "Wow, Chloe. Just wow."

She settled in bed with her bedside lamp on and picked up her new (old) journal, untying the strap to open it to the first page and clicked her pen.

*December 26, 2015*
Beca Mitchell wants to marry me.

And I'm going to ask her to.

Chapter End Notes

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:) :)
Chloe felt a thousand pounds lighter after The Revelation. She didn't know it was weighing her down until she made her decision, and now she felt light as a bird.

She didn't turn around and propose the moment Beca walked in, though. Chloe had more class and tact than that.

No. She needed to plan it. She needed it to be grand - not in the flash mob, violin serenade, ring-in-the-champagne sense, but emotionally. She needed it to be perfect.

She didn't brainstorm or fixate. With the knowledge living in the back of her mind, she was confident the right pieces of the puzzle would come together without her forcing it.

That didn't mean, however, that she couldn't be a little excited about it. She almost texted Aubrey about it a dozen times that first week. But something told her not to, to keep this one thing close to her heart, private. She didn't need people complicating it or filling her head with other thoughts or doubts.

She needed to decide when to do it.

She refused to be cliché. She was a romantic for sure, but the concept of proposing on Valentine's Day made her want to gag. She also knew tying romantic memories to other significant dates could taint those dates if things ever went south.

She still didn't much care for April Fool's Day. Not because she couldn't appreciate a good practical joke (Are you kidding? She loved them!), but because by chance, it happened to be the day she broke things off with Tom, and he thought she was joking. He called and texted her all day commending her on her joke while begging her to tell him it really was a joke.

I made a fancy little Spotify Playlist for this fic, FYI. It has every song referenced thus far in the story. Just a little something fun!
It made the whole ordeal a lot more painful than it needed to be.

So she couldn't bear tying this to such a major day as Valentine's. If it didn't work out - even though she repeatedly reassured herself that it would - she didn't want the holiday ruined forever more. She'd rather a random date she could maybe someday forget be the host to her heartbreak, should that be the outcome.

But she wasn't scared of rejection. Not anymore. She was confident and sure.

She was just protecting herself.

No holidays.

But the romantic and spontaneous side of her itched to do it, and do it soon.

"Why do I feel like every time we wake up, we're getting ready to celebrate another holiday?" Beca asked from the bathroom where she was doing her make-up.

"Because there are way too many holidays at the end of the year. Have you seen my black strappy heels?"

She was in front of their open closet, half dressed in a bra and matching thong and unsuccessfully scanning her shoe collection suspended from the clothing rod to no avail.

"Check the bottom right," echoed out to her.

Her eyes dropped to the lower pocket of her shoe rack. "Those aren't the ones, Bec! They're...wait, what?"

"Surprise," Beca said, suddenly behind her and making her jump.
Chloe pulled the black pumps out of their spot on the rack, red soles gleaming in the overhead light of the closet. "Babe..."

"They're are the right ones, yeah?" Beca slipped an arm around Chloe's bare waist, arm warm against her cool body.

She couldn't believe it. They were the Louboutin Kristali laser-cut patent leather pumps she'd lusted over every time she let herself visit the designer's website, and the three times she let herself wander into Saks Fifth Avenue. She tried them on every time, only to walk out empty handed, refusing to spend so much on a pair of shoes for herself.

She also was fairly certain she never told Beca about these shoes. But she definitely mentioned it to Aubrey. Maybe she put them on Instagram? "How did you...?"

"A bitchy little bird told me."

Aubrey. Chloe shook her head, feeling way too spoiled. She had splurged on Beca's earrings for Christmas, but there was no way she could keep up with the extravagance Beca's producing advance allowed compared to her teacher's salary. Sure, she had that nice chunk of cash from a certain pop star, but she was holding onto that.

Epic honeymoon indeed.

"Do they fit? They should."

Chloe set them down with the most reverent care and balanced against Beca to slip them on, testing the fit.

"They're perfect."

Beca beamed at her. "The sales lady remembered you. I told her what I was looking for and we started talking and when I showed her a picture of you on my phone she knew your size. Said you've been in there once or twice?"
Chloe blushed a little. "Maybe. Wait, you were chatting up the salesgirl and just decided to show her a pic of me?"

"To be honest I think she was hitting on me?"

Green flashed through Chloe's brain. "What!"

Beca laughed and held her hands up. "Calm down, tiger. I made a point of telling her about you. And you got shoes that fit because she agreed you're hard to forget. She was happy you were finally getting them."

She huffed. "Fine. But she won't be helping me again." Realizing she jumped from admiring to jealousy and back to admiring and failing to even say 'thank you,' she kissed Beca in gratitude and stepped out of the shoes to finish getting ready.

"I thought you could wear them tonight, yeah?" Beca said, following Chloe back to the bathroom to finish her make-up.

Chloe tested the heat of her flatiron with a finger and picked it up to clap it together a few times.
"Totes. They're perfect for New Year's."

A black sedan courtesy of Capitol Records dropped them off at the RIAA’s New Year's Eve blowout at an event hall on Hollywood Boulevard at 9:30pm. It was a Black and White party and, in a decision that tickled Chloe to no end, Beca chose to wear white. It was a nice departure from the darker grays, blacks, and jewel tones that she was naturally drawn toward. Chloe also didn’t mind the fact that it was a new dress, and one that really hugged her curves and stopped mid-thigh and gave her a ridiculous amount of cleavage.

This was glamorous Beca, the one that showed up almost as infrequently as Halley’s Comet and only when it really had to. Tonight was one of those times, because the party had a “Dress to Impress” dress code which, as they determined after having to Google what the heck that meant, was pretty much only one step down from Black Tie.

“So, like, Video Music Awards, not Academy Awards,” had been Beca’s sound interpretation.
So Beca found herself a new dress and Chloe resisted the urge to crack into her Katy Perry cash and instead dug out her pair of high-waisted, wide-leg pants that were slit from the ankle to knee on each side. The slits gave the pants plenty of movement to show off her new shoes while flashing a little skin. She was probably the only person who would care about the shoes, but that didn’t matter. She paired them with the sleeveless black silk blouse she’d given to Beca for Christmas and had not yet been worn by its rightful owner.

She really enjoyed that particular perk of being in a relationship with another woman.

Her wardrobe doubled in size.

A few sparkly bangles and, as much as she hated to do it, replacing her diamond studs with shiny silver hoops finished out her “Dress to Impress” look. The Louboutins made her feel like the classiest lady in the world.

And then there was Beca, who really was red carpet ready (the fun one, not the uptight one), with her hair curled softly and pinned to hang over her right shoulder and white platform pumps that made them the same height, even with Chloe’s new heels, and no jewelry save for the diamonds Chloe gave her and a chunky piece of costume jewelry on her right ring finger.

Chloe might have been a little giddy over the fact that Beca chose to wear the earrings.

And honestly, if Beca looked over her shoulder at her one more time with those smoky eyes and light pink lips, she was pretty sure she’d suffocate from beauty.

“Babe, you coming?” Beca asked, glancing back at her as she stood on the sidewalk, blocking their driver from closing the car’s door.

She took a breath and smiled. “Sorry, yeah.” She caught up to Beca and accepted her outstretched hand, walking together up the strip of black carpet that led from the edge of the sidewalk to the door of the venue. Paparazzi were there, behind a rope, but after a brief moment of excitement and a single camera flash, Beca and Chloe were ignored, having been no one of interest after all.

Chloe squeezed Beca’s hand. “They’re going to regret not getting that photo three months from now when you’re super famous.”
“Shut up,” Beca muttered, bumping her shoulder against Chloe’s as they stepped through the door that a handsome man in a tuxedo opened for them.

They both stopped short, taken aback by the venue.

It was like a scene out of *The Great Gatsby*, glittering lights and white balloons and thumping music. Half the room was filled with round tables, dressed in black linens with white plates topped with black napkins. Most of the tables were, or had been, occupied by partygoers, all dressed in black or white or combinations thereof.

A pretty blonde in a little black dress popped out of nowhere, stopping their advance. She wielded a headset and an iPad. “Hi! Can I have a name?”

“Uh, Mitchell. Beca.”

“And guest,” the girl said with a smile at Chloe after tapping the tablet’s screen. “You’re at table sixteen, which is right over there.” She pointed. “It’s an open bar, and our bartenders appreciate gratuities. We have several bars set up; the closest to your table is manned by Matty. He’ll be happy to serve you.”

“Manned by Matty?” Beca repeated, failing to stifle a laugh. Chloe elbowed her.

“The ladies’ room is located downstairs. Stairs on either side of the dance floor will take you there. And we have a buffet across the room.”

“Anything else?” Beca said, voice tight as she took a step in the direction of their table. Chloe chuckled at her eagerness to get the ball rolling.

“Make sure you visit the accessories collection!”

“Accessories collection?” Chloe asked.
The girl pointed. “Have fun, ladies!” And then she was gone, checking in the next couple to arrive.

“What the hell is an accessories collection?” Beca asked as they walked toward a table separate from the main seating area. When they were close enough, she took a few quick steps forward. “Ah ha, accessories!”

Chloe watched her speed ahead to the table and then turn around with neon green glowing glasses - or rather, a green glowing tube twisted and bent into the shape of 2016 - perched on her nose.

“Those really complement your look,” Chloe said, laughing and joining her at the table to survey the options. There were glowing glasses like Beca chose, and tiaras and bowler hats and top hats and fedoras and noisemakers, all adorned with HAPPY NEW YEAR! or 2016 and combinations thereof.

Beca put the glasses back, hands on her hips as she tried to make up her mind.

“I’m the one that has to look at you all night. You’re wearing this,” Chloe said firmly. She grabbed one of the black fedoras off the table to set it onto Beca’s head.

“Oh, am I?” Beca said, smiling as she took off the hat to put it back on comfortably.

Chloe flicked the brim, appreciating the style. “Yep. You look hot.”

Beca curtsied and then plucked one of the top hats off the table and drop it on Chloe’s head with a pop. “Then you get this.”

“No tiara?”

Beca shook her head. “You look...dashing.”

“Dashing?”
“Mhmm.” Beca held out her right hand expectantly. “Escort a lady to her seat?”

Chloe laughed and lifted the hand to her lips to kiss her knuckles. ”As you wish.” She looped her elbow around her hand to walk them to what was marked as table sixteen by two giant silver numbers one and six sitting in the middle of the table as a centerpiece. No one was seated at their table, but a couple of the chairs were askew and plates used, and a couple ladies’ purses and clutches were on the chairs.

“So do you want to dance?” Beca asked, setting her silver clutch on a chair, but not before pulling out a small fold of cash and tucking it down into her cleavage. “Or eat? Or drink?”

“Drink, then dance. I want to watch you dig that cash out of your boobs like a lady,” Chloe said with a grin as she reached for Beca’s hand to lead them to their section’s bar.

There were people everywhere, but the line at the bar was short - the numerous set-ups keeping wait-time down, no doubt. Chloe ordered a vodka cranberry, and was about to order Beca her usual preference of a Dos Equis when she interjected, indicating she would have what Chloe was having.

“Are we getting crazy tonight?” Chloe asked teasingly. Beca was a bit of a lightweight, and beer kept her on the slow and steady path. Liquor tended to hit her hard and fast.

Beca smiled and fished her money out of her cleavage to drop a five dollar bill into the tip jar. “Just to get things moving. Thanks, Manny,” she said, winking at the bartender who had not so subtly watched her remove and replace her cash as he mixed and passed their drinks skillfully with both hands.

“See you later, beautiful,” the man answered, grinning as he flipped more glasses over to fill with ice for the next in line.

“Excuse you?” Chloe asked Beca as they walked away, sipping their drinks and weaving through the crowd toward the dance floor. “What was that?”

“What was what?” Beca asked, eyebrows high as she took another sip.

“Flirting with Mister Manny?”
“Uh, duh. Our drinks will be stronger next time. You can’t tell me that you, of all people, have never flirted for booze.”

Chloe tried to be jealous, she really did, but Beca was being her same adorable self, disguised by her outward glamor, and she couldn't really be jealous. She knew Beca was hers, that it was her arm Beca would hold for the evening, that it was she who would be the recipient of her Beca's midnight kiss.

"Okay, good idea," she agreed. “I'll get him on the next round. Give him a one-two punch.”

"That's my girl," Beca said, taking Chloe's elbow again as they stepped onto the dance floor. Macklemore’s “Downtown” was blasting and the mass of bodies on the floor undulated to the rhythm. They stayed near the edge, still working on their drinks, not doing much more than bobbing their heads and stealing smiling glances at one another. They knew better than to venture into the crowd and hope to not have a party foul with their drinks.

"Come on, I wanna dance," Chloe finally shouted, tired of waiting. She tossed the rest of her drink down like a shot and left the floor to leave her glass on a table. Beca was doing the same when she turned around and Chloe grabbed her hands once they were empty to lead her onto the dance floor, further into the crowd this time. She pulled Beca close, hands on her waist as she grinded into her playfully before taking a step back and rocking her hips and feet into motion.

She liked having a hat; it was an accessory that she didn't normally have on the dance floor, and it opened up a world of possibilities as she tipped it at Beca in invitation, who laughed and stepped closer to her to fall into the same rhythm.

They danced close, sometimes touching, sometimes not, laughing and shooting sexy, smoldering, occasionally silly looks at each other.

Chloe was reminded of all their nights out with the Bellas - and the few nights without them - and how for the first year she always had to finagle Beca to dance with her. It usually involved a lot of puppy eyes and pouty lips and batted eyelashes before Beca would let herself be dragged onto the floor, moving hesitantly more than actually dancing. That was, until Chloe would put her hands on Beca's hips or around her waist and whisper something in her ear about having a good time with her, making Beca smile and bite her lip to try to stop the smile from turning into a grin. And then she would start dancing for real, shaking off her chains of reservation in what usually ended up with one grinding up on the other until one of the other girls commented on it and they broke apart sheepishly but grinning, to leave Chloe burning up inside over how blatantly sensual Beca could
get with her on the dance floor, only to laugh it off once someone else interrupted.

Chloe really wasn't a fan of those interruptions.

Now that they were busy being responsible adults, their nights out were few and far between. She could count on one hand the number of times they'd gone out dancing since graduation Copenhagen, Halloween, and...and that was it? - since they became a couple and she didn't have to coerce Beca to dance or worry that she was being too handsy with her.

Which reminded her.

"Oh!" Beca exclaimed, getting yanked forward into Chloe's space to be wrapped up in her arms and held close.

Chloe felt Beca's arms come down around her neck and she met her smokey eyes, holding her stare for a moment before pointedly dropping her gaze down to the line of cleavage on display.

She felt warm breath on her ear. "Like what you see?"

She dropped her head, nipping the swell of a breast and making Beca curse in her ear before she straightened, grinning at her.

"Are you going to make a scene?" Beca asked when Chloe resumed behaving herself. "Because half the recording industry is here tonight and I'd rather they have a good impression."

"I would never do that!" The look Beca gave her reminded her again of all those nights spent dirty dancing and she corrected her statement. "I won't tonight; I promise!"

"Thanks, babe." Beca draped her left arm around Chloe's neck, dancing close but not quite close enough to be deemed dirty.

"On the other hand," Chloe said in Beca's ear, wrapping an arm around her waist again, "in a male-driven industry, we could really make some noise." She flicked the brim of Beca's fedora up
enough to fit with her own top hat and drop a quick kiss on her lips.

She felt Beca smile under her mouth and then she was pulling back, shaking her head. "Behave."

Chloe sighed dramatically. "Fine! But you can't blame me for trying. You look fucking sexy."

She caught the surprise in Beca's eyes at the brassy compliment and winked at her.

And then she gasped, twirling Beca and pulling her close so they were facing the same direction, toward a man in a black sequined jacket and hat, killing it with Michael Jackson-esque movies. "Is that Bruno Mars?!"

Some time and two drinks later, Chloe pulled Beca downstairs to the bathroom. Her feet were killing and she was sweaty and needed to pee. In the silence of the bathroom, her hearing felt muffled. She had to strain to hear whatever it was Beca was telling her from a bathroom stall as she touched up her make-up in the mirror.

"Almost 11:00," was her answer when she realized what Beca was asking. Chloe's pants came with pockets and the benefit of being able to keep her phone on her at all times. And as she kept it out to take a wide-eyed selfie in the bathroom mirror with her top hat purposely askew, she saw Beca exit the stall behind her, still tugging her dress back into place around her hips.

"Ooh, selfie!" Beca cheered, scurrying up to Chloe to perch her chin on her shoulder for the photo.

Chloe giggled; Beca being into selfies was a sure sign she was at least one sheet to the wind. The way her smile for the photo grew a little lopsidedly told her it was maybe two sheets. And in an almost unprecedented event, the moment devolved into a mini photo shoot of silly poses of Beca with her tongue out and holding up fingers in various combinations of the west coast gang sign, and the universal ones for rock on, hang ten, and peace, and Chloe mostly pulling various faces or experimenting with her hat as a prop.

"Oh my God, you guys are so cute! I didn’t know you’d be here."
They both started at the intrusion, forgetting they were in a public space for the moment. Chloe started laughing and then froze when she saw who'd interrupted them. And then it was Beca's turn to start laughing, her awkward, nervous, tipsy giggle that she used to try to wipe away whatever she had just been doing.

"Um, yeah," Beca said, folding her arm and propping her elbow on Chloe's shoulder to lean against her casually. "You?"

Chloe was still frozen, half in shock that Beca was able to actually sort of enter a conversation with Taylor Swift. Even though her response had literally nothing to do with the conversation opener.

"Yeah, def!" the leggy blond answered. "You're Becky Mitchell, right?"

"No, it's Beca."

"You're Katy's new lead producer."

"That's right." Beca's posture changed and she started to smack of confidence. "This my girlfriend, Chloe."

Chloe knew she was beaming - both at Beca for being recognized and at Taylor Swift for, well, being Taylor Swift. "Hi."

Taylor gave her a quick smile and turned her attention back to Beca. "I remember seeing your picture at a Big Machine meeting. We listened to the track. That was pretty cool, dropping it like that at a club."

"Yeah, well..." Beca shrugged.

"Song wasn't half bad either."

Chloe felt Beca stiffen a little at that.
"So that means it's only half good?"

"Well." Taylor laughed. "Considering. You know." She waved her hand around as though it was obvious. "Anyway. I came in here for a reason which is becoming urgent. But...Beca, was it? Can I get your info? I might want to collaborate on something."

Chloe's head snapped to Beca so fast she thought she might have broken her neck. She was just as enthralled as she was amused. Because...wow. The rumors were at least partly true. An unsubtle attempt to sweep Katy's producer out from under her was happening in the bathroom of a party. And she watched the same realizations slide over Beca's face as she considered her response, left eye squinting as she thought.

"I'm tied to Capitol. But if that ever changes, I could consider letting one of your people know."

Chloe gave a subtle approving nod. Even fairly tipsy, Beca remembered her professionalism.

"Fair enough," Taylor said with a sigh. "Let me see your phone; I'll save my assistant's info."

"Oh...I don't have it on me," Beca said, patting her hip for nonexistent pockets.

Chloe pulled hers out of her trusty pocket and pulled up the texting application and her message thread with Beca. For a moment she considered handing her phone over, but Beca playing her cards cautiously made her follow suit; it wasn't that Chloe had any particularly confidential information in her phone, but - you never know. "What's her info? I'll text it to her."

Chloe tapped out the email address and phone number relayed and pressed 'send.'

"That thing I came in here for is becoming an emergency," Taylor continued, pushing the door to a stall open. "So I'll see you around, I'm sure. Maybe at the Grammys?"

Chloe caught the hint of a smirk as the singer disappeared behind the stainless steel door and felt her jaw drop at the unspoken trash talk. It didn't go unnoticed by Beca either, who Chloe saw light up at what was now a personal offense on her - quite literally. It was no secret that there was a high
expectation that the new sound she developed for Katy would finally lead the pop star to a Grammy Award, infamously denied her after so many nominations.

And then she saw Beca check herself after she took a quick step forward and settle for waving her middle finger emphatically at the closed bathroom stall.

Chloe clasped her fingers around Beca's waving hand and tugged to get her moving. "Come on, I need another drink."

What began as an evening of a couple awesome celebrity sightings grew to a night that Chloe knew other people in her life - those who didn't know Beca - would never believe. As midnight neared, the dance floor became a mess of people whom Chloe herself could barely believe she was with. She'd spin and come face to face with Christina Aguilera (a moment she would definitely be telling Aubrey about in their next chat). She'd shift her focus from Beca's face (or cleavage, because maybe it was hard to keep her eyes from drifting) and see Usher trying to dance up on Beca from behind.

And then there was the time she felt someone doing that to her and when she turned to offer a polite declination, she discovered it was Adam Levine, and despite being somewhat in love with the man since she was twelve, she was more than somewhat in love with the woman whose hands were sliding a little too high up her torso from behind to be appropriate and, after indulging in a precious few seconds of dancing with the man, she smiled at him and covered Beca’s hands with her own to turn back around to pull her arms around her waist.

She didn’t miss the look of surprise on Beca’s face when she turned back. “You can dance with him,” Beca said, leaning in to be heard. “I know how much you love him.”

Chloe shook her head and grabbed the fedora off Beca’s head to have a clear approach for the quick and thorough kiss she delivered. “I love you more.”

Beca laughed and fixed her hat after Chloe returned it off-kilter. “You’re so fucking cheesy.” Beca was hanging onto her, a little off balance from being knocked back with the kiss, supporting herself with an arm that moved from Chloe’s waist to her neck. “You’re lucky I love you!”

In that moment, Chloe felt the room shudder and trip, like an old film reel spinning off the last few frames of a movie and everything around them disappeared. All she could see was Beca, and
Beca’s laughing grin, and sparkling eyes, and the faint beauty mark that resided on the high inner curve of her left breast, and the sharp angle of her jaw, and the perfect symmetry of her collarbones, and the tongue that pressed between her perfectly straight teeth as she smiled at Chloe like she was the only person in a room filled with people that should be so much more important to Beca, because they could be Beca’s future.

Chloe was laughing, too, bending forward to dip Beca backwards with a tight hold around her waist and an arm across her back, and Beca wasn’t paying attention to those people. Her eyes, when they weren’t closed in laughter, were on her. They could have been alone, and though they weren’t, it felt like it.

It felt a thousand miles away, but she could hear people cheering, getting louder. It sounded somewhat rhythmic. Like a countdown. And she couldn’t identify what number they were at, but she didn’t care. And while she didn’t have a ring, she had her grand moment, and had what she knew would be one of her favorite mental pictures of Beca ever right now, and for what she thought would be a moment full of nerves and sweaty palms and days and days of planning, she felt so much at peace, it was scary in its own right.

Cheering exploded from all angles, noisemakers blowing, and she could hear the opening strains of “Auld Lang Syne” beginning as the cheering quieted and people began singing, and she knew there was kissing, and hugging, and she smiled at Beca who was still looking up at her with sparkling eyes, but her grin had softened and Chloe could feel her fingers tickling the back of her neck, teasing into her hairline to make her shiver. And she knew. She knew it was now, and maybe it was a holiday and maybe it was cliché, especially at midnight on New Year’s, but -

“Well?”

She blinked, realizing on a delay that Beca was talking. “What?”

“Ask me.”

Chloe shook her head, wondering how long she’d been apparently ignoring Beca, lost as she was in her thoughts, and what she’d missed. “Ask you what?”

She noticed Beca was flushed, more so than from the dance and drink, and it was hard to miss how quickly she was breathing. “Ask me now, Chlo.”
To be truthful, Chloe had literally no idea if Beca was even referring to what Chloe was thinking. For all she knew, she might have accidentally tuned out an entire conversation moments ago. But Beca was still looking up at her expectantly from the dip Chloe was holding her in, and despite becoming more aware of their surroundings - the song had ended and, in a realization that gave Chloe a swell of emotion for more than one reason, Katy’s “This Moment” followed it - she still felt like they were alone. And she still had her moment, and she pressed pause on her racing thoughts to focus on the only one that mattered right now.

“Will you...Beca, will you marry me?”

It wasn’t until Beca had pushed them upright, her lips on Chloe’s, that she felt how hard her heart was thundering in her chest.
She said yes.

Technically, it was January 1st when she wrote it. It was four in the morning and they'd just stumbled up the spiral staircase together (which really was a bitch when you're tired and still a little tipsy), and she stole a moment while Beca was in the bathroom to jot it in her journal which took up residence under the edge of their mattress.

The four hours prior to that were a spinning blur of the good kind.

Beca crashing into her with a kiss before she responded to the question.

Chloe laughing and asking if that meant 'yes.'

Beca laughing and nodding and then covering her mouth and freezing as if she just realized what had happened.

And then there were tears and more laughing as Chloe grabbed her hips and lifted her enough to spin them around playfully.

"Put me down!" Beca had demanded, batting at Chloe's arms.

"I'm practicing," Chloe said when she set her down carefully.

"For what?"

"That whole threshold thing."
And then they were laughing again, and Chloe remembers throwing her hands in the air and squealing, "We're getting married!" And while the music was too loud for her to be heard by everyone, the dozen or so people around them heard it and gave a cheer.

The party went off the rails after that. It turned into an impromptu concert festival, singer after singer jumping on the stage with the DJ to sing - sometimes horribly depending on their level of inebriation - over their studio recording in the DJ's library. A few were lucky enough to get instrumentals. Ed Sheeran found a guitar somewhere and finally gave them a proper slow dance.

After their moment, they got swept back up in the party. The DJ unleashed his best after midnight, and though they quit drinking after The Question, Chloe felt increasingly drunk, but on adrenaline and endorphins and one particularly frenzied groping session that took place in a bathroom stall.

As Chloe sat on the bed after scribbling in her journal, pants off and shirt unbuttoned as she waited to use the bathroom, she felt...off. Not a bad off. Kind of out of body, like she was watching herself from above, like a dream.

But Beca exited the bathroom wearing the oversized tee she'd left on the floor after waking up that morning, with her face scrubbed of the glamour and her hair tied up in its messy bun, and her face tired but her eyes bright, Beca was...just Beca again.

But that was it, Chloe thought as Beca smiled at her and gave her a go-ahead to the restroom, that it was never just Beca. It was and it wasn't, and Chloe promised herself when she was thirteen and saw a terrible Lifetime movie about a woman who let a man be her everything and then who left her ruined that she would never let someone be that, to be her everything.

And Beca wasn't her everything.

But she was as close to it as Chloe would let her be.

Beca was still awake when Chloe returned, arms crossed behind her head to prop it up a little. She didn't say anything, but she recognized when Beca was wired, bubbling over with whatever it was, and as Chloe slid under the covers next to her, intent on curling up next to her, Beca was quicker, pushing Chloe onto her back and climbing over to straddle her hips and lean down to bring their faces close. Chloe laughed, lifting her eyebrows in inquiry.

"Who are you?"
Chloe tilted her head. "Huh?"

Beca shifted her weight to lift her left arm and tap Chloe's chest in time with her words. "Who. Are. You?"

"Um...I'm Chloe?"

"Nope," Beca said, popping the 'p' with smacked lips.

"It's like four in the morning. You're gonna have to spell it out for me, Bec."

Beca grinned and shifted her hand to lay against Chloe's neck, thumb idly stroking the column of her throat. "You..." She paused and lowered herself enough to place a soft kiss to Chloe's lips. "Are..." And another. "My fiancée."

Chloe drew a quick breath through her nose. The term lit something inside - an immense level of pride, perhaps. Beca's tongue slipping past her lips interrupted her analysis and she sighed into it, bringing her hands up to Beca's waist and simply hold her.

Beca pulled back after a moment, smiling. More like grinning like the cat that got the canary.

"Oh my gosh," Chloe said, laughing at the look she was getting. "What is it now?"

"I'm going to make it official." Beca clambered off Chloe and shuffled on her knees to her side of the bed.

Chloe watched as she bent over, stretching to pull open the drawer to her nightstand and reaching in for whatever. She heard the tap-tap-tap as she felt around and then she was on her way back, smiling with her hand hidden behind her. "Whatcha got there?" Chloe asked, letting out a little oomph when Beca sat over her again.

"Close your eyes."
Chloe hesitated and then closed her eyes. She was nervous, but nervous-excited, and she felt Beca shift a little and heard a tiny squeak of what sounded like a hinge followed by the soft thud of something hard hitting the carpeted floor. She wanted to peek, but whatever it was, Beca was taking her time and drawing out the anticipation for a reason and she kept her eyes closed. She felt hands on her, beginning at her stomach and making her shiver, moving higher to graze but not linger over her breasts, and up to her shoulders. She expected those hands to continue their parallel journey down both arms, they detoured and both trailed down her left, a warm palm underneath and fingernails tickling down her bicep and inner elbow and underside of her forearm until they were on her hand, playing with her fingers one at a time, and she started smiling.

"Bec..."

Beca wiggled her thumb, and then her index finger, and then her middle finger. "Hmm?"

And then she felt it, the chill of metal slipping over her ring finger, catching at her knuckle and then moving past to settle into place. She swallowed the lump in her throat and let Beca keep playing with her fingers until she tugged on them playfully.

"Open."

She counted to five and aimed blindly to land her gaze on Beca, who was smiling down at her, biting her lip, and Chloe could tell Beca was fighting back tears, which didn't make it an ounce easier for her to do it.

She didn't look, not yet. But she could see it in her periphery, the way it caught the low light given off from the bedside lamp to make it sparkle.

"Beca."

"You -" Beca's voice was thick and she stopped to clear her throat. "You beat me to it. So. I figured I should give you this." She tapped the sparkle and sat back.

Chloe finally let herself look at the silver band wrapped around her left ring finger, crystal clear jewel perched atop it proudly. She felt a tear slip out, rolling warm down her temple to disappear into her hair and she didn’t bother to wipe it away, but she blinked a few times to try to keep the rest of them reined in. She fanned her fingers out, trying to imagine what it would look and feel like
to have a ring on that finger every day for, hopefully if everything worked out, forever.

“It’s beautiful,” she breathed. The ring was perfect with its silver - maybe platinum? - band and a princess cut diamond and...and smaller ones inlaid in the band that she noticed once she drew her hand closer, and it was literally the exact ring from her secret wish list. She snapped her eyes up to Beca, who was biting her lip again.

“Oh...my gosh. I can’t believe you!”

Beca shrugged with one shoulder, feigning a little bit of guilt. “A bitchy little bird told me?”

Chloe scoffed and swatted Beca’s thigh. “You’re the one that’s been making Aubrey harass me about marriage all this time!”

“I can neither confirm nor deny that.”

“Beca!” Chloe was laughing, and trying really hard to not feel like a complete moron for being blind (yet again) to what she now felt should have been pretty damn obvious. “Baby, I’m sorry, I can’t marry you after all.”

Beca flinched, jumping back an inch. “What?!”

“I can’t let you be married to a felon. Because I’m going to murder my best friend.”

“Oh my God, Chloe!” It was Beca’s turn to swat, connecting a couple times with Chloe’s arms. “It’s too soon to joke about that.”

“About killing Aubrey?”

“Saying you changed your mind!”

Chloe softened immediately, dropping her exaggerated anger. Beca was serious. “I asked you, remember? I’m not going to change my mind.”
Beca shrugged, eyes downcast, maybe a little sheepish. “I knew you were kidding but, wow,” she paused, laughing nervously, “it kind of suckerpunched me right in the gut.”

“Aww awwww,” Chloe teased with a wiggle of her hips to get Beca to look at her again. “Somebody really loves meeenee!”

“Shut up.”

“Yes you dooo! You got scared when I said I didn’t -” she paused, gasping as a lightbulb turned on. “That’s why you were having Aubrey do it! You were scared for me to say I didn’t want to marry you.”

“Well...yeah. Basically.”

Chloe crunched her abs to sit up and better look eye to eye with Beca and loop her arms around her waist. "I get it. But I don't want you to feel like you can't talk to me about stuff."

"This wasn't, like, not knowing how to tell you I hate how you squeeze the toothpaste."

"It doesn't matter how I squeeze it -"

"You waste it when you don't start at the bottom! No, that's not what we're talking about right now. Never mind that."

Chloe chuckled and let her hands roam a little over Beca's back, enjoying the warmth. "So it wasn't like toothpaste."

"No!” Beca huffed and slouched a little, rapping her fingers against her thighs. "I...I didn't want to scare you off. Or hear what I didn't want to hear. And...I knew that Aubrey would buffer it."

Chloe smiled a little at that. "I can't decide if I'm more amused that you went to Aubrey, and imagining how that first conversation went, or that you thought you could do anything that would
Beca groaned, rolling her neck. "Please don't tease me right now."

"Sorry," Chloe said quickly. "I'm sorry. I don't mean it that way. I just...it's going to take a lot more than you asking me to spend the rest of my life with you to chase me away. I hope you know that."

Beca nodded, lifting her eyes from where they kept slipping down in bashfulness.

She pressed her hands to Beca's back and moved to lay back and bring Beca down with her. "Come here."

Beca followed easily. She slid down a bit to tuck her head under Chloe's chin. Chloe found Beca's left hand and matched it up with her right, measuring their fingers against each other for a moment before continuing, looking at Beca's bare finger. "You need a ring, too."

She felt Beca shrug against her. "It's okay."

"I almost bought one, you know."

"A ring?"

"Mhmm. For you for Christmas."

"What happened?"

"I chickened out and got you earrings instead."

"You chickened out?! Chlo!"

"What?? I was scared I was misreading your two thousand signals and I'd freak you out."
"So you're telling me you were afraid to just ask me, lest you scare me off?"

Chloe nodded.

"I'm having a major case of déjà vu right now." Beca's tone was teasing, and Chloe poked her in the ribs with her free hand.

Beca laughed and tilted her chin to press a kiss to Chloe's collarbone.

"You know what I wanna know?" Chloe continued.

"Hmm?"

"At the party. You told me to ask you. Honestly I have no idea if that's even what you were talking about."

She felt more than heard Beca's quiet chuckle. "It was."

"But how did you know?"

"You forget that literally everything you think is super obvious on your face."

Chloe blushed at that. "But that's kind of...a complex thought to display...facially with such...clarity."

She felt Beca take a quick breath, and then she paused, as though considering. Maybe remembering. "You...you were looking at me like I was the only person in the room. And...you look at me like that a lot. But...not like that."

Chloe sighed and ran her hand down Beca's back.
"And I didn't actually know. It was more a...Hail Mary? With a hope that I was right and that you wouldn't ask me if I wanted another shrimp cocktail instead."

Chloe laughed. "Good use of a football term, babe."

Beca groaned at that. "Thanks for that reminder."

"Oh, no no, shh. No thinking about that right now." Chloe could have kicked herself, reminding Beca of the incident at Thanksgiving.

"It's fine. Maybe they'll come around to the idea if you make an honest woman out of me."

Chloe felt another kiss pressed to her chest and brought her hand up to rest on the back of Beca's neck, scratching lightly how she knew Beca liked it. "So we're really doing this?"

"Seems that way."

"Maybe we can go shopping together? Somehow the ring you like didn't make it to my inbox and I don't want to go in blindly."

Beca laughed and flipped her head to face the other way, toward their clasped hands. She flexed her fingers with Chloe's, playing with them and running her thumb over her knuckles. "You could give me your Barden ring. Like we're going steady in the 1950s."

"That," Chloe said, detangling their fingers to pull her class ring off her right hand, "is an excellent idea." Beca held her hand up, fingers splayed, parallel to the bed to wait as Chloe slipped the band over her fourth finger. It wasn't a diamond, or even a real jewel. It was a faux emerald and had music notes inlaid on one side of the wide band and 2015 on the other with Barden University engraved around the stone's setting. It wasn't something she ever thought she would give Beca, certainly not for this particular tradition, but in a way, it made sense. It was at Barden that they met, through the music they both lived for, with the year the wall between them finally came crashing down. Chloe was acutely aware of the action, of the physical motion of sliding a ring onto Beca’s finger, onto that finger, and she took a shaky breath to keep calm. “There.”
She saw Beca looking at her hand for a moment and then the hand turned and worked its way under Chloe’s neck, as though seeking warmth. They were silent a long moment, long enough that Chloe wanted to sleep, but she knew Beca was still awake, her breaths still shallow and even, the occasional sniff or wiggle confirming her assumption. Chloe’s eyelids were getting heavy, the emotion and energy of the night piling up quickly.

“Baby?”

Beca shifted. “Hmm?”

“I’m sleepy.”

“You can sleep.”

“You aren’t tired?”

“Just thinking.”

Chloe hesitated a second, and then wriggled carefully out from under Beca so they could lie face to face. “About?”

Beca smiled and tugged Chloe’s hand out from where she’d tucked both under her pillow, left hand and left hand, and she interlocked their fingers, rocking their hands back and forth as though pointing out their new accessories. “We’re getting married.”

Chloe felt the swarm of butterflies that hibernated periodically in her stomach wake up, and again, it wasn’t that she forgot - she was just given an engagement ring for Pete’s sake - but hearing it, hearing Beca say it, made it a thousand percent more real. “Yeah,” she said with an exhale. “We are.”

Beca’s smile grew, and then she was scooting forward until she was close enough to kiss Chloe. “I love you.”

Chloe smiled back. “I love you, too.”
“God, why are you still awake?” Beca laughed, turning over and backing into Chloe like she did every night (until it got too warm to tolerate, anyway).

Chloe scoffed and tugged Beca close with an arm around her waist. “Screw you.”

She felt Beca shake with silent laughter, obviously fighting to keep it under control. “Maybe tomorrow.”

When Chloe woke up, it was well past noon. There was no hangover to be seen, thank goodness, but her head felt fuzzy. She was on her stomach, hands under her pillow, and she dragged them out to roll over and stretch, momentarily startled by the bauble that now lived on her ring finger.

It was definitely going to take some getting used to.

A smile crept over her face as she looked at it, a constant reminder that Beca had planned to propose, that Beca really did want to be with Chloe the way she wanted to be with Beca, that it wasn’t all some kind of ruse.

“Morning.”

She looked to the left to see Beca sitting up in bed, laptop propped on her thighs, headphones on but the right side pushed back so she could hear. “How long have you been up?”

Beca tapped the spacebar and pushed her headphones back completely to hang around her neck. “An hour maybe?”

Chloe stretched again, this time tensing her legs beneath the covers and rolling her ankles. “You could have got me up.”

“It’s nice, being with you when you’re sleeping.”

Chloe smiled. “What do you mean?”
Beca shrugged. “You’re always moving. When you’re asleep, you’re...not, obviously. And I can just enjoy you? That sounds weird and creepy and like I don’t enjoy you otherwise I promise I don’t mean it like that.” Beca rushed her explanation, and it made Chloe giggle.

“It’s okay, I get it.” She pushed herself up against the headboard next to Beca, glancing at her screen. “Whatcha doin’?”. The fact that Beca pressed Command+Tab to toggle another window to hide what she was mixing didn’t go unnoticed.

“Nothing. Just checking Facebook.”

Chloe let her white lie slide; there was surely much more fun to be had about her explanation than the real thing. “And what’s happening in the world of Facebook?”

“Apparently there's Bellas drama. Why is there drama over break? Emily is posting vague and passive-aggressive status updates, followed by inspirational quote hipster graphics.”

"We could give them something else to discuss." The night had been such a whirlwind, the excitement that came with actually telling people she popped the question was just catching up to her. She grabbed her iPhone off the nightstand, disconnecting the charging cable, and started playing with different angles to photograph her new piece of jewelry.

"You and that artsy shit. You're going to put three filters on it and make it look like a photo from a century ago."  

"I am not!" Chloe answered, flipping through filters and settling on one (just one!) that brightened up the white background of the duvet and accentuated the rumpled bedding and the peaks that were their hidden feet so it was super obvious they were in bed. "Now...how to break this news..." She reflected and considered, ignoring Beca's suggestions, until she had to laugh at the most predictable one:

"She liked it so she put a ring on it."  

"But I'm the one that asked you, Bec."  

"Yeah but it's a picture of your ring."
"You're right. Come on, hold out your hand." Chloe splayed her fingers out again in what she decided was the prettiest angle and leaned over to get Beca's in the frame, too. And then repeated the filtering process to push the photo first through to Instagram and her Facebook, and then immediately into the Bellas Facebook group.

Chloe Beale We liked it.

“Okay, go comment on it.”

Beca rolled her eyes but refreshed her browser anyway, and Chloe could see a hint of a smile touching her lips.

Beca Mitchell So we put a ring on it. On them. On each other. Whatever you get the point. We're getting hitched. Huzzah.

The response was immediate, Chloe's phone chiming at every comment on her post.

Emily Junk O-M-Aca-G YOU GUYS!

Stacie Conrad Hottest couple ever! Congrats!

Fat "Amy" Patricia All you bitches owe me $20. Oh and that's awesome!

Cynthia Rose Adams Aw hell yeah, welcome to the club, ladies!

Chloe Beale Thanks, guys! Super excited!

Jesse Swanson Good luck. And I don't mean that in a bitter, snarky way.

Fat "Amy" Patricia Sure you don't, loverboy. btw who added him? This group is Bellas only. Or does boning a Bella get you in? Emily Junk can you add Bumper?

Stacie Conrad Is one of you going to share the deets or do we get to hypothesize for another four years?

Beca Mitchell AMY! Emily Junk don't add him.

Beca Mitchell Stacie Conrad she asked me last night at midnight.

Jessica & Ashley Awww! Congratulations!
Emily Junk  Beca Mitchell OK boss!

Emily Junk  O M G THAT IS SO CUTE

Stacie Conrad That is so cliche, of course you did, Chloe Beale.

Chloe Beale IT WAS NOT CLICHE. Not really. It's not like I planned it. I didn't even have a ring to give her.

Stacie Conrad Those are your scary super long fingers with that rock. You mean to tell me Mitchell was more romantically prepared than you?

Beca Mitchell HA!

Chloe Beale Stacie Conrad she was. I will concede that point. Guess I beat her to the punch.

Lilly Onakuramara I'm an ordained minister.

Florence Fuentes ¡Felicidades!

Katherine Junk I'm so happy for you ladies! Congratulations on this new phase of your lives together. Emily Junk don't forget your dentist appointment at 2:00pm.

Emily Junk Katherine Junk THANKS MOM. AS ALWAYS, THIS IS NOT THE PLACE TO HAVE MOM CONVOS.

Aubrey Posen Well, it's about time. I'm calling you now.

“That’s right, she better call me,” Chloe said, thumb hovering over the screen of her phone to wait for it to illuminate with an incoming call.

“These girls are ridiculous.”

Chloe saw the Facebook window disappear and the blackness that was Beca’s favorite mixing program re-appear, but Beca turned the computer away before she got a good look at whatever it was she was working on. She didn’t have time to think about it, because her phone lit up.

“Aubrey. Posen. You little sneak!”
This is really just pure filthy smut. So much so I'm actually changing the rating on this to protect myself from a slap on the wrist. Oh and I can't publish this without a nod to Redlance's ridiculous hot Playtime story because, there was soooo very much inspiration there. Yeah. So anyway. AVERT YOUR EYES OR TAKE IT ALL IN. MAKE YOUR CHOICE.

"I can't believe you!" Chloe was up and out of bed before Aubrey had a chance to respond to Chloe's initial greeting. "You're my B.F.F.! How could you keep this from me??"

"Because I'm your B.F.F.," came the answer through the phone.

"You were basically lying to me, you know. For months. Meddling in my life." Chloe was acutely aware that she was pacing alongside the bed, wearing nothing but a pair of lavender briefs, and that Beca was watching her with much amusement. She'd address that momentarily. There were more important things to deal with first.

"I wasn't lying. I shifted the focus just-so to meet the needs of my friends who were too scared to figure this out for themselves. Beca came to me; this wasn't my doing, so don't get snippy with me."

"How long?" Chloe turned, addressing the question as much to Beca as Aubrey. "When did you start this little charade?"

"Octooooober…?" Beca answered. She was still smiling, thoroughly entertained.

"I don't see why you're all worked up. You literally got what you wanted."

"I..." Chloe stopped her pacing again to look at Beca, who was grinning at her, arms folded over her chest. "I feel silly."
Beca made a pouty face and moved to crawl across the bed until she was at the edge nearest Chloe to poke her stomach.

"Don't feel silly. If you didn't know what was up, then I was doing my job well. And zoom out for a second, Chloe. This happened because Becca wants to marry you. And now that's going to happen."

Beca was still smiling at her, fingertips starting to trail over Chloe's stomach and up her sides.

Chloe deflated a little, starting to realize it was pretty ridiculous to be any level of upset about this entire situation. She just didn't like being kept in the dark. "You're right."

"Of course I'm right."

Beca acted on the change in Chloe's demeanor, unceremoniously cupping her breasts and squeezing. The unexpected action made Chloe gasp.

"What? What happened?"

"Nothing," Chloe said quickly, trying to ignore what Beca had decided to start doing with her mouth on Chloe's chest. She looked down at her, considering an admonishment for interrupting the conversation, but Beca used that exact moment to use her teeth and Chloe almost dropped her phone. "Okay, Bree, I'm gonna have to let you go."

"Are you mad at me?"

Chloe caught the moan that was about to escape her throat, hand flying to the back of Beca's head to push her closer. "No, not mad."

"Good, then I offer you both my sincerest congratulations."

"Thanks." Chloe's voice was giving out on her, no thanks to Beca's wandering hands. "Bree, I really need to go." She glared down at Beca, whose muffled laugh must have reached the mic on the phone.
"Beca’s there? Can I say hi?"

"Yeah, she’s here." Chloe failed at catching the squeak that came with fingers walking their way up her thighs.

"Oh my God, Chloe. Seriously? Gross. I’m hanging up."

"Sorry, Bree. My fiancée's demanding my attention. Thank you for meddling!" She added her gratitude as an afterthought and cut off the call without waiting for a response to set her phone on the dresser behind her. "You couldn't wait five more minutes?" Chloe asked. She whimpered at Beca choosing to shake her head 'no' with her nipple between her teeth. "Yeah, okay, me neither." She gave Beca's shoulders a shove to detach her, hands immediately grabbing the bottom of Beca's tee to pull it up and over her head.

Beca laid back down and held up her arms in invitation. "Get over here."

"So demanding," Chloe said with a smile as she climbed up and moved to lie comfortably in the space Beca created between her legs. She gave a little roll of her hips and felt Beca's thighs tense against her.

Hands moved to her hair, expertly untying and untwisting it from its knot, and then Chloe was shivering as Beca worked her fingers through it to fluff it out and scratch at her scalp. Chloe let herself sink down and into a kiss that was equal parts unhurried as it was hinting at more. She felt Beca sigh and shift beneath her, bending her knees to better cradle Chloe between them. She took advantage of the extra space and rolled her hips again, and a quiet moan slipped into her mouth. Chloe lived for these moments, when they could lie together, wrapped up in one another, and just be. Walls tumbled quickly at the touch of their lips, and Chloe found the mutual disarmament thrilling.

She diverted her mouth’s attention to Beca’s neck, seeking out the sweet spot that would send her through the roof. Beca was warm under her tongue and her neck still smelled like the perfume she’d worn the night before, and when she grazed her teeth along it, Beca shivered and ran her fingernails up Chloe’s back.

It spurred her on, tongue flickering along until nails dug into her backside and Beca gasped so harshly it surprised her.
“Shit,” was Beca’s subsequent exhale and Chloe zeroed in on it, pulling the sensitive skin between her lips and releasing it to lap at it. Chloe was content to stay right there for as long as Beca allowed, but then those hands on her backside decided to slip under the one and only piece of clothing between them and squeeze her bare flesh, and she broke away, enjoying the immediate look of annoyance she got from a very flustered Beca.

“You were just getting started,” Beca said, sounding a little winded.

“I...okay.” She’d intend to change things up, but there was little she could do to resist Beca wanting more of anything and she picked up where she left off, massaging that spot on Beca’s neck with her tongue as she brought her hand up to slip between them. She cupped Beca’s breast, relishing the way it fit the curve of her hand so perfectly every time. Air rushed out of Beca at the contact and Chloe squeezed gently and changed tactics at her neck, opting for light and delicate instead of wide and firm as her thumb dragged over the taut peak, and the mess of syllables that slipped from Beca pushed Chloe’s hips up into her, making both of them moan.

Chloe pulled away again, eager to step things up. Beca groaned at the loss and snapped her head back to look up at her. “Why do you keep stopping?”

She bit her lip and smiled, feeling a little shy but more than a little turned on. “Can we...um...try it?”

She struggled to remember a time she’d seen arousal wash over Beca’s face so quickly. Nothing came to mind. Beca was nodding and pulling herself out from under Chloe, before Chloe could even move off her, to lie in a better space on the bed than where they had ended up. Chloe was nervous, she realized as soon as she was standing alone, looking at Beca with her head settled against the pillows as she scratched at her stomach absentmindedly. And then Beca smiled at her and the nerves dissipated enough for her to will her feet to move, to turn her around and take her to her nightstand and pull it open to be greeted by the tangle of black straps she’d tossed in there Christmas night.

She pulled it out and gave it a shake, hoping it would straighten itself out and also hide the fact that her hands were shaking. “You’re sure?” she asked Beca, who had turned onto her side to watch, a hand idly trailing up and down her own hip.

“I’m so sure. Do you need help? The lady at the store showed me how it works.”

“No. Um, I don’t think so?” She bent to step into it, and then stopped, deciding to wiggle out of her
briefs first.

“Good idea,” Beca said, grinning at her.

“I’m trying super hard to not think about this looking silly, so...don’t crack any jokes for a sec, okay?”

Beca grinned wider and then pressed her lips together to pretend to zip them.

Chloe moved quickly, trying with decent success to get the right straps in the right places on the first try despite her nerves and excitement. She fetched the purple toy out of the drawer, along with the bottle of lube that was a remnant from her last relationship, and climbed up onto the bed to kneel and sit back on her heels next to Beca. The whole process was taking longer than she anticipated and she worried the moment was fading.

But then Beca was moving and taking the toy from her hands to sit up and reconnect their mouths. And the way Beca’s tongue moved over hers was a clear sign that the moment was definitely not fading.

“Let me,” Beca said when she broke the kiss, leaning down to tug at the O-ring on the front of the harness and slip the toy through it in one quick motion. And suddenly, it was done.

And it was really, really hot to watch Beca do that. Especially as she didn’t let it go, instead giving it a tug to pull Chloe forward until she was shuffling ahead on her knees to end up between Beca’s.

“So, we’re going to talk through this kinda, yeah?” Beca asked, plucking the bottle from Chloe’s hand and flicking the top open.

Chloe nodded, and then forced a verbal, “Yes,” when Beca cocked a brow at her. It wasn’t that she didn’t want to answer, but she was highly distracted by the fact that Beca was quite literally giving her a hand job as a part of the whole lube application process, and by how illogically hot it was. She couldn’t feel a thing, but her brain sure told her she could.

“I don’t think we even need this, you know,” Beca said, trading her cocked eyebrow for a salacious wink.
“Oh?” Chloe breathed, feeling the slight tug of the straps on her hips with every pull of Beca’s hand.

Beca shook her head. “I’m so fucking turned on right now.”

Chloe felt her jaw loosen at Beca’s tone and snapped it closed again, stifling the groan that worked its way out of her throat. “Lie down.”

Beca did as she was asked, wiping her hand on her thigh as she moved. “I thought you wanted me from be-”

“Let’s start with this, ‘kay?”

“Whatever you want, baby.”

Chloe felt hot all over, and Beca’s confidence was only adding to it. She was lying comfortably, looking up at Chloe with dark, sparkling eyes and Chloe bent down, cognizant of the new appendage’s whereabouts, to kiss her. And Chloe might have been the one on top, but it was Beca who was in charge of the kiss, sucking on Chloe’s tongue and nipping her lower lip until Chloe forgot to be cognizant and pressed closer.

Beca jerked beneath her, startling Chloe out of the kiss, realizing a moment later that she’d forgotten to pay attention to where things were. “Sorry,” she said quickly, glancing down between them to see that it was simply pressed against Beca, and she was grateful she hadn’t missed the moment.

Because Chloe very much needed to see Beca’s face when she finally did it.

Beca’s hips tilted, sliding a little against the shaft with a throaty moan, and she pulled Chloe back down into another kiss. Her hips worked until Chloe couldn’t wait anymore and she tore herself away and sat back, making Beca whimper at the extreme loss of contact. She replaced it with her hand though, and Beca wasn’t lying. She was really, really turned on.

“Beca...wow...”
Beca only nodded, head pressing back into her pillow as Chloe touched her.

“Can I?”

“Yeah. Yes.”

She used her hand to guide it, watching until she knew she wouldn’t miss, and shifted her gaze to Beca’s face as she pressed forward slowly. Beca’s eyes slammed shut as her mouth fell open, nothing but silence escaping her at first, until Chloe pressed further, and then the moan came, the moan Chloe had waited so long to hear.

She moved her hands to Beca’s hips, lifting her a little as she pulled her own hips back and rocked forward, all so slowly.

“Fuck,” Beca breathed, opening her eyes again to look up at Chloe. “Fuck, that feels good.”

Beca’s praise boosted Chloe’s confidence and she wasn’t quite as hesitant with the next push. “Yeah?”

Beca bit down on a groan and nodded. And then she was parting her legs further to create more space for Chloe to move and Chloe’s resolve wore thin. She pulled back and pushed forward again, motion a little jerky, but Beca only urged her on until Chloe found a smooth rhythm.

Beca’s moans were coming quicker, and Chloe heard herself echoing them. It was utterly obscene, and her arousal was through the roof. The harness bumped against her pelvis just-so, driving it even higher. She hadn’t considered it initially, but she knew without a doubt it was going to do the trick for her, too.

But she had to get Beca there first, and she held her hips and pulled her closer, quicker, confidence growing by the second until she was leaning over Beca, hands pressed into the mattress next to her shoulders, with Beca’s knees as high as Chloe’s elbows and Chloe couldn’t A) believe how fucking hot this was and B) stop marveling at what it was like to be on the giving end of this. To watch Beca’s mouth drop and close and gasp and watch the muscles in her neck strain as she threw her head one direction and then the other, to see the way her entire body moved with Chloe’s thrusts - it was intoxicating.
Her quads and hamstrings burned with the effort, but she didn’t care, because the sounds spilling from Beca’s lips were the most glorious things she’d ever heard.

But then something happened.

Beca grabbed Chloe’s biceps, pulling one and pushing the other to roll them and suddenly Chloe was on her back and Beca was straddling her hips.

And Chloe thought she was going to lose her sanity.

“Holy shit,” she said once she could wrap her brain around it. Beca had hardly missed a beat in their quick rhythm and Chloe’s hands flew to hold her thighs.

“Mhmm,” Beca hummed as she rode Chloe. “You like fucking me?”

Chloe felt dizzy. All she could do was nod, because the way Beca was moving, and the way her breasts moved with the activity, and Beca’s dirty mouth, and that fact that she could glance down and actually see what was happening was all almost too much.

“I want you to touch me, baby.”

Chloe didn’t have to be asked twice, her hand moving between Beca’s legs to the bundle of nerves that she knew would ultimately bring Beca crashing down. The cry Beca let out at the contact told her it wouldn’t be long, and her own sky-high arousal drove her to lift her hips up into Beca, drawing another gasping moan out of her.

The indirect stimulation she was getting was driving Chloe as mad as bearing witness to what was happening above her, but the sight was quickly doing its part to close the gap and make up for a lack of contact. She’d wanted and waited so long to see Beca this way, getting glimpses of it when Beca would end up in her lap with Chloe's hands between her thighs, but it was never like this, and the way Beca would look down at Chloe and moan and then close her eyes and throw her head back was almost too much to handle.

“Babe…”
The desperation in Beca’s voice made Chloe moan and work her fingers more quickly. “Yeah?”

“Fuck, Chloe.” It was more a groan than actual words.

All sense of grace or tact was lost as it became a mad dash to the finish and Chloe couldn’t stop her hips from rocking upwards if she tried. “Bec...baby...” Chloe’s words were interrupted with a moan when Beca’s angle changed and pressed down just right. “I’m so close.”

Beca’s head snapped forward, face flushed and eyes wild with surprise. “You are?”

Chloe whimpered and nodded, grabbing Beca’s hip and then her backside with her free hand, just holding on more than guiding anything. She assumed Beca would close her eyes and lean back again, but she didn’t; her eyes didn’t leave Chloe’s face and Chloe felt the spring winding tighter, ready to snap any second and she stumbled over a moaned utterance of Beca’s name. She was out of time and lacking the ability to communicate any more than that.

And then Beca was nodding, too, breathing a strained, “Come with me.”

Somewhere in her mind, Chloe knew she probably needed to give Beca, like, ten more seconds, but Chloe’s spring was wound to its limit and it broke violently, jolting her up and into Beca.

“Fuck fuck fuck…” was Beca’s brief refrain, and then she was falling forward, barely catching herself from crashing completely into Chloe as her body rolled and rocked in waves, hot breath and loud moans pouring into Chloe’s ear.

Chloe whimpered her agreement and pulled her hand from where it was trapped between them to grab the other half of Beca’s rear, pushing and pulling her a little to move her through it, still shuddering as pings of ecstasy crept up and over her. Chloe didn’t know exactly what had gotten into her - except the sexiest moment of her life - but she was just as turned on as she was before their wonderfully shared climaxes. Maybe more so.

She felt a tongue on her neck, followed by teeth, followed by lips that threatened to leave a mark, and after a few minutes, Beca was doing most of the work again, shifting back and forth. It was exhilarating, knowing how Beca didn’t want it to be over yet either.

As insanely sexy as it was, Chloe wanted...needed something more. She wanted…”Bec?”
“Hmm?”

Her need was raw, incessant. “Use it on me?”

Beca lifted her head quickly, looking down at Chloe. Her eyes were still dark, and her face was as flushed as Chloe’s ever seen it, wispy hairs clinging to her damp forehead. “Can I?”

“Yeah.”

“Right now?”

Chloe pushed her hips up to make her point. “Right fucking now.”

“Jesus…” Beca breathed, jumping both from the unexpectedly firm thrust and Chloe’s bold response. And then she was climbing off Chloe onto unsteady knees to pull at the D-rings on the straps hurriedly.

Chloe pulled at the ones on the other side until it was loose enough and then Beca was dragging the harness down and off to put her own feet through the loops and pull it up, far less clumsy with it than Chloe had been. Beca’s hands were back on her in an instant, pushing at her hip.

“Turn over.”

As if she wasn’t excited enough, Beca taking control and telling her what to do was the icing on the cake. She moved quickly, moving up to her knees with her elbows against the bed.

“Where’d I put the lube?”

Chloe laughed weakly, dropping her head down to watch, upside down, as Beca moved into place behind her. “I don’t know. But I promise you don’t need it.”

She heard Beca’s appreciative moan as hands landed on her back, dragging nails down from her
shoulder blades to her waist, making her shiver and arch into and away from the touch. She felt the experimental prodding, and before she could tell Beca it was okay or to get on with it, Beca pressed forward to slide easily into Chloe, making her elbow buckle for a moment. “Shit, Beca.”

There was no slow build-up, no easing into a rhythm. Chloe didn’t need it and she knew Beca knew she didn’t. An arm slipped under her waist to hold her in place as Beca moved with quick, short strokes.

“Beca...fuck…”

Beca's voice was low, raw and gravelly in a way that made Chloe's heart pound even faster. “I love it when you swear.”

Chloe groaned and balled her fists into the pillow as she let her head hang. A sharp pull on her hair brought her head back up with a gasp. She felt Beca’s fingers secure themselves in a thick plait of hair at the base of her skull and pull again. Every possible synapse in her brain was firing and frying, and she was quite sure she was on the brink of certain death. She suddenly understood why the French referred to it as *la petite mort*. “God damn it, baby.” She gasped at another sharp tug. “Fuck me. Please, please, please.”

She’d been reduced to a begging mess. And Beca was fucking her - hard - and if it hadn’t been for the first round, she wouldn’t have been so close so quickly and without some nice, gentle touching. But she was, and she mumbled her impending doom, having to repeat herself when Beca pulled again, unhappy with her diction.

It was when the arm around her waist disappeared and the palm of a hand connected with her backside with a crack that she came undone.

And somewhere in the lightning going off in her brain, she wondered how Beca knew to do those things. Because they’d never talked about it. But she’d done it, right on the money, too, and sent Chloe over the edge so quickly and so strongly that Chloe was beyond dizzy. Everything was spinning and it felt like dying and heaven all at once and when she tried to drop her head, arms threatening to give out, the firm grasp on her hair caught her and then disappeared, letting her collapse against the pillow. She felt hands moving over her back, fingernails scratching lightly to make her shiver. The thrusting was gone, but Beca hadn’t left yet, staying nestled close as Chloe struggled to reassemble her thoughts.

When she felt Beca slip out her mind snapped back easily, the last few minutes rushing back through her like a freight train to draw one last moan out of her as she kicked her legs out to lay flat.
on her stomach. The bed dipped and shifted as Beca shed the harness to lie next to her, one leg hitched over Chloe’s thigh. She lifted her head enough to turn it in Beca's direction and drop back into the pillow.

She was still trying to catch her breath. "Jesus, Bec."

Beca was smiling, eyes bright, and Chloe knew the teasing, prideful comments were coming, but she didn't care. "That was okay?"

Chloe smiled at the thoughtful question that came instead. "More than okay. That was...Jesus!"

Beca chuckled and reached out to pull Chloe's hair away from her face and tuck it behind her ear, smoothing it in a light caress. Her lip quirked and Chloe knew it was coming. "Someone likes it rough."

Chloe pushed her shoulders into a half shrug, letting herself smile. "Can't believe you had the audacity to spank me."

Beca laughed fully and pushed a little closer to start drawing patterns on Chloe's back with her fingertips. "Um, it felt appropriate?"

Chloe smiled wider. "Oh, it was. But what would you have done if I wasn't cool with it?"

"Babe, you were so far gone I think I could have done anything except actually leave and you wouldn't have cared."

Chloe laughed at that and mustered the strength to turn onto her side and relish the cool air that hit her warm body. "I think you're pretty right."

Beca grinned and bit her lip.

"What?"
Beca shook her head. "Nothing. It...I just can't believe how hot that was."

"So that fantasy was a winner?"

"You can say that again."

"So that fantasy was a -"

"Don't. Don't! You're a dork."

Beca was laughing, rolling into her back to heave a sigh as she calmed down, and Chloe just looked at her, really looked at her and all the beauty that she held. Her physical beauty was obvious to anyone with eyes, but it was the other beauty she really admired: her ability to create amazing music, to make people fall in love with her in an instant if she wanted them to with her always-relatable spunkiness, to make Chloe feel like she had a safety net no matter where she was or what she experienced.

The way she shifted from awkward conversationalist to confident lover. Chloe giggled at the thought that flew through her monologue and Beca turned her head in question. "Nothing," she said, too quickly to appease Beca's curiosity.

"Tell me."

Chloe smiled. "No."

Beca reached over and swatted at Chloe, ending up slapping her palm against her stomach a few times. "Tell me!"

"It's just..." She laughed again and pulled a 'badass rapper' tough face. "A lady in the streets but a freak in the sheets."

Beca held her hands up above her, like she was stopping the sky from falling. "Oh my God, Chloe. Oh, my God."
"What, it's true!"

"That's more true for you than me! I'm no lady."

Chloe wriggled up to her and pecked her cheek. "You're my lady."

Beca turned to her again. "You're so sweet that it gives me a toothache."

Chloe moved before she turned away, capturing her lips in a brief but thorough kiss. "You know, you never shared your consolation fantasy. Since that business with Bree is definitely never, ever going to happen."

“And then you go from sickeningly sweet to asking me about my fantasies.” Beca squinted one eye at her. “Have I mentioned how much I love you?”

“Once or twice.” She waggled her eyebrows at Beca. “Well?”

“Well...I didn’t know it until like, just now, but this whole business,” she swept her hand over the two of them, “was pretty fucking spectacular.”

“We can’t have the same fantasy!”

Beca laughed. “Why not?”

“Because then we already did it, and I didn’t know I was fulfilling your fantasy, too.”

“Well neither did I! But who says we only get one fantasy?” She tapped Chloe’s forehead with her index finger. “You can’t tell me you don’t have more ideas in that pretty head of yours.”

“Uh uh,” Chloe said, shaking away her finger. “You are oh-and-two for fantasy fulfillment. You need to tell me something so I can make it come true.”
“Okay, okay. Um…” Beca turned away to look up at the ceiling in thought. “I want to try that whole Skype thing.”

“We’re saving that for when we’re apart. We are not having Skype sex when we’re in the same house.”

“Good point. Um, how about mutual…touching. Ourselves. At the same time? Without the Skype.”

Chloe grinned. “That’s easy. What else?”

“I want to do it in your classroom.”

She gasped, pulling back from Beca and laughing. “I could get fired if we got caught!”

“That’s why it’s exciting! It could be late, during a break or something. Like Spring Break. That’s coming. Or tomorrow. It’s a weekend and a break.”

Chloe rolled her eyes. “I’ll think about it. I’m only hesitating to agree to it because of the professional thing. What else you got?”

“Okay, if your school’s off-limits…” Beca was quiet a moment, and then her face lit up as she looked at Chloe again. “Can we do it somewhere public? And I don’t mean like we did on the beach over Labor Day. No one was around, that didn’t count. And not hidden in a bathroom stall. Like, public-public. In a restaurant or bar or park or movie theater or store or something.”

“You’re really excited about that.” Chloe smiled at the enthusiasm lighting up her face.

“Yeah! I mean, it’s not that easy to do with a guy, you know. Because they’re so…obvious. But we could totally do it. On the down-low.”

Chloe laughed. “The down-low?”
“Figuratively.” Beca tilted her head, thinking. “Or maybe literally, depending on the location. Surprise me!”

Chloe wrapped her arm around Beca’s middle and pulled her close, still chuckling. “What have I gotten myself into with you?”
Yeah. So, I just need to move on because I'm hardcore stuck, so here’s some business I’m not remotely proud of, but better things are ahead that I'm excited to get to!

Chloe thought the Bellas grilling her about engagement and wedding details that weekend had been a lot; it had been fun, laughs and squealing and gushing about everyone’s dreams about weddings and dresses and white picket fences and babies.

However, it was nothing in comparison to sharing the news over the phone with her non-Facebook-having mother. Her mother was amazing; she loved her mother - she could make an argument that her mother was the coolest mother in the world, and not in the “Mean Girls cool mom” way but in the genuinely cool mom way. But her mother was still a mother and sometimes her scale tipped more toward mom and less toward cool.

First, she cried and talked about how her baby was growing up and becoming a woman (Really? ‘Becoming’ a woman? I’m twenty-five, Mom. I’m getting married, it’s not my first period.)

Then she demanded to know every detail about the proposal - who said what, and when, and how, and where. Chloe had to send her a photo of her ring. She asked if they had set a date. (Mom, it’s been, like, a month. We aren’t in a rush.)

She asked if Chloe was finally going to make her a grandmother. (Finally? You can’t be serious; you’re only forty-eight. ‘I was younger than you are now when I had you! And there are ladies in my book club younger than me with grandchildren!’ We are probably as far away from being ready for kids as humanly possible. You’re going to have to be patient. ‘So you’re going to have kids??’ Mom!)

She said she would check with their church’s office to see what their autumn calendar looked like for wedding ceremony availability. All that did was stress out Chloe about wedding details and the fact that Beca was very likely not a get-married-in-a-church kind of girl. And there was also the fact that Chloe’s family was in Florida, and Beca’s was in Oregon and Georgia, and how would they decide where to have a wedding? (‘Well, you have to get married in our church, Chloe. That congregation basically raised you, and you know we’ve always been an accepting faith.’ Mom, I don’t even know those people! And I didn’t say we’re getting married in the fall!)
Chloe had to cut off the conversation, coming up with an excuse about something in the oven she needed to tend to. Her mother was the best, truly, but oh how she knew how to pile on the undue stress. She spoke to her father briefly before hanging up - he offered his congratulations and said he loved and missed her. He was always a man of few words, though they were always meaningful.

Beca’s dad found out through Facebook, something both he and Beca were displeased with. Beca talked to him New Year’s Day, in the evening, literally less than twenty-four hours after the popped question, but it was too late. And when he demanded - not angrily - to know why Beca didn’t call him immediately, Chloe giggled at Beca stumbling over an explanation about how they’d slept in, were battling hangovers, went to a movie, then dinner, and she was just starting to feel up for a phone call.

Of course, it couldn’t be further from the truth, other than the bit about sleeping in. After their...vigorous...lovemaking, they’d spent the better part of the day in bed, just being together, watching TV and cuddling with some interspersed making out and Thai food delivery. Their phones chimed and rang most of the day with messages from friends and family responding to the news spreading through social media. They used commercial breaks to respond, but phone calls were being ignored - until Beca’s dad called.

While Beca defended herself to her father, Chloe retrieved the harness from where it had been discarded on the floor by Beca and forgotten earlier in the day to wave the dildo toward Beca like a floppy sword, making her laugh and bat it away before leaving her to her phone conversation to disassemble and wash things in the bathroom.

After a weekend of retelling the news to arguably everyone in her entire life, Chloe returned to the West Hollywood Academy for the Performing Arts and got to do it all over again. She didn't make a big announcement about it, but the women noticed her ring, grabbing her hand to gush over it and ask for all the details. No one gushed more so than her personal cheerleader, Mrs. Washington, who simply couldn't believe that the two "legendary" Bellas were marrying each other. She was sure it meant something in the stars was aligning for some kind of global event.

The news even made it into the ICCA monthly email newsletter: DEFENDING WORLD CHAMPION BARDEN BELLAS CO-CAPTAINS SET TO MARRY. They hadn't even asked them for an interview; everything they wrote was culled from the Bellas’ Facebook group. And they had yet to report on Beca landing a major producing contract. Go figure.

Everyone at school asked the same questions:
"Have you set a date?"

"Who asked whom?"

"Oh, to a woman?" came from the older staff with whom she didn't socialize enough to know her personal life. Most of the staff was pretty open-minded, being an art school, and though no one made a negative comment, she could feel the well-hidden disapproval from a few of them.

"Is she making you sign a pre-nup?" came from her absolute favorite colleague, Anika Schmidt. "Since she's probably going to be a millionaire. And let's face it. None of us are going to become millionaires being teachers."

Chloe frowned, offended by the question, though she noted Anika kind of softened the blow by lumping herself into the “working stiffs” group. She also hadn't thought about the legal mumbo jumbo that came with marriage. Which was obviously a legal matter itself. *Duh, Chloe.*

"I don't know."

"She'd be a moron not to. No offense."

"Um, yeah," Chloe said, sliding her chair out from the table to leave. "None taken?"

Ahh, the joys of workplace dynamics. She certainly hadn't missed them over the winter break, and it was a little rough getting back into the swing of things. Her students seemed to have forgotten every classroom rule and it was minor chaos for the first week back.

It made her grateful for the stability at home.

Beca's work on the album was, officially, finished. Now she was working on live arrangements for the upcoming promotional appearances and subsequent global concert tour that would come with the release, but it was mostly a solo project for her and Beca kept her own hours, having plenty of lead time. Most days she got up with Chloe and drove her to school before heading to the studio. She’d been relocated to a smaller (cheaper) studio which was much closer to Choe’s school, and some days she was even able to meet Chloe for lunch.
Sometimes she brought Taco Bell with her and they ate it in the car in the school parking lot while Chloe vented about her day.

And more often than not, Beca was waiting for her when she walked out the door at the end of the day to take them home where one of them would make dinner, or they'd cook together or order in, and sit down to watch TV and talk about their day. They were caught up on their DVR for the first time since Chloe started working.

On the rare occasions Beca was stuck at work, forcing Chloe to take the dreaded bus home, she missed the domesticity. It was those nights she laughed at herself for being so far gone over someone, and then shrugged it off and texted Beca to tell her she missed her.

That was Chloe's January - routine, domesticity, jogging in the mild Pacific coast winter weather, and cuddling on the couch; the arrival of an invitation Capitol Records' Grammy Awards viewing party next month.

She knew she should have been mentally preparing, but she kept telling herself it would be fine. That it would be fine when their life would get upheaved in February once Katy's single officially dropped.

There were hints of things to come as some of Beca's days were spent on the phone with news outlets, talking about the new album. Sometimes she was chauffeured around the Greater Los Angeles Area for in-person or on-camera interviews or photo-ops with Katy to accompany the articles that would start showing up soon. She was coming home with professionally done hair and make-up, and the occasional new designer outfit or accessory. Chloe knew it wasn't industry standard for a new producer to get the attention Beca was getting, but the label was positioning her strategically. Beca was a woman, and mainstream female producers in the music industry were as hard to come by as a snowflake in summer. Katy was already a girl power icon, and they gave her a one-two punch by two girls making girl power music. Beca thought it was cool to be able to talk about her music, and Chloe thought it was refreshing that Big Corporate was wanting to empower young girls.

Or maybe they just had two hot chicks at their disposal to sell records.

It was weird, for lack of a better descriptor. Beca was still Beca, but sometimes Beca’s name would pop up on the radio or her face would face show up in the magazine Chloe was reading. It really only happened once so far, in her issue of *Glamour*, and the picture, a floating head, was barely the size of her thumb, tucked into a pink column with a few random facts about Katy’s upcoming album and favorite mascara. It was as weird as it was exciting, because it was *Beca*. In a magazine.
She’d ripped the page out of her magazine and hung it inside her teacher-only cabinet in her classroom. And then she’d bought another copy of the magazine, ripped the page out again, and proudly tacked it onto the cork-board in the teachers’ lounge that was home to notes about garage sales, athletics schedules, and rooms for rent. But not before grabbing a Sharpie and writing, over the area of the page that wasn’t the tiny feature, **THE FUTURE MRS.** She stopped, realizing she had no idea if Beca was going to become Beca Beale, or if she was going to become Chloe Mitchell, or if they were going to become Beale-Mitchell or Mitchell-Beale, or if they’d both keep their surnames, or pick a new one altogether, or none of the above, and she settled on what would be semi-accurate and understandable to her colleagues: **THE FUTURE MRS. CHLOE BEALE** with a swoopy arrow pointing at Beca’s floating head with more than a few exclamation points, and a heart around her for good measure.

On February 1st, Chloe excitedly went to work early to do her classroom decor changeover from nondescript winter to all manner of hearts - red, pink, white, purple, fake candy ones. Valentine's Day was arguably one of her favorite holidays, vying for first place with Christmas. Not for the corny Hallmark cards and boxes of chocolates, but because it was a day dedicated to showing someone how much you cared about them. She made a conscious effort to do that every day for Beca, but Valentine's Day was something special, a day that crackled with excitement and a pleasant tension of what was to come after flowers and dinner and dessert.

So far in this relationship, Chloe dropped the ball on Beca's birthday and even a marriage proposal, by her standards. Things went off without much of a plan or fanfare; minimalistic to say the least. Of course, they were still wildly successful events, but lacked the Chloe Beale flare.

But this was Valentine's Day! Their very first as a couple - a couple engaged to be married. She wouldn't let it fall into haphazard minimalism.

"Hey, babe?" she asked that evening as they sat side by side on the couch, computers propped on both their laps.

"Hmm?"

"Valentine's is in a couple weeks."

"Oh, yeah, it is."

“It’s totally fine if you haven’t, but have you made any plans for us? I want to do something, but we can’t both plan surprises.”
Beca looked up from her computer, smiling. “You’re planning a surprise?”

Chloe met her smile with a brilliant one of her own. “Maybe. But only if you don’t already have something planned. And it’s really okay if you don’t. No judgement or anything, I have zero expectation. And if you do, it’s totally cool, and we can do that.”

Beca’s grin dropped into a crooked half-smile. “I made reservations at this place.”

Chloe chewed on her lower lip, and then sighed. “You know, Beca. I’m supposed to be the mushy, romantic one in this relationship, and you keep throwing off our established roles.”

“I didn’t say what the place was. It could be a cage fighting match.”

Chloe laughed. “Are you going to tell me what it is? Because I know it’s not a cage fight.”

“It’s totally a cage fight.” Beca held her curious gaze for a long moment until they both broke down laughing, Beca shaking her head. “I haven’t planned anything yet. It’s all you, baby.”

Chloe nodded, knowing exactly what she wanted to do.

There was excitement and flailing and crying the first time they heard the song in the car together that Tuesday. Beca knew what time it was premiering, and they made a point of rushing to get ready for work so they would be in the car with the radio blasting when the time came.

Chloe had already heard it innumerable times, and Beca infinitely more of course, but there was something special, something exciting about hearing it on the radio, broadcast to millions, listening together in one united moment. It was a dream coming true for Beca. It was a lifelong goal being met. It was a reminder that hard work and focus - with a dash of good timing and a pinch of luck and a hefty dose of right place/right time - could make things happen. Chloe had never felt more proud of Beca, and to be the one by her side.
Then the song was everywhere - always on the radio, always on the older students' iPhones, always over the loudspeakers in whatever store she was in, whether grocery or clothing or mall.

It was real. Beca had produced a Billboard Top Ten single, debuting at Number 5 and it only showed signs of picking up speed. They'd celebrated so many times that Chloe was considering a temporary boycott on alcohol because she was sure it had overtaken water as her most frequently consumed beverage.

The song’s immediate success pulled Beca out of the house a little more; joint interviews were being set up around Katy’s schedule and Beca had to go with the flow. Chloe didn’t mind much, not this week. She had an elaborate Valentine’s Day event to prepare for, and she couldn’t do it with Beca in the house, and Beca was booked all day Saturday.

Chloe started with laying out her note cards - squares of red construction paper she’d used the school’s die-cutting machine to make - across the dining table with a selection of Sharpies. She put on some music and sat down with a glass of ice water and bowl of grapes, popping one in her mouth as she wiggled her fine-point Sharpie between her fingers. She grabbed a square and folded it in half and traded pens for a bold-tipped marker and wrote CLUE #1 on the exterior. Humming to herself as she thought what to write on the interior, she popped another grape and picked up the fine-tipped marker again, hand poised over the paper, smiling.
You're On My Heart

Chapter Summary

Let's change up the POV for a hot sec, shall we?

Beca...well, she’d had a day. It was Sunday, a supposed day off, and not only that, it was Valentine’s Day. And instead of spending the entire day with Chloe, preferably in bed with things like strawberries and champagne and that can of Reddi-wip that’s gone painfully ignored since it showed up on her birthday. Actually, they probably needed to throw that out, come to think of it…

Point being: she wanted to spend Valentine’s Day with her fiancée, not with this idiot “journalist” who didn’t know the difference between house and trance and who insisted on asking every question with his mouth full of hamburger at the crappy diner his publication - something Beca had never heard of - was picking up the tab for. She knew it would be less than thirty bucks between his burger and her Cobb salad and milkshake, and that was pretty much what she felt the interview was worth. She put up with a lot of shit for this press build-up, but the PR office had some real balls to book something like this - who was he with again? Was it a podcast? He was such a novice. Today of all days.

Her phone buzzed periodically on the table next to her plate, giving her much needed distraction from his mind-numbing interview. Just as he started prattling on about the time he saw Timbaland in a Chipotle, it buzzed again, Chloe’s name popping up in the banner notification on the screen. She smiled and tapped in her six-digit passcode (Seriously, six digits now? What the hell, Apple?) to check the message, tilting her phone a little in case what popped up was perhaps intended for her eyes only. Chloe had a knack for well-timed selfies in various states of undress, and she was really on a roll today. Three times in an hour - four, now - and each one was getting progressively less...clothed.

There wasn’t much left after the third text and...wow, yeah there was pretty much nothing left now. She bit her lip to cut her smile at the photo of Chloe on their bed, wearing nothing but a pair of red lace panties and a smize that would make Tyra Banks proud, and a conspicuously placed arm and hand, hiding but not quite hiding the bits that were disrobed. It was unfair, really, how gorgeous she was. Sexy, sure, but Chloe was gorgeous, in that painful kind of way that stabbed Beca in the stomach with equal parts disbelief, amazement, and maybe a dash of jealousy. Because really, Chloe was obviously trying to play the vixen, but she was managing to come across more like an innocent Victoria’s Secret model with the way her perfectly red hair fanned out perfectly across the pure white duvet with her perfectly blue eyes and her perfect lips and her perfect mostly covered breasts and her perfect stomach and her perfect hips and really it was so unfair and when did they get a selfie stick?
“Ms. Mitchell?”

“Hmmb? Sorry.” She put her phone to sleep and asked him to repeat his idiotic question, but not before pre-empting it with a statement that she needed to get going. Because honestly - if Chloe was going to play these cards, she needed to get home so she could be dealt into the game.

She had to make a pitstop at the florist down the street - but don't you dare judge her character! The line was out the door with men buying last-minute flowers, but she breezed passed them and up to the counter marked PICK UP ONLY. If she’d had enough notice about her interview, she would have scheduled the roses for delivery instead, but they were booked by the time she knew she would be working part of the day. But it was fine; now she could go home, roses in hand, and sweep Chloe off her feet the proper way.

She rushed home and ran up the front stairs, keys in hand, ready to sprint up to the bedroom where Chloe was surely waiting for her in a pile of rose petals, or whatever she was cooking up today in her absence.

Her key was already in the lock before she noticed the red paper taped to the door over the peephole, a bold CLUE #1 written on it. She smiled, jerking it off the door with a snap to open it and see Chloe’s neat script.

It’s Valentine’s Day. Follow the clues. Then we can play.

She chuckled to herself, rubbing the back of her neck, already warm. So much had changed for Beca in the past year - she learned a lot about herself, and she discovered that pretty much everything about Chloe turned her on. She said and did things with her that she never, in a thousand years, could have imagined doing with other people. It was kind of like Chloe had reached into her mind and flipped a breaker, illuminating a whole side to her sexuality that she didn’t know existed. Not about being bisexual - she’d known that since she was fifteen - but about trust, and comfort, and not being afraid to say or do something because it felt good or because she wanted it. And it certainly was paying off in spades; she’d never had such a satisfying sex life, and okay, it’s not like she had a lot to compare it to, but she was pretty certain what they had together was stellar. She was eager to see what this little game today would bring to her.

She stepped inside, the room quiet and dim, afternoon light filtering in through drawn blinds. She set down her bag and the bouquet of roses and toed off her shoes, and tossed her keys into the bowl on the side table. A flash of color there caught her eye, and she smiled, plucking the pink fold of paper out from under her keys marked CLUE #2.
Let this be your guide: You make me feel like a princess.

Clue #3 will lead you to your bride.

Beca sniffed at the note, a wave of coldness washing over her at the concept of seeking out her bride. Not that she was nervous about getting married, but *holy shit, that was really a thing.* She took a deep breath and tapped the card on her palm, glancing around the room for any obvious notes. Seeing none, she read the note again and circled the living room, pausing in front of the TV. Her brain clicked, and she turned, striding toward the media tower to scan movie titles. The myriad DVDs and Blu-rays all belonged to Chloe, but Beca had organized them, insisting on alphabetizing by title rather than sorting by genre, and she knew it was there - Chloe’s favorite, and okay, it wasn’t half bad, and Chloe swooned every time Beca used “As you wish” on her.

“Ah ha!” she exclaimed, using her index finger to tilt Chloe’s copy of *The Princess Bride* out of the rack and crack it open, feeling the rush of victory as a white fold of paper fluttered out of it to the floor. She put the movie back and snatched the card off the floor.

*Today is a day of white, pink, and red. For Clue #4, look by the _ _ _.*

“So easy,” she said, turning and jogging to the stairs, climbing quickly, unbuttoning her shirt as she went. “I hope you didn’t bother getting dressed! Because I’m so totally ready to get my Valentine’s on.” She stopped at the top of the stairs in their room, their dark, empty room. “Baby?” Silence. She frowned, re-buttoning her shirt as she headed for the bed, checking the drawers of each nightstand and then under their pillows, and inside the pillowcases, and under the duvet, and she got onto her hands and knees to peer under the bed. And then she wedged her fingers under edge of the mattress and pried it up, spotting the pink card. She noticed the journal she gave Chloe for Christmas there, too, and smiled, appreciating that Chloe was using it. She swiped the note and dropped the mattress, turning to sit on the floor as she opened her fourth clue.

*You’re doing so well! Come find me, and sit a spell?*

*You have my heart. Join me at the temple for your kind of art.*

“What the hell?” she said aloud, reading and rereading the clue, trying to connect the dots. Spells...magic? Witches? And what in the world was she talking about with a temple? And her kind of art? Beca hated art. Its beauty was completely lost on her, though Chloe loved it - the more abstract, the better, as far as she was concerned. The only kind of art Beca liked was music and body. But a temple for art? She fanned herself with the card as she thought, and thought, and thought. Riddles really weren’t her strong suit, and she’d become overconfident with the first clues being so easy.
A spot on the card caught her eye as she waved it in front of her face and she stopped, turning it over to the back where she had yet to look, to find a tiny ladybug drawn in the corner. She smiled and hopped up from the floor and headed back downstairs, shoving her feet into her Converse and grabbed her keys and bag - but not before tucking the roses into the refrigerator to keep them fresh.

Beca pulled up outside a green building on Melrose Avenue, red neon spelling out TATTOO & PIERCING and an arrow outlined with white light bulbs pointing down at a staircase adorning the façade. She knew the place - she’d seen it countless times on Spike TV’s tattoo reality show, and it was the parlor for which Aubrey had given her a gift certificate. She assumed that, if she checked her wallet, the certificate would be missing.

She locked her car and bounded up the stairs, stopping short at the red CLUE #5 taped to the door.

*You’ve come so far! I hope I made you think.*

*Now come find me and let’s get some ink.*

Beca laughed, and rolled her eyes, and smiled. Leave it to Chloe to change up Valentine’s Day; she was certain about it being a night of lingerie (*she had photo evidence to back up that theory*) and sex, but her skin was already tingling with other possibilities. She pressed the door open, hearing the bell jingle, and sure enough, there was Chloe, dressed in jeans and a crisp teal blouse, sitting on a leather couch, looking at her phone, along a wall decorated with beautiful framed illustrations, and Beca was giddy. It looked just like it did on TV.

“You found me!” Chloe cheered, flip-flopped feet kicking out in her excitement.

Beca grinned and rushed over to take a seat next to her, knee folded under herself so she could sit sideways. “You’re pretty sneaky,” she said, leaning over to steal a not-so-quick kiss.

“Happy Valentine’s Day,” Chloe said when they parted, lifting her chin to kiss the tip of Beca’s nose.

“This is what you want to do? I had you pegged as more of an Italian food and chocolate covered strawberries kind of girl.”
Chloe hummed, tilting her head. “Who said I wasn’t? But let’s do this first.” She grasped Beca’s hand and pulled her back to her feet, leading her to the reception desk. “Okay, she’s here!” she announced to the man sitting at the desk. His name was Chucky; he didn’t have a name tag or anything, but Beca knew. She knew everyone’s name that was in the room, and maybe she was dying a little inside.

“Cool. Guess you figured out the scavenger hunt?” Chucky asked, standing up to shake Beca’s hand.

“Uh, yeah,” she said with a smile. Nervous. She was so nervous.

“Your little lady here told me all about it. And about you. She likes to share.”

Beca saw Chloe blush a little and look at the floor, and Beca squeezed her hand. “Yeah, she does. So, I guess we’re here to get some ink?”

“If you want to,” Chloe said, suddenly seeming unsure. “Do you want to?”

“Hell yeah!”

Chloe laughed. “That settles it, then! So, my next question is - do you trust me?”

Beca’s excitement turned back to uneasy nerves at that. “Well...yes…”

“Do you trust me enough to get a tattoo I pick, without seeing it until it’s finished?”

Beca tried to pick her jaw up off the floor. “You're...you're serious?”

“Totes! But you don't have to do it. This isn't some big test about you trusting me. It's your body, and it's up to you.”

Beca gnawed at her thumbnail, looking around the studio. Of course she trusted Chloe, implicitly.
And she trusted the artists there would do a good job with whatever it was. And okay, she might be more than a little whipped to agree to let someone pick a tattoo for her without having any say in the matter. But she *did* trust Chloe; Chloe knew her style and taste as well as Beca did - sometimes better, she was discovering. And she did already have five tattoos, what was one more, when it would have such significance?

“Are you getting one, too?”

“Yep!”

“Okay. Can I lay out a few conditions though?”

“Of course.”

She gathered her thoughts for a moment and held up her free hand to count them off. “One: no names; I love you, but no names. Two: nothing gross like skulls or snakes.”

Chloe giggled and nodded, silently waiting for her to continue.

“Three: I get to pick where it goes.”

Chloe thrust out her hand. “Deal.”

She smiled and shook it, and Chloe turned her attention back to Chucky at the desk. “We’re ready.”

Beca shook her hand out of Chloe's grip; her palm was sweating and Chloe's was starting to, too. It wasn't that she was uncomfortable; Beca *loved* tattoos and got hooked on them quickly, collecting her five in just three years. She wasn't scared of the pain or the permanency, but there was adrenaline that came with the excitement and discomfort, and now there was this massive dose of the unknown. She was literally going to get a tattoo with no say in the design. *What*?!

She shook her head at Chloe as they waited for their respective artists to prep their stations, and Chloe scrunched her nose at her.
“Nervous?” Chloe asked.

“Yes and no. I can't believe I'm letting you do this.”

“You can always change your mind. It's really okay.”

Beca took a breath and held it, giving it one final consideration before exhaling and giving a sharp nod. “No, I'm down.”

Chloe grinned and clapped excitedly. “I promise, you'll like it!”

“Do I get to see what you're getting?”

“Ummm, no. You can watch, but from over there.”

“Yours is a surprise, too?”

“Mhmm,” Chloe said with a smile, turning her attention to her artist who started asking her questions about placement and if it was her first tattoo, to which she pointed to the underside of her wrist, and then pointed out her ladybug and the line of Sanskrit on her ankle.

Whatever the design was, it was already waiting on the tray next to Chloe's chair, but Beca was too far away to make it out. There wasn't anything on her tray, though.

“Hey, I'm Isaiah. You're Beca?”

Beca smiled at the artist who was, apparently, finished setting up his station. “Hi. I know. I mean, I watch your show. So I know. I mean, hi.”

Isaiah smiled and turned his baseball cap around backwards and reached for a new pair of latex gloves. “I'm not supposed to let you see what I'm doing today.”
“But I get to pick the placement.”

“Okay. Where are we going with it?”

Beca looked at her arms and down at her legs, considering her options. Not knowing the design wasn’t helping, and she looked over at Chloe, whose artist - Johnny R., Beca thought, a little jealous - was placing the stencil over Chloe’s wrist, and she held out her own arms. Her left was taken by her headphones and her French script. Her right only had her grasshopper, and if Chloe was planning some type of coordinated thing…

“Right here,” she said, pointing at the spot opposite her headphones on her right wrist.

“Cool. I’m going to grab your stencil. Hang tight.”

She looked over at Chloe, arm laid out, her hand open and relaxed, as Johnny R. picked up his tattoo machine and buzzed it a few times, dipping it into a cup of black ink. “You ready, Chlo?”

“Yes!” Chloe chirped, smiling at Beca and wincing a little when the needle came down on her skin. “No peeking!”

“I can’t even see what he’s doing.”

“No, no peeking at yours!” Chloe pointed with her other hand at Isaiah returning, stencil in hand as he sat back down on his stool and rolled around to Beca’s right side to pull up the armrest so she could lay her arm out on it.

Beca rolled her eyes but smiled, keeping her eyes on Chloe instead of looking down at the stencil being placed over her wrist. And it was physically killing her, but she kept her eyes up even as Isaiah disappeared and came back with his tray on wheels filled with cups of black ink and his machine in hand. Chloe was still smiling at her, squinting a little when a sensitive spot was hit, and Beca took a breath and held it as Isaiah inked up his needle with a few pulsing buzzes.

“Ready?” he asked.
Beca nodded. “Ready.”

She felt the heat of the needle hit her flesh and kept her eyes on Chloe, who’d taken to batting her eyelashes at Beca. Which, okay having to stare at Chloe to take her mind off the curiosity and burning, scraping sensation wasn’t the worst thing. Especially when Chloe’s free hand came up to her mouth for apparently no other reason than to trace the edge of her lower lip with her index finger before catching it between her teeth and smirking at Beca.

It certainly worked to redirect the burning from her wrist to other parts of her body, namely her face and groin as Chloe’s biting turned into sucking, and Beca knew she was staring, but that was literally what Chloe wanted her to do, so she didn’t try to mask it. She tried to mask it even less when Chloe dropped her fingers to trail down her neck and the vee of skin exposed by the two undone buttons of her teal shirt, but then those fingers nonchalantly pushed a third button through its hole to reveal a hint of cleavage and the edge of a bra that definitely matched what Chloe was wearing in her boudoir selfies.

Beca was momentarily jealous of Johnny R. for being so close to Chloe at this particular moment, but his attention was on his work and Chloe’s attention was on Beca and Beca’s attention was jumping between her chest and her mouth and her eyes. But then Chloe’s attention shifted and she pulled her iPhone out of her pocket, swiping it to life with her thumb. She was smiling to herself now, tapping around on the screen and then she shot a look at Beca. She heard her own phone chime in her pocket and she pulled it out, seeing Chloe’s name across the screen, just as she’d seen all day today.

She bit her lip and unlocked her phone, holding her breath for whatever Chloe sent her.

This photo, Chloe’s arm wasn’t conspicuously placed. She was on her knees, in their bed, and instead of hiding them, her arms were accentuating her breasts as she leaned toward the camera.

Beca let out a puff of air, feeling her face warming further as she stared and then glanced up at Chloe who’d returned her finger to the corner of her mouth, phone balanced on her thigh. She returned to the message to read the accompanying text.

_Clue #6! That tattoo won’t cost you a buck. I can’t wait ‘til we get home so we can_ _ _ _._

A shocked bark of laughter escaped Beca’s mouth, startling everyone in the room. “Sorry,” she said sheepishly. She threw a look at Chloe, getting a wink in return, and tapped out her reply.
You’ve been driving me crazy all day. Hope you’re ready.

Chloe picked up her phone and smiled at it, thumb flying across the keyboard.

I’m so ready baby. The things I have planned for u.... ;)

Beca drew a breath and swallowed. What kind of things?

Have to wait and see. xxx

Is that 3 kisses or a triple x?

Yes

She looked up and over at Chloe again, who was clearly finding enjoyment in watching Beca react to her teasing. And then Johnny R. intervened, asking Chloe a question and Chloe’s attention was diverted, leaving Beca to her thoughts. She was only vaguely aware that she was being actively tattooed, most part of her brain working overtime to imagine what was to come when they got home. Hopefully, me, she thought, and then sniffed a laugh at her own joke.

Chloe didn’t return to their text message flirtation, and Beca watched her settle a little further into her chair and close her eyes, brows pulling together now and then, and Beca recognized that - the super fun part where your skin started to protest, angry at the abuse.

“You doing okay?” she asked Chloe.

Chloe lifted her head, face a little flushed, and Beca wondered if it was from pain or if her mind was running a mile a minute imagining different sexual scenarios like hers was, or maybe both. “Yeah,” she breathed. “Are you?”

“Yeah, I’m hanging.” And then it was her turn to flinch and close her eyes as her body realized that, hey, needles jabbing into it repeatedly isn’t really that cool. She’d sat for three hours for her
shoulder piece, and it had literally been less than an hour for this, but she was ready to be finished. Maybe the excitement of the entire day had taken its toll and her body was tired of the endorphins and adrenaline.

She couldn’t ignore it anymore - her skin felt like sandpaper had been taken to it and he really, really needed to stop, but it kept going and going and going and briefly she wondered why exactly she liked this so much.

“I love it!”

She lifted her head, not having noticed the buzzing across from her ceasing.

Chloe was holding her arm up, and then she noticed Beca and immediately turned it. “No peeking! You’re not cheating over there, are you?”

“I’m not cheating! But I’m ready to know what it is. And for this to be over, generally speaking. How are things going there, man?”

“Five minutes,” Isaiah said, not looking up from his work.

She sighed and sat back, watching Chloe’s artist wipe down her arm and talk to her about aftercare as he cleaned up his station. When he reached for the plastic wrap to cover her wrist, she asked him to wait so she could show Beca when hers was finished, and he agreed, but made her stay put so she didn’t bump it against anything and risk infection.

So Chloe just stared at Beca, smiling, and Beca stared at her, smiling and sometimes grimacing when Isaiah hit a nerve just right, and then he sat back, declaring his work finished.

“Don’t look yet!” Chloe said, starting to hop up. “Wait, wait. Johnny, can I go over there?”

“Sure, just hold it up in the air.”

Chloe hopped out of her chair and scurried over and around to Beca’s left side to sit on the edge of her chair, holding her arm up but twisted so Beca couldn’t see it. “Eyes up here,” she said, pointing
at her eyes with two fingers.

Beca kept her eyes on Chloe’s, which were absolutely sparkling and complementing her brilliant smile, as she felt her skin be wiped down and cleaned up until Isaiah rolled backwards, saying he’d give them a minute and come back to bandage it.

“Can I look now?” Beca asked, as curious as she was excited.

“Not yet. Close your eyes.”

Beca closed them and felt Chloe lean over her, and felt their hands brush. She smiled when Chloe’s pinky linked with hers.

“Okay, open them.”

She did, and took one more second to steel herself and make sure she didn’t react negatively if it was something she hated. She promised Chloe she trusted her, and it would crush Chloe if she said she didn’t like it. But this was Chloe, and she knew Chloe wouldn’t stick her with something like a Care Bear or a unicorn or a butterfly, as much as those things fit into the typical Chloe Beale bag of traits.

Holding her breath, she let her eyes fall down to their hands, little fingers linked, and she could see black figures on their wrists and she gave it two more seconds before shifting her focus down.

She looked at her own first. And smiled. It was simple, and perfect: a black and gray treble clef, with a little artistic flare and a few purposely rough edges on it.

It paired with the bass clef on Chloe’s wrist, but hers was neat and tidy with a girlish flare.

And honest to God, Beca actually considered crying for a second or two, because Chloe really did get her - not that “music” was an outlandish thing to associate with Beca, but because it was something she easily could have chosen herself to have tattooed, and she never, ever would be one to get cutesy matching tattoos, and while these were a set, they were distinctly different. And it would always, always remind her of Chloe and the memories they shared and made together, no matter where life took them. She felt Chloe’s gaze heavy on her, waiting for a reaction, and finally looked up.
“I think we make beautiful music together,” Chloe said, biting her lip.

Beca kind of half-sobbed at that and blinked quickly to cut the tears that threatened, even though she was smiling. “How long have you been waiting to use that line on me?”

“A few years,” Chloe said with a giggle and tug on Beca’s pinky. “It’s okay?”

She nodded, and leaned over to kiss Chloe. “I love it. And I love yours. Can I ask why I got the treble and you got the bass?”

“If I was you, I’d crack a Treblemaker joke right now,” Chloe said with a sly grin, and Beca elbowed her. “Or because...I’m all about that bass, bout that bass, no treble…”

“Fuck off,” Beca said, laughing and giving her a playful shove. “Be real with me for a second.”

Chloe’s silly grin softened. “I chose it for you because...you bring melody into my life. Everyone always thinks I’m like the Energizer Bunny when it comes to being peppy and positive, but it’s really hard, I really have to work at it. But when you showed up...it wasn’t so hard anymore. You gave me a tune to follow, a hook I couldn’t get out of my head.”

Music metaphors. Beca didn’t even bother to brush away the tear that fell at Chloe’s explanation, so Chloe did it for her.

“And yours?” she asked, clearing her throat when she heard how thick it was from the emotion.

“Well, because my messed up voice lets me hit the bass notes sometimes and we won the ICCAs for it.”

Beca laughed and sniffled, and Chloe continued.

“But it’s more a reminder to keep myself steady, to not rush or drag but keep the tempo that’s right for me.”
“This is so fucking cheesy,” she said, almost twisting their hands together before remembering they quite literally had open wounds that needed tending. She settled for sitting forward and capturing Chloe's lips with her own, parting when Isaiah rolled his way back into their space, apologizing for intruding.

Beca drove them home, wrists wrapped in plastic wrap and tape, hands linked and resting on Beca's knee. She’d asked Chloe if she was hungry, to which she demurred, but Beca had maybe kind of expected dinner to be part of Chloe’s plan for the night and she’d left most of her Cobb salad at the diner. And it was way too late to even think about trying to get into a nice restaurant.

“Do you want to like...pick up Olive Garden and bring it home? Or something?” she tried, hoping Chloe would be on board with that.

“Olive Garden?” she said with an excited gasp. “Yes!”

Beca laughed and changed lanes. “Call it in; they’re probably slammed. I’ll get off the freeway to buy time. I don’t want to wait there forever.”

More than an hour of driving down surface streets and waiting in the restaurant parking lot later and they were finally home. For as revved up as she was earlier, Beca’s empty stomach dominated her psyche and other than a brief little groping session against the front door, the other physical pleasures of the holiday would have to wait. They ate on the couch, out of plastic containers with plastic forks, and Beca’s thoughts on their first Valentine’s Day together categorized it somewhere between a weird misfire and perfection.

Not that many people, anyone outside of that room anyway, knew, but Beca was a romantic. But she’d learned it was safer and easier to not feed that monster. Chloe was a veritable buffet, however, and she kind of maybe thought Chloe asking to take over the planning would give her that grand evening of chocolates and wine and a fancy dinner and cutesy handholding at a candlelit table that she secretly craved.

But as she watched Chloe slurp the spaghetti from her vegetable primavera, nestled close enough for their knees to touch, eating in comfortable near-silence together with their fresh and permanent
reminders of their lifelong and life-changing connection, Beca asked herself, *who needed fancy restaurants where you're surrounded by people and noise when you have this?*

Although, maybe there was one thing they could add...

"Do we have any wine?"

"I'll check!"

Chloe bounced off the couch before Beca had a chance to say she could do it herself. But Chloe's bare feet skittered across the room to the kitchen too quickly and she yanked open the refrigerator door, scanning the shelves.

"Beca!" she said with a squeal.

Beca jumped, startled. "What?"

Chloe pulled the bouquet of roses out of the fridge, nose buried in them immediately. "Are these for me?"

Okay, so maybe Beca forgot about the flowers and that she'd stuffed them in there before pursuing her next clue, and definitely didn't remember to take them out and present them to Chloe. But Chloe seemed tickled by the surprise.

"Of course," she said, brushing off her caught-off-guardedness best she could.

"They're beautiful. Thank you."

Beca smiled at her, watching her inhale their sweet aroma with pure glee.

“I didn’t see any wine, but,” and then Chloe was reaching back into the fridge. "I got you something, too."
"Oh?" she asked, intrigued. She set down her chicken parmigiana and stood up, something telling her they were finished with dinner.

“Well, us.” Chloe's arm returned from behind the refrigerator door with a bottle of champagne and a, "Ta-da!"

"Nice," Beca said, making her way to the kitchen. Her pulse was already quickening. "Anything else hiding in there?" she asked hopefully as she pretended to peer around the door. She'd been in such a rush earlier that she hadn't paid attention to what was in the fridge, and she wished she had.

"Maybe," Chloe sang and set the bottle on the counter. Her flowers were still cradled in her elbow and she reached back in, hand returning with a bowl of strawberries that Beca hadn't noticed either.

Beca smirked; Chloe might have surprised her with the tattoos, but her assumption had been correct after all. "If you pull whipped cream out of there next, be prepared to use it."

Chloe set down the bowl and peeked into the fridge again with a smile, and then she frowned. "Nope, sorry."

Beca felt her smirk fall, genuinely disappointed for a second until she realized she still had champagne and strawberries and, most importantly, Chloe. She reached for the bowl and bottle, ready to make for the bedroom. "That's okay. This'll do fine."

Chloe made a quiet sound of thoughtful surprise as she looked into the refrigerator one more time, withdrawing a can of aerosol whipped cream.

Beca felt her stomach fall to her feet and then lurch to her throat, and she had a fleeting thought of hoping it was a new can and not the one that was surely expired.

She smiled at Chloe. “Let's go.”
Chapter Summary

Happy Valentine's Day. ;)

Beca constantly wondered how she got herself into these situations.

She was conscious of everything leading up to these moments, but there would be a moment of blackout, of closing her eyes and leaping and not worrying about falling.

This was one of those moments.

She remembered brushing Chloe's hands away playfully as they kissed, sitting on the edge of the bed. She remembered Chloe pulling her down on top of her. She remembered pinning Chloe's hands down above her head and being careful to not grab or pull at the raw skin at her wrist. She remembered Chloe whispering in her ear and she remembered reaching into her nightstand to grab the handcuffs. She remembered slapping one of the cuffs around Chloe's right arm and attaching the other to a rod in the headboard. She even remembered the way Chloe cursed and wrapped her free hand around another rod, effectively restraining herself.

Well, it wasn't that she wasn't conscious of what she was doing. Every decision she made, word she said, move she made was done with full lucidity.

So it was more a matter of... incredulousness every time she was with Chloe. That she could do this. Be this way with another person. All unquestioned trust and inconsequential pleasure. That she could be this way with Chloe. Eighteen-year-old Beca would have died at the very thought.

But twenty-two-year-old Beca didn't die at it. She thrived on it, and sat, naked, astride Chloe's hips, watching her squirm as she drew a line from Chloe's navel to her throat in whipped cream.

"Cold," Chloe said, gasping.
“Not for long.” Holding the canister at bay, Beca slid backwards and bent at the waist, clearing the patch of skin on Chloe's stomach with her mouth before inching higher, tongue dragging along her sternum, between her breasts, to the hollow of her throat. She moved seamlessly to kiss her, to share the cold sweetness with her.

She pulled back before Chloe was ready to be done with the kiss and the rattle of metal and the straining flex of Chloe's toned arms made Beca struggle to contain the groan in the back of her throat. She watched Chloe, panting and staring up at her, wondering what Beca would do next.

Beca shook the can slowly, pondering. Considering her options. Eyes roaming over the impeccable canvas below her. She flipped the canister to draw another line, following the curve of Chloe's right breast, under it, then following the rise in a spiral to the tip.

“You know.” Chloe said through a shuddering intake of breath. “I’d planned to be the one driving you crazy tonight.”

Beca hummed and leaned to the side to set the can on the nightstand, fingers swiping a strawberry from the bowl on the way back. “Who says you aren’t driving me crazy right now?”

Chloe liked that. She sighed and her hips lifted, seeking and finding little in the way of relief in the gap between them. “Will I get a turn?”

“You should have thought of that,” Beca said thoughtfully as she touched the tip of a strawberry to Chloe’s ribs, making her bend away from the cold sensation, “before you handed me whipped cream and asked me to tie you up.”

“But I want ahh…”

Beca smiled at Chloe’s loss of focus as she dragged the strawberry along the path of cream she’d drawn, watching it gather over the red fruit in white folds like drawing curtains until it reached her fingers where she held the stem, just halfway through the trail. She stopped and watched Chloe watch her lift the berry toward her lips, but she paused, and smiled, and reversed her path, offering it to Chloe instead.

And she watched Chloe part her lips, tongue licking out to pull a dollop of cream off the fruit, and then her lips were around it, just holding. Sucking. Beca could feel the heat of her gaze on her, but Beca’s focus was on Chloe’s mouth, and the pink fullness of her lips, and the way she pulled the
strawberry a little further into her mouth before sinking her teeth into it. Cream pushed up onto her lips and before she could clear it herself, Beca darted down to kiss her, capturing her lips in a slow kiss to let Chloe chew and swallow before slipping her tongue into her mouth to twist over Chloe’s. She never thought a kiss with Chloe could get any sweeter, but this one did, the taste of the cream and the slightly tart berry overwhelming her senses.

She pulled back with a sigh and considered finishing the strawberry, but there was still skin to uncover - the most desirable spot of skin, at that. She bent again, picking up where she had left off, slowly with her lips and tongue until all that was left was the taut, pebbled flesh that she could see straining beneath the cream that was starting to melt away with Chloe's warmth. She used the bitten strawberry, pressing the cold, wet, exposed flesh of the fruit against the tip of Chloe's breast. Chloe gasped and her back arched, and Beca twirled it against her until she fell back against the bed with a groan and a scrape of metal. It was her turn to have a bite, and she smirked to herself that there was more than one thing she wanted to bite at the moment. She began with what she wanted most and lifted her hand away to replace it with her mouth, licking up the cream missed by the berry, and then she closed her lips and pulled, drawing another desperate moan from Chloe. She sat back, letting it go with a pop, and sank her teeth into what was left of the strawberry and tossed the stem toward the bowl.

It was so quick Beca didn't see it coming, but Chloe's free hand shot out, grabbing Beca's forearm to pull her down and before she realized what was happening, they were locked in a kiss that Chloe was very much dominating.

Beca let her dominate it, allowed her to take a little of what she wanted when Beca knew she was withholding so much. She knew Chloe was lost, lost in the kiss and lost in their embrace as Beca felt a hand at her back, dragging short nails over it to make her shiver, clinging to Beca, holding her close. Beca levered herself up enough to rest her weight on her elbow, and she had to chuckle a little at the way Chloe whined when she created a hair's breadth of space between their bodies, because the only reason she did it was to slip her hand between them.

Chloe was busy protesting and maybe punishing Beca a little if the teeth pulling on Beca's lower lip was anything to go by. But Beca didn't care; Chloe could punish her fifty different ways for all she cared. As long as her mouth was involved. And fifty scenarios flashed through her mind, making her moan and compelling her hips roll forward. Chloe liked that, too, and pulled on her lip again, but Beca didn't give her the same reaction the second time.

Instead her fingers crawled down over strong abdominals, feeling them flex and quiver with the strained, shallow breaths Chloe took, to slip between her thighs.

Chloe jerked below her, teeth pulling a little too hard as she fell back to the pillow without care. Beca winced, but there was a rush with the pain and she chased the broken kiss, capturing Chloe’s lips with her own as she caressed and teased her, savoring the slickness that was a very real
reminder that this was happening, that Chloe loved her, wanted her, needed her.

Was aroused by her.

Chloe whined a little, against the kiss, as her hips lifted and tilted and twisted to seek more and Beca moved with her, negating her efforts. Chloe's free hand was still at her back, grasping and pulling at Beca, using her for leverage until Beca decided it was enough and she withdrew her hand to grab Chloe's bicep and push her arm away and up, a little less than gently, until she got the hint and grasped the headboard again.

Beca shifted off her slightly, needing more room to work, and she smiled at Chloe, all wild, dark eyes and flushed cheeks who flashed a quick but bright smile back just before she said, “Bec, I need you. Please.”

The way her voice cracked over the last word, as though she was desperate, on the verge of tears perhaps, made a shiver of anticipation run up Beca's spine.

She still took her time, though. She wanted Chloe to know how much she cared, how much she loved her. She brought her lips to Chloe's shoulder first, trailing wet kisses along it until she reached the curve of her neck. With a finger to her chin she urged Chloe to turn away and expose the length of her neck to Beca's tongue and teeth.

Chloe always smelled so good, like lilac and citrus, and when she was worked up, a hint of pure, undiluted Chloe.

“Bec…”

She loved hearing her name like that, whined in desperation between broken breaths. Chloe's entire body rolled when Beca flickered her tongue below her ear and it felt like a magnet, drawing her hand down again. She loved hearing her name like that and she loved watching Chloe’s face the moment she touched her, and she lifted from where she was nibbling to see it, to see the parting of her lips and the gasping of breath and the rolling of her eyes and the fluttering of her eyelashes that all preceded the way she pressed her head back into the pillow for leverage as her hips lifted toward Beca’s fingers.

It was intoxicating. It was Chloe, she realized, who made her confident enough to lean back down and tell Chloe how wet she was with words that made Chloe moan. It was Chloe who made her
want to press herself against her thigh. It was Chloe that made her ask for handcuffs, or buy a strap-
on, or lick whipped cream off a breast, or do crazy things like buy an engagement ring when her
girlfriend seemed unsure. Because, she knew; she knew that this was it, the “it” that she grew up
hearing her friends talk about, the “it” that was in the rom-coms Chloe forced her to watch with
promised rewards of food or backrubs and, later, kisses and orgasms. She felt more like herself
with Chloe than she did without Chloe, and that was mildly terrifying, feeling like you needed
someone to know yourself. But it wasn’t that she didn’t know herself – it was that she didn’t have
to worry when she was with Chloe. Because Chloe never judged, never made her feel bad about
what she wanted, always reassured her and told her it was okay in the beginning. And it was
thrilling, really, how their roles had almost reversed. That Beca was the one eager to push the
boundaries, to try new things, to tell Chloe to bend over so she could take her from behind, to coax
things from Chloe’s mouth that she was hesitant to say, even though her desire to say them was
palpable.

Beca felt sexy, and confident, and sure when she was with Chloe.

“You feel so good,” she mumbled in Chloe’s ear as she dragged her fingertips up and slid them
back down until they slipped inside to be surrounded by warmth. Beca rolled her hips forward and
let out a quiet moan at the sensation.

It was clear Chloe tried to moan at the intrusion, but all that came out was a jagged breath, and
then her hips were pitching up and pushing down, and her knee bent, pushing her thigh up and
closer against Beca. “So do you,” she finally managed.

Beca let her set their rhythm, and it was a quick, staccato one. Chloe drove it with her hips and the
push of her thigh and Beca went along for the ride. So to speak. She wasn’t passive, though. Her
fingers were quick and nimble and knew how to curve and pull within Chloe, and press and rub
elsewhere, in ways that made Chloe’s moans sound more like broken sobs. She could, quite
literally, play Chloe like an instrument.

She leaned back for a moment to take it all in, Chloe’s face, lost in pleasure. The white-knuckled
grip her fingers had around the railings of the headboard. The sexiness of the handcuffs chaining
her to it and the fact that she willingly kept her free hand there, too. The way her toned arms flexed
to brace herself as she bucked her hips higher or faster.

It made Beca moan and grind down against Chloe’s thigh, but she struggled to find a rhythm for
herself with the way Chloe was starting to breakdown under her. Which was fine, she didn’t care.
She wanted – needed – Chloe to climax, to shudder and swear with that sexy, low voice that
showed up when she was turned on. And because Beca wanted it, and because Chloe made her
confident, she told her.
"I want you to come for me."

"Shit, Beca…” Chloe’s reaction to the words was instantaneous, hips lifting off the bed as she tried to get more, to take more of Beca.

"You’re so sexy."

Chloe whimpered, and Beca watched her uncuffed hand start to reach for her before snapping back to its proper place and gripping even harder as her legs moved restlessly, parting further and then closing tightly against Beca’s hand.

"Tell me what you need,” she demanded more than asked. She lifted her leg off Chloe’s and moved off her completely to give her room to writhe. Beca’s body was slick with sweat where they had been pressed against each other and the rush of cold air was exciting. “Tell me.” She was already moving, keeping her hand as steady as Chloe’s unpredictable motion allowed, easing herself down and over to settle between her legs on her stomach. She pressed a wet kiss to Chloe’s inner thigh and looked up at Chloe, following each curve and plane and angle up her ridiculous body with her eyes until she found her face, eyes closed tightly, framed by her elbows as her hands locked around the railing. “Tell me what you want, baby.”

"Bec…”

Beca hummed and kissed her other thigh as she slipped her free arm under Chloe’s leg to hitch it up over her shoulder.

“I’ll do anything you want.”

Chloe’s mouth fell open at that, another broken moan escaping before she stuttered once or twice until she got it out successfully. “I want…I want your mouth…your tongue.”

“Now, was that so hard?” Beca said with a contented sigh as she rotated her thumb out of the way to graze the tip of her tongue against the sensitive, swollen bundle nerves begging for release.

"Fuck, Beca..."
Beca liked that. She swirled her tongue once and closed her lips to suck, Chloe's hips coming off the bed with a moan. She wondered if it was too strong too quickly but Chloe didn't flinch. So she pressed her fingers in deeper, and quicker, and flicked her tongue in all the ways she knew would make Chloe come undone.

"Yeah..." Chloe breathed as she pitched her hips up toward Beca again. "Just like that..."

Beca hummed her approval and reached with her free hand to drag her nails across Chloe's stomach and hip and then stretched higher to cover her breast and squeeze, and pull, until she decided to focus on one thing and one thing alone.

She thrust her hand one last time and held it in place. Her mouth would be enough now, and she stroked her tongue over the flesh held between her teeth until Chloe cried out, thighs closing against Beca's ears to trap her there as her body jerked and shuddered.

Beca could hardly breathe, but she didn't care. These moments of raw, unbridled passion were mind blowing, because every one of them felt like a dream, like she'd been plucked out of her presumed reality and tossed into an alternate dimension where things happened like Chloe handcuffing her to the bed or having sex in the ocean or licking whipped cream off a breast. Or being engaged.

“Fuck!” Chloe finally said with surprising enthusiasm when her legs relaxed and fell away.

Beca took a gasping breath and brought her head up, shocked by the outburst. Chloe usually melted into silence after climaxing; she didn’t…cheer? Was it a cheer? Her eyes were wide and staring down at Beca with such intensity Beca actually recoiled a few inches, taking her fingers with her which earned a much more typical groan at the loss, but Chloe’s eyes were still on her.

“I feel like you’re staring right through my soul right now, dude. You okay?”

“Untie me.” Chloe’s voice was so clear, it startled Beca all over again. This wasn’t normal afterglow Chloe. This was…something else. She scrambled into action, absentmindedly wiping her hand on her thigh as she climbed off Chloe and the bed to dig the tiny silver key out of its new home to help it not get lost – the box from Chloe’s engagement ring. She reached for Chloe’s wrist, not bothering to waste time getting back on the bed first because with the way Chloe was looking at her, Beca was starting to be apprehensive about what might happen if she took too long.
She popped the lock on the cuff around Chloe’s wrist and Chloe was moving before Beca had a chance to undo the other end from the headboard. Hands were on her shoulders and pulling her down onto the bed with such force it almost knocked the wind out of her. But it didn’t, so Beca was able to half-shout a “What the –” before Chloe’s mouth came down over hers as she settled over Beca on her hands and knees. Beca didn’t try to ask questions after that. She let Chloe hold her down and consume her mouth until they were both gasping for oxygen.

And then Chloe was gone, sitting back on her knees as she leaned and stretched to grab not only the can of whipped cream off the nightstand, but the bowl of strawberries and bottle of champagne they hadn’t even gotten around to opening yet. She let the can fall next to her leg and balanced the bowl carefully in a flat spot nearby and set to work on the bottle, ripping at the gold foil and twisting the wire off the cork until she had her thumb angling the cork up.

Beca closed her eyes and turned her face, bracing for the pop which came a moment later.

The bottle fizzed but didn’t overflow and Beca looked up at Chloe again, who looked so intensely gleeful that Beca couldn’t help but smile, despite being mildly terrified at the excitement with which Chloe seemed to be consumed by. She watched Chloe bring the bottle to her lips and take a drink.

“I bought these things for you, remember,” Chloe said, finally speaking with a semi-normal, if not still-aroused voice. Beca relaxed at its timbre and felt it was safe to lift her hands and rest them on Chloe’s thighs.

“Didn’t mean to steal your thunder,” she said with an Elvis tug of a smile. Her smile faded quickly, though, under Chloe’s appraising eyes, which were raking over Beca’s form unabashedly. Part of Beca knew she should brace herself, take a breath, use her hands to cover as much of herself as she could, but she was frozen with some type of fear, or rather, anticipation, and all she could do was watch as Chloe held the bottle by the neck to hover over Beca before it tilted. “Dude!” she said, jumping with nowhere to go as a splash of champagne landed on her chest. It wasn’t much, but it felt like a deluge as it ran wherever the curves of her body and gravity decided it should go. Down her ribs, mostly. Then over her stomach once she exhaled.

It was cold and she shivered, and then Chloe was leaning down with a happy little sigh and Beca shivered again at the mouth working its way across her ribs and lower to dip into her navel where she knew the champagne had gathered. Chloe straightened, still smiling down at her as she took another drink from the bottle, and yet another shiver ran up Beca’s spine.

“Thirsty?” Chloe asked, swirling the bottle slowly.
Beca felt like the question was a trap. Yes or no, something wonderful would happen. And to be honest, she was pretty thirsty. She nodded, and watched Chloe extend her arm and start tilting the bottle.

“Open.”

She was barely quick enough, opening her mouth just in time for the more-than-a-mouthful of champagne Chloe poured into it. She had enough time to swallow and reach up to wipe her face before Chloe’s lips were on hers again, firm and chaste and she was gone again to set the bottle on the nightstand. She was already shaking the can of whipped cream before it clicked for Beca what was about to happen. She realized it half a second before the can flipped upside down and deposited a line of cool cream on the side of her neck.

She shivered again and then Chloe’s mouth was there, licking and kissing, and Beca knew she was searching it out, the erogenous spot on her neck that ranked second in sensitivity only to the nerves between her legs and she turned her head to the side quickly. She wanted - needed - Chloe to find it. She was close, it was tingling as Chloe’s warm breath drifted across her skin.

It was weird, to Beca, when she discovered that the right pressure on the exact right spot high on her neck could make her want to jump out of her skin. She remembered learning about erogenous zones in the Human Sexuality class she took as an elective. She remembered that most everyone had the same sensitive areas, but that it could still vary widely from person to person. Of course she liked her neck being kissed; who didn’t? But the first time it happened – when Chloe was attacking her neck in their Cöpenhagen hotel room bed – it...confused Beca, for lack of a better description. She’d never been made to feel that way, hot and cold, tired and wired, tense and relaxed, and certainly not by something as simple as lips against her neck. She remembered her fingers twisting in Chloe’s soft curls and pulling her closer, first encouraging it, and then begging her not to stop. She didn’t stop, not until Beca was writhing and bucking underneath her and Chloe apparently couldn’t help herself any longer and thrust her hand down Beca’s flannel pajama pants to make Beca all but hit the ceiling.

Ever since that experience, Beca almost (almost) preferred Chloe’s mouth on her neck to other regions of her body. She’d cling to her when Chloe would latch on, and wrap her body around her, or simply melt into a puddle.

So she waited with tingling anticipation as Chloe searched. It wasn’t always a guarantee that she would find it – it seemed to float a little, and sometimes it didn’t seem to be ‘activated’ at all. But she knew it was tonight, and she knew Chloe was close, and with a tilt of Beca's chin and a swipe of Chloe's tongue, it was found and Beca felt, perhaps, her soul leave her body for a moment before it settled into her once again to allow the shaky moan to escape her lips. Her hips bucked in reflex, seeking all but finding little as they brushed Chloe who hovered above her.
She felt Chloe against her and a moment later, Chloe’s hips pressed down into hers, drawing another moan out of her. Beca was more than ready for whatever it was Chloe was planning to do to her from the moment their positions reversed, and now it was almost painful to wait for it. Though the spot of fire on her neck was making her wonder if maybe she would be driven to climax simply by Chloe’s tongue against it. She knew it was a goal of Chloe’s to make that happen some day, and her nerves were so hypersensitive and her arousal so keyed up that Beca spent a few minutes evaluating whether or not it could happen or if she should just push Chloe down to what she knew would be a failsafe.

Chloe made the decision for her, though, and pulled back from her handiwork on Beca’s neck, leaving both of them panting as she stared down at Beca, smile playing at her lips.

Beca smiled back up at her, loving the way Chloe looked in these moments (well, all moments). She was wild, raw. Chloe was very much an open book, and she was ever-confident, but she wasn’t superhuman and she did get shy sometimes, which tickled Beca to no end. Chloe Beale, hesitant or shy in the bedroom? It defied logic, but Chloe defied a lot of expectations. But Beca knew what it really was - it was Chloe wanting to make sure it, whatever it was, was okay. She wanted to be sure Beca was okay, to make sure she was okay herself. She wanted to take her time, be aware but not necessarily wary, and nudge their boundaries by millimeters at a time rather than kicking it across the field.

"What?" Beca finally asked, growing impatient under Chloe's intense gaze.

"Nothing," Chloe said with a shake of her head as she pushed herself backwards to sit astride Beca's knees. She snagged the Reddi-wip again and the smile that slid across her face was enough of a warning for Beca.

She braced herself, best as she could pinned down by Chloe, and decided to reach above her head and grab the rods of the headboard. It drove her crazy to see Chloe do it and the least she could do was return the favor. Not that it didn't ratchet her own arousal up a few hundred percent either. She felt the dangling handcuffs brush her arm and if wasn't for them hanging against her right wrist and its fresh tattoo instead of her left, she would have chained herself to the bed.

For Chloe. (Right.)

Instead she gripped hard and rolled her body as Chloe's eyes raked over it to settle between her thighs.
If there was one thing Chloe knew how to do well - though there were many - it was knowing how to tease Beca. Her finger trailed along Beca's left thigh as her other hand shook the canister. Her face was a mix of thoughtful and excited, and Beca was too focused on her face that she didn't realize where the nozzle was aimed until cold wetness landed along the soft skin of her inner thigh. She jumped and tried to move but Chloe's weight had her trapped.

The weight disappeared as soon as Beca stilled and she watched Chloe move further back until she was kneeling between Beca's ankles, one hand idly moving along her foot as she glanced up at Beca and back down to the line of sweetness she'd drawn. Beca shifted with her newfound freedom, unabashedly parting her legs.

Chloe's eyes flashed up at her again, bright and...hungry. Beca couldn't watch anymore and let her head fall back into the pillow, eyes on the ceiling, grip around the headboard tightening as she waited for the inevitable. She could feel Chloe moving with the shifting of the bed, the occasional graze of skin against skin, the blur of red in her peripheral vision descending until it disappeared. It was replaced with the warmth of a tongue dragging along her thigh through the whipped cream Chloe had deposited there, and Beca's arms tensed on reflex.

She heard the frothy shake of the can again and she closed her eyes to wait to feel where Chloe would decide to use it this time.

It showed up high between her legs, in the warm crease where thigh turned to sensitive flesh and her back arched off the bed with a gasp. The sensation was mind boggling and she waited for her tongue to make its presence known.

And she waited.

And waited.

"Chl-" Her question got tangled in her throat at the cold roughness that dragged right up the length of where she knew she was slick-soaked and warm. It was too cold to be Chloe's tongue and it took her another three seconds to realize what it was.

"Shit, baby," she breathed, parting her legs further as Chloe dragged the strawberry over her again. It diverted its path and she felt it glide through the whipped cream that she knew had to be melting by now; her body was on fire.
A moment later she heard Chloe hum, the same hum she heard when she tasted a good wine or chocolate. She lifted her head at that to see Chloe looking up at her from where she had settled between her legs, half-eaten strawberry pinched between her fingertips as she chewed and swallowed.

She fell back to the bed, muttering, "Fuck," as Chloe's fingers wandered. They were warm, a stark contrast to the cool touches that she knew came from berry after berry. Beca was quite certain she was on the road to madness, the accelerator pressed harder with every glance down to see Chloe touching or licking or chewing and smiling back at her.

She felt the soft pressure of something pressing against her entrance. And she knew what it was, she absolutely knew because of course this was all Chloe's little plan. But knowing only made it more erotic, and Beca tilted her hips at the soft and slight intrusion that disappeared a moment later. It felt impossible but she knew she had to do it; she had to watch it. So she pried her eyes open and lifted her head, dropping her grip on the headboard to push herself up to her elbows and look down at Chloe, just in time to watch her sink her teeth into the strawberry that she knew was teasing into her a second earlier.

"Jesus..." Beca sighed, hips lifting again despite a lack of contact. Contact almost felt moot at this point, like she could watch Chloe eat a strawberry and it would be enough to make her come. But where was the fun in that? she thought, sniffing a laugh to herself.

"What?" Chloe asked with a bright smile. She was clearly enjoying driving Beca crazy and she dropped the stem into the bowl to pluck another one out, twirling it millimeters away from Beca.

"Dirty bird."

Chloe giggled and lowered her hand enough for the spinning berry to graze Beca and make her jump. "I can't help it, Beca," she said with a sigh as she watched what she was doing. "You're just so yummy."

Beca's arms gave out at that and she fell flat again to try to grind her hips down, but Chloe compensated and backed away to render her efforts fruitless.

So to speak.

She felt it against her again after a moment, slipping gently over and between everything she knew
was ridiculously and embarrassingly - no, she had nothing to be embarrassed about - wet. Then it disappeared and she heard Chloe's happy hum again and she knew she was nibbling on it the berry until it was gone. Beca was quite ready for Chloe to decide to move from appetizer to main course (as it were), and she was about to desperately reach and push Chloe down when she felt, undoubtedly, a tongue drag its pointed tip through her to wiggle against the nerves Chloe had been teasing for what now felt like a millennia.

"Fuck, Chloe!" she said with a squeal that was maybe a little embarrassing. She pulled away for half a second at the firm and direct contact and then pushed herself down against it with a groan.

Chloe hummed again, the exact same hum, as arms slipped under Beca's legs to pull her down and closer, one hand resting in her hip, the other angled around to pull Beca up and open with her fingers.


Chloe crawled up over Beca and flopped onto the bed on her back by her side, bodies touching in places like their forearms, their hips, their toes. They were both panting - Beca from, well, obviously, and Chloe from her effort.

Beca twisted her arm to rest it over Chloe's abdomen, patting her hip with a total lack of grace or accuracy. “Good. Very good.”

Chloe laughed and covered Beca's hand with one of her own. “Why thank you.”

Beca stretched her legs and rolled her neck to feel it crackle. “No, thank you.”

Chloe giggled again and patted her hand.

The angle was a little awkward and Beca lifted her arm, feeling it peel away uncomfortably. “You're sticky.”

Chloe ran her hand over her stomach. “I guess I am.”
Beca tilted her head to look at her and felt her hair stick to her neck. “So am I.”

“Maybe I should have bought sugar-free whipped cream instead?”

“Gross. What's the point of that?”

“At least we wouldn't be sticky.”

Beca stretched again and rolled onto her side to tuck herself into Chloe. “Guess we'll have to take a shower together.”

“Darn.”

“Yeah, darn,” Beca said with a laugh and a kiss pressed to Chloe's shoulder. “That was really hot.”

Chloe laughed and Beca felt fingers slide into her hair and over her scalp to make her shiver. “Yeah it was.”

“You know…” she started, and then shook her head, second guessing herself.

“What?” Chloe asked quietly.

Beca shrugged as she reminded herself about the kind of person Chloe was and took a breath to speak honestly and with confidence. “I never saw myself, like... being...how I am. With you. How we are.”

“And how are we?”

Beca smiled up at her from where she was using Chloe's arm as a pillow. “We’re kinda fucking kinky, babe.”
Chloe burst out laughing, pulling Beca into her with both arms for a second. “We’re not *that* kinky. There’s nothing wrong with spicing things up.”

“I wasn’t lodging a complaint,” Beca said with a dismissive sweep of her hand above Chloe’s body that ended with her hand flopping down aimlessly below Chloe’s navel. Her fingertips stroked the skin there, enjoying the softness. “I was making a life experience observation.”

“Well,” Chloe said with a contented sigh and resumed playing with Beca’s hair. “I have fun with you. You...reveal parts of me I didn’t know I had.”

Beca smiled, taking pride in that. But she couldn’t pass up a prime opportunity to twist Chloe’s words. “You might not know about them, but I’m pretty sure I know every single part of you by heart. *Quite* intimately.” She shifted her hand lower to nestle it between Chloe’s legs to reinforce her point. She let it rest there. It was nice and warm.

Chloe inhaled at the unexpected contact and then she was giggling. “I can’t argue with you on that.”

“You better not,” Beca laughed. She was quiet a moment, thinking about her day and their evening together and the events of the past hour or so, and everything that was ahead of them. She sighed and snuggled closer to Chloe. “Happy Valentine’s Day, Chlo.”

She felt Chloe's arm wrap around her shoulders and pull her closer. “Happy Valentine’s Day, Bec.”
Sorry for the unusually lengthy time between updates, friends! Been dealing with some personal stuff and between that and the holidays, it took awhile to find my voice again.

Chloe's (and Beca's, for that matter) first Grammy Awards viewing party was just as glamorous as she expected it to be, based on the “insider” photos of industry parties that showed up in tabloids and on social media. It wasn't black tie - or “blacktail” or “cocktie” as Beca invented when trying to remember “black tie” and “cocktail” - it was nice and casual but no less glamorous. Drinks flowed and music blasted during the commercials. Katy performed her new single live for the first time during the broadcast. The room toasted Beca, and someone announced that the single would hit Number 1 on next week’s Billboard Top 100 chart. Beca made everyone toast Chloe for keeping her grounded and for keeping her from turning into an egotistical asshole like some of them. (Apparently that was an inside joke.) Chloe couldn't help but wonder where they would be at that time a year later. If they would be at the awards. Because Beca and her album could be nominated. For a Grammy Award.

The next day, when Beca was swept away for a live radio interview with Ryan Seacrest to talk about the performance, the rest of the awards, and the country’s new chart-topping record, Chloe returned to the real world inside Room 17. She had to miss Beca's interview because it aired live during the daily spelling lesson.

“D-O-G. Dog. Repeat, please.”

“D-O-G. Dog,” came back to her in a chorus of squeaky voices as she wrote out the letters in neat capital print on the permanent guidelines of the white board so the students could observe and copy.

“Good. Now, who here has a dog?”

Tiny hands shot up excitedly and she broke up the monotony of drilled spelling lessons with a non-showing show-and-tell, helping them work on their sentence structure and verb tenses while they talked about something they loved.
“He ran,” she corrected after a dog “runned” away from a student.

She lived in a world of black and white; it gave her a kind of whiplash moving between the vastly different worlds she and Beca shared. Beca was luxury cars and a steadily increasing collection of designer apparel and “industry people” and celebrities and an advance of more money than they had both earned in their lives, combined. Chloe was public transit and gossiping with other teachers about parents and being inundated by a cacophony of “music” made by tiny hands on miniature drums or tambourines or xylophones or tiny voices singing-slash-shouting as she played “Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes” on the piano and ushering her class out for an impromptu recess to allow a custodian to clean up the vomit and forty-nine thousand dollars per year.

By her calculations, she was one month away from meeting her savings goal for a decent down payment on a car. It wouldn't be a Corvette or any of the Mercedes or Cadillacs or BMWs the other half of her life contained. But that was okay.

They shared a life. But they led different lives. And that was okay, too. It was thrilling to jump between worlds. When one was getting too loud or too monotonous, she could jump into Beca's or go have a drink with Suzanne Washington, who always wanted to know the latest on her wedding plans and the 2016 Bellas. Or even Anika Schmidt, who had, more or less, dropped her Regina George act for more of an end-of-the-movie Regina George. She was actually kind of fun.

Wedding plans. It had been three months since she popped the question and they had barely addressed it beyond the loving cheesiness that came with calling one another their fiancée. She didn't assume it to be a bad thing. Surprising, maybe. It certainly didn't fall in line with her fantasized wedding plans buried deep in her computer files. She wasn't in a rush. And she knew Beca wasn't either. But it would be nice to have some type of general outline…

*What do you think of an autumn wedding?* she texted Beca after her 4:30 parent-teacher conference appointment departed. Her 5:00 hadn’t shown up yet.

*THIS fall?*

*Does that feel too soon?*

*I like fall.*

*Maybe next?*
That's more than a year away. Not too long? And Chloe isn't impatient - she isn't - but suddenly waiting another eighteen months to marry Beca feels like an eternity. She's not in a rush but she doesn't want to wait either. Because that's not confusing.

*I like Spring* was Beca’s offered compromise.

*So a year from now?*

*From today?*

:*p from this approx time of year*

*I could get with that. You sure you wanna marry me? I'm a mess you know*

*No you're not. But it Only makes me love you more :)*

*Which is it? I'm not or I am? Can't have it both ways!*

*Shut up. :p What do you think you'll wear?*

*Idk. Clothes?*

*Becccccccccc*

*Idk!! Do I have to decide right this sec while I make this sandwich?* A photo accompanied that message, a selfie of Beca licking, presumably, mayonnaise off a knife.

*It can wait :p*
What are YOU wearing

Right now? ;) Chloe bit her lip, debating whether or not to turn the conversation properly racy. It's very sexy

Is it?

Oh yes. This sweater set leaves nothing to the imagination.

Ha!

I'll be the judge of that

Chloe glanced at her door and heard voices carrying; they sounded a lot like Marisa’s parents, so she was quick about it, shrugging her argyle cardigan off her shoulders and tugging the scoop neck of her shirt lower until there was cleavage. She licked her lips and put on her best smize and snapped a high-angle selfie, letting Beca see right down her shirt. She almost dropped her phone as her appointment walked through the door, and she shrugged her cardigan back into place quickly. “Mr. and Mrs. Flores! Please, come in.”

Her phone lit up on her desk a few minutes into her discussion with Marisa Flores’ parents. She ignored it, but she knew it was Beca, and she wanted to know what Beca had to say about her selfie. The Floreses weren’t pleased with her report that their daughter was acting out in class too frequently and while they quietly but brusquely argued with each other about whose fault it was, she stole a quick glance at her messages.

What would we be doing if I was there?

Chloe pressed her hand into the surface of her desk, mind racing. The parents were still arguing and she knew she should intervene, but she wanted them to be able to have their discussion and maybe she wanted to flirt with Beca. I’d be sitting on my desk. We’d be making out

What else?

You’d get on your knees
Miss Beale!

You want me to go down on you in your classroom?

You dirty girl

I'm only dirty with you Bec

Are you wet right now?

I bet you are

Chloe shifted in her chair. She was more than a little turned on and she had three more conferences to go before she could rush home. Or rather, spend more than an hour getting home. Damn buses.

Mhmm

Fuck

Chlo you always taste so good

Chloe caught the sharp inhale before it was too obvious. Beca was...really into it. And she also really needed to be professional. She typed one more message and put her phone face down so it couldn’t distract her. Are you touching yourself?

“Mrs. Flores? Mr. Flores?” she interrupted, hoping her face wasn’t flushed but feeling like it was. “Let’s refocus, shall we?”

It was a good conference, and with the screen of her phone out of sight, she was able to refocus as well. Once they left, she checked Beca’s reply to the question she had sent some twenty minutes earlier. She smiled at the influx of texts waiting for her - getting Beca going over text was fun, and they didn’t flirt that way often.

No

Maybe...
Ok a little but just like, thru my jeans

Baby where’d you go

Oh right you’re at work

Wellllll I’ll just be here

On the couch

Touching myself

Ok I’m going back to my sandwich

You better wait til I get home, missy!

There you are!

But now I’m all horny

And I’m not?!

At least you can do something about it BUT YOU BETTER NOT

Cuz I have to sit here and talk about kids

God I’m such a creep! D:

Chloe

I’m so wet

“Ms. Beale?”

Chloe jumped and plastered a smile on her face as she set down her phone and turned toward the door. “Hi, Ms. Stewart. Please, come in.” She ran a hand through her hair to calm herself down; her entire body was warm.

To her relief, Ms. Stewart’s son was her top student and their conference was blissfully short. She grabbed her phone as soon as Ms. Stewart stood to exit to see another avalanche of texts from Beca.
You keep disappearing
So rude
I know you’re working
But I really wish you were home
I need you
siiiiiiiiiiiiiiigh

Whatcha need me for, Bec? ;)

STOP DISAPPEARING

I’m at work!

I KNOW BUT I CAN STILL BE ANNOYED WHEN YOU DISAPPEAR

Chloe laughed at Beca’s all-caps intensity. Why so annoyed? ;) Something wrong babe?

Yeah. You’re not here. When the hell are you done?


Jfc

You behave yourself til I get home!

No promises

Chloe would have laughed if she wasn’t so painfully aroused. Instead she dropped her phone into her purse to stop torturing herself and work on cleaning up her classroom while waiting for her last
conference to arrive.

Of course, they arrived late – the Jacksons were always late – and of course when she checked the time as she locked up her room she knew she had missed her bus. “Damn it,” she muttered, opening up her messages to text Beca and let her know she’d be home later. Just as she tapped ‘send’ while walking out the side entrance of the school, she looked up to see Beca, leaning against the side of her sports car, looking every bit like Jake Ryan at the end of *Sixteen Candles* and for approximately thirty seconds, Chloe forgot their little sexting spree and she skipped across the sidewalk to throw her arms around Beca’s neck.

“**You came!**”

“Not yet. You told me to wait.”

Chloe pulled back in confusion, but Beca’s smirk reminded her of exactly why she had been so anxious to get home and annoyed to be waylaid. Chloe flashed a quick smile and pressed her lips to Beca’s, pulling away a moment later.

“**Hey, c’mere,**” Beca protested, catching Chloe by a side of her cardigan to try to pull her back.

“Parents are still around and I don’t need them seeing me making out up against a car.”

“**Would you rather it be there in the grass? Or in the car? I’m okay with either at the moment.**”

Chloe granted her one more kiss and then sidestepped Beca’s attempt to get her hands into her rear pants pockets, reaching for the passenger door handle. “I have to be professional at school, Bec. Let’s go home.”

She heard Beca groan as she pulled the door closed and giggled at the way Beca pushed her hair back in frustration as she rounded the front of the car to slide into the driver’s seat. She wasn’t at all surprised that Beca’s right hand spent the better part of the trip home on Chloe’s thigh.

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Their life had become perfectly routine in that it rarely had a routine. Chloe’s did, for the most part,
but Beca’s didn’t, and it kept them on their toes. Katy’s album released over Chloe’s Spring Break in mid-March and Beca was pulled away more and more frequently for press. Usually it was during the day while Chloe was at work and her absence went unnoticed. Even when it did go noticed, it was okay; it was exciting, things happening like Beca taping an interview with Access Hollywood, and sure it was only a sixty-second clip on air, but it was awesome and Chloe locked the recording on their DVR so it couldn’t be erased accidentally.

The album debuted strong at Number 2, stuck behind Ed Sheeran’s. It didn’t open at Number 1 like *Prism* did, but it was the long game that would prove success, would test Beca’s craft. It sold a quarter million copies its first week, which again fell short of her previous release. They released a second single in late March; it premiered at Number 3, higher than the lead single and pushed the album to Number 1 the week of April 16th and jumpstarted sales.

The album went gold in its second week.

Beca was presented with a framed gold vinyl record, complete with her name and everything. They hung it in the living room along the front wall, to the right of the window.

It went platinum in its third week. *Rolling Stone* was at that presentation.

That one went up next to the gold one in the living room.

The next day, Chloe was called to the school office. The receptionist handed her a FedEx envelope. She hadn’t ordered any supplies recently and didn’t recognize the return address, but it was definitely addressed to her. She tore it open and pulled out a standard white envelope, and within that she found a business check made out to the school from some unfamiliar corporation wrapped in a sheet of paper. Some refund, probably. She rotated the check to the side with her thumb.

*Chloe Beale,*

*Thanks again for lending Rebecca to me. She’s magic. So are you. Help those rugrats make their own magic.*

*Katy Perry*

*p.s. Heard you beat her to the question. Congrats!*

Chloe looked at the check again, having ignored it initially. It was for twenty-five thousand dollars. She laughed, and pressed her palm to her forehead, and walked down the hall to make a copy of the note and give it and the check to the bookkeeper.
“It’s a donation,” she said, grinning to hold back the tears. Their school had been horrendously ill-equipped to provide the level of performing arts education they promised their students and the parents and families of the students couldn’t close the gap between state funding and expenses. In one fell swoop, that issue, at least for a year, was resolved.

On May 13th, Beca told Chloe that she had to go New York for a week to do the east coast press that she couldn't do by phone. It was fitting, that it was a Friday. Bad luck indeed.

“But you're going to miss Awards Night.” The West Hollywood Academy for the Performing Arts was holding its annual awards night on May 24th, and Chloe hadn’t had a chance to tell Beca yet, but she’d just found she’d been nominated for Teacher of the Year. She didn’t understand how, or who had nominated her, what with being a new teacher and not feeling like she’d done anything particularly award-worthy. Part of her was considering it was a prank, though Anika Schmidt really had cut her bullshit. Okay, maybe being the conduit to the school getting a slew of new musical instruments, tap and pointe shoes for all the students enrolled in the dance program, and more canvases, paints, and sculpting materials than the school had ever had at one time.

“I know, I know. I’m so sorry, Chlo. I asked three times if they could push it back or cut it shorter. They've had some of these appearances scheduled since last year and it's too short notice to move them.”

“And they gave you a week heads up before flying you across the country?”

“I guess that's how it works sometimes. I don't know.”

“You guess that's how it works?”

“Yeah. I guess that's how it works.”

Chloe scoffed. “So tell them no.”

“I can’t tell them no. This is important to me, Chlo.”

“And it’s important to me for you to be here!”
“I think sometimes you forget this shit is new to me. I'm doing my best to figure it out, you know. And I'm not the one in charge. This is what I signed up for. You signed up for it, too.”

“I didn't sign up for you to abandon me.” Chloe knew she was being irrational. She knew. That didn’t change anything.

Beca held up her hands. “Oh my God, I'm not abandoning...you know what, whatever. This is my job. If I'm lucky, this is only the beginning. I'm getting to do what I always wanted to do and if you can't handle that…”

Beca let the sentence dangle and ice washed over Chloe. This was a very real fight. Not one over how to squeeze the toothpaste or hair in the shower or accidentally erasing the latest “Real Housewives.” It was Beca needing to do something that would hurt Chloe and being unable to do anything about it; nothing that wouldn't jeopardize her career, anyway. And it was Chloe being selfish and expecting Beca to make sacrifices that were unfair to ask her to make.

She was mad and she was hurt and she knew it was irrational to blame Beca or even presume she had any control over this aspect of her life; she likely had no more control over being told to get on a plane than Chloe had being told to go to a training. But logic and reason rarely triumphed over hurt feelings.

She knew she should apologize, should tell Beca she understood and they could celebrate when she got home. Instead, she said, “If I can't handle it, then what? Hmm?”

“I don't know, Chloe,” was all Beca answered before leaving the couch and walking up to the bedroom.

“Oh, what, you're just going to walk away?” she threw at Beca, who ignored it. She heard the bathroom door slam shut a moment later. Chloe remained, and let her head fall into her hands as she cried.

She spent the night on the couch.
Late Night

“Morning,” Beca said when she appeared on the stairs and headed for the kitchen.

Chloe was awake and still on the couch, watching a World War II documentary on TV. She slept like shit and felt worse. The cold tone to Beca's voice wasn't lost on her. She hummed a response, not taking her eyes off the screen and not having the guts to actually reply aloud or, as she knew she should do, apologize.

“I'm getting the silent treatment now?”

Out the corner of her eye, Chloe watched her make a coffee and lean against the counter. She knew Beca was staring at her but she didn't give in and turn her head.

Because she was still mad, damn it.

Or maybe, just maybe, she was afraid. And she hadn't even realized she was until last night when she was faced with the immediate reality.

She'd never been alone in LA, not for more than a night when Beca would pull an all-nighter at the studio. The city was still intimidating and she didn't have a good network yet. She was a social person; she craved human contact and could only tolerate a certain amount of solitude. But more than that...

“I'm scared you're going to start traveling all the time and I'm never going to see you and you're going to get super famous and turn into someone I don't know and meet someone more exciting and leave me.” She said it before she had time to think about it.

“What? Chloe…” Beca said, rushing from the kitchen. She hesitated before sitting on the couch with an abnormal amount of space between them and the fact that she'd made Beca feel unwelcome killed her. “I probably am going to have to travel a lot. You know that comes with the territory, at least if I'm doing my job right. Right?”

Chloe nodded, though she wasn't at all happy about the reality she knew was right around the corner.
“But I'm not going to change. Am I any different now than at school?”

“Not really.” That was kind of a lie. She knew Beca was smarter, more confident, certainly happier overall than when she was at Barden. But not the kind of different she was fearing.

“All that fame shit, I don't care about that. I just want to make music. If fame comes with it, fine. I can’t really do anything about that. But you know that's not what I'm trying to do.”

Chloe sighed and finally turned to face Beca. “I know.”

“And you can totally come with me, whenever you can. This was just super short notice and I know you can't take time off at the end of the school year so I didn't even ask. But they'll totally pay for you to come with me. You're not going to have to sit here alone all the time.”

Chloe hadn't given much thought to the potential benefits of Beca's evolving lifestyle spilling over to her. Sure they had a few nice things around the place now. They were chauffeured sometimes. She had a few designer purses. Beca bought her nice things. She knew they would be taking an awesome trip for their honeymoon, whenever and wherever that would be, which wouldn't have been possible otherwise. But she hadn't considered that she would ever be tagging along if Beca had to travel.

“And yeah, I'm going to meet a lot of people. I have to if I'm going to succeed, you know? It's all about who you know. But that doesn't mean I'm going to fall in love with one of them.”

Chloe felt uncomfortable in her skin. She was never one to feel threatened by the potential of others stealing her partner. It was an icky feeling. “You're going to meet all those hot musicians and the hot guys and girls that follow them around with their exciting lives flying to London and Paris and you just have me, the boring teacher.”

Beca barked a laugh and then covered her mouth, apologizing with her eyes. “I don't want them, babe. You're the hottest chick in the world. And you're hilarious, and kind, and the sweetest person I've ever met. And you’re far from boring. How many boring people do you know who barge into a stranger’s shower?”

“Oh my gosh, are you ever going to let me live that down?” Chloe said, rolling her eyes and smiling. She felt the tension in her chest and in the room finally crack and she let herself sag to the
“Not a chance.” Beca’s arm wrapped around her and squeezed. “And you know, to fall for someone else I’d have to fall out of love with you. And I really don’t see that happening. Like, ever.” Beca reached across Chloe’s lap, the treble clef tattoo on Beca’s wrist catching her eye, and her fingers wiggled the engagement ring on Chloe’s finger. “I'm in this, dude. For better or worse. Richer or poorer. All those things. Are you?”

Chloe nodded and lifted her head from Beca’s shoulder to kiss her. “I’m sorry.”

“I’ll text you when I land,” Beca said as she hefted her laptop bag over her shoulder. Her only other baggage was her small carry-on suitcase, despite having a week-long trip ahead of her. Apparently there would be a ‘glam squad’ for her public appearances, which included a stylist and clothes, so she didn’t have to pack beyond daily wear. “And I forwarded my updated schedule to you when I was in the bathroom because it changed again.”

“Okay,” Chloe said, trying not to be sad about having to say goodbye to Beca for six whole days. They hadn’t been apart that long since their last winter break at Barden. She extended the handle on Beca’s suitcase and twirled it to hand to her.

“Let me know what happens with the awards. If you win, you better call me pronto.”

“I’m not going to win,” Chloe started, ignoring Beca’s eyeroll of disagreement. “But if I do, I will.”

“Okay. Promise you’ll watch ‘Seth Meyers’?”

“Do I promise to watch your first appearance on late night television?” Chloe laughed. “Yeah, I promise.”

A horn honked outside. “Okay, I gotta go.” Beca slipped her arms around Chloe’s waist to tug her close and into a kiss. “I love you.”

Chloe stole one more kiss before replying, “I love you, too.” Beca turned toward the door and
Chloe swatted her rear end. “Go get ‘em.”

Beca yelped and threw Chloe a glare over her shoulder followed by a wink, and then she was out the door, down the steps, and into the waiting SUV.

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Home without Beca didn’t quite seem like home. It wasn’t that Chloe was dependent on her other half; it was just that Beca really felt like her other half and it was off-putting for her to be gone. Like her arm was missing. Chloe was grateful that she was busy at work; it was a nice distraction. The school year was ending in three weeks and between keeping on track with her own lesson plans, she was also proctoring the standardized tests for the older students after school and helping the prom committee finish their planning.

On Friday, she worked late, too nervous to go home and sit around doing nothing while she waited. Beca had taped her “Late Night with Seth Meyers” interview that afternoon and other than receiving a photo of Beca getting her hair and makeup done, taken by an assistant of some kind, Beca had been painfully incommunicado all day. Chloe tried to not bother her too much; she knew she was busy. The schedule Beca sent her had her bouncing from interview to interview, from a radio station to a television studio to a hotel to a restaurant and back to a hotel, only to be set to start it all over again the next day.

Chloe was racked with nerves, and not knowing how it went or how Beca was feeling about it only exemplified it. That morning, she had invited Suzanne Washington over to watch it together, but by the end of the day, she was borderline nauseated about it and had to break Suzanne’s fangirl heart and rescind the invite.

Suzanne, of course, promised to watch regardless.

So as she settled onto the couch with the Thai food she could barely bring herself to touch, she was eternally grateful she was alone for this moment. Her phone reminded her that she wasn’t truly alone - it chimed every other second as the Bellas’ group texts blew up as the show began, and Chloe finally turned off her ringer, because it was all just too much and she was probably going to spend the next hour crying.

“But 30 Rockefeller Plaza in New York, it’s Late Night with Seth Meyers! Tonight…from X-Men: Apocalypse, Michael Fassbender. Comedian Kate Berlant. Record producer Beca Mitchell.”
Yes, she burst out crying when Beca’s name flashed across the screen in giant white block letters over an aerial shot of New York City.

“Music from Katy Perry. Featuring the 8G Band. Ladies and Gentleman, Seth Meyers."

Of course Beca would be last, preceding Katy’s performance. Chloe gave up on her food altogether and curled herself into as tight a ball as she could on the couch as she stared at the television screen, willing time to go faster as she suffered through the monologue and first two guests.

After the fifth commercial break, they teased the final segment, and Chloe about jumped off the couch when the camera tilted at sharp angles into the dressing room that housed Katy, because Beca was in the background in front of a mirror, shaking out her hands with her eyes closed, oblivious to the fact that she was caught on camera.

This was it. It was happening. Everything was about to change. Again. When the commercials ended, Chloe held her breath and considered crawling under the coffee table to hide. As illogical as that was.

“Our next guest is a newcomer to the music scene. She’s the magician behind the country’s number one song right now, ‘Unchain Me.’ You guys might have heard it?” The audience cheered and Chloe covered her mouth, unsure if she was about to laugh, cry, or vomit. “Katy Perry’s here to sing it for you later, but first, please welcome - in her first late night show appearance, by the way, not just here on ‘Late Night’ but ever - please welcome to the show, Beca Mitchell!”

Chloe wasn’t sure how she managed to not pass out. There were so many emotions exploding in her that she was sure her brain would short circuit and quit. But it didn’t, so she watched Beca walk out, wearing her hair down and a little black dress and every bit of confidence Chloe knew she had mustered up in the dressing room to hug Seth Meyers, wave at the audience, and take a seat in the chair next to his desk.

“Hi, welcome to the show!”

Beca struggled for a second with getting her dress to fall correctly after she sat, and Chloe giggled and felt her own stress lessen a touch. “Thanks for having me,” Beca said, plastering a smile on her face.

“This is your first time on a talk show.”
“It is! This is so dope.” Chloe saw Beca wince at her choice of words.

“Dope?” Seth teased. “I’m glad we’re dope. So, you’re Katy Perry’s new producer.”

“I am, yeah.” Beca played with her hair nervously and then visibly made an effort to stop.

“And this was your first time producing an album, is that right?”

“Yeah, that’s right. It’s pretty crazy. I produced this song with my friend Emily at my college internship last year -”

“That was ‘Flashlight,’ right?”

Beca smiled at the smattering of applause. “Yeah.” The song hadn’t ended up going very far, but Chloe knew Beca was thrilled that at least some of the audience had heard of it. “And that studio - Residual Heat in Atlanta, look it up -” Chloe laughed at Beca’s plug and its accompanying wink. “They released it and I guess someone liked it.”

“That someone being Katy Perry.”

“Well, more like an A&R rep at her label, but sure, we can say that.”

Chloe smiled - Beca was oddly at home in that chair. Her banter was natural, her underlying nerves were endearing, and her passion was palpable.

“So what’s it like, being fresh meat and getting thrown into the lion’s den like that? I expect most producers start small and work their way to the big leagues, but you kind of just kicked down the door.”

Beca laughed. “I didn’t exactly do that. But yeah, I mean, it was scary. It’s not like I didn’t know what I was doing, but sometimes it felt like it. But I couldn’t let myself get intimidated, you know? I was given the chance to do what I always wanted to do. I just kept reminding myself of that every
“What a great mantra that is to have. This isn’t your first brush with success though, is that right?”

Chloe saw Beca’s genuine smile turn a little plastic, and while Chloe knew enough about these types of appearances to know that embarrassing or flashback moments were staged more times than not, she felt nervous for Beca at the obvious impending blast from the past.

“I’m not sure what you mean.”

“I think we...do we have a clip? We do?”

“Oh God, what...”

Beca was cut off and a bootleg video of the Bellas’ disaster of a performance at that 2014 convention played, and when it ended to reveal Beca hiding her face behind her hands, Chloe was doing much the same. Never in her lifetime did she ever think that embarrassment would be aired on national television. It felt worse than the Kennedy Center incident, because other than Amy’s “mishap,” that performance was good. If not a little flashy.

The audience was applauding and hooting and Seth was laughing and Beca was red in the face when she lowered her hands. “Thanks for that, Seth. Thanks.”

“If I’m not mistaken,” Seth said, still laughing and pointing off-camera at a monitor, “that was you up there twerking.”

Beca grimaced and kept stealing glances at the monitor, that was, presumably, replaying the clip. “No. No, I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Correct me if I’m wrong, but weren’t you the captain of your college a cappella group, the Barden Bellas?”

“You’re not wrong,” Beca said through clenched teeth. Chloe knew she was playing up the annoyance plenty, but the show’s choice to use that clip out of the dozens of possibilities was
There was another weak smattering of applause, until Seth went on, “You guys might not remember that name, but I bet you all remember Muffgate 2014. Anybody? Anybody?” A photo of an inverted Amy flashed on the screen. That got a raucous reaction and Beca actually brought her hands up to cue the audience to quiet down.

“We don’t really need to revisit that particular event. We apologized and went on to win the World Championship of a cappella last year to reinstate the a cappella program at Barden University, which is more important than Amy’s wardrobe malfunction.”

“Oh, right, I think that was the wrong clip. Can we roll the right one this time, guys?”

This time, a clip of their performance of “Girls” at Worlds ran and Chloe hugged her knees to her chest. It was all too much, the reminiscing about the Bellas coupled with this amazing moment for Beca. Her face hurt from smiling.

“That’s better. That’s better,” Beca was saying when the clip ended and the audience clapped.

“That performance earned you the World Championship title.”

“It did.”

“And I can’t help but notice...can we play that back? Just that one... yeah that, put that up for the audience.”

Chloe gasped and covered her mouth again; they’d put up a still frame of Beca and her on stage together, right arms in the air right after Chloe had popped out from behind Beca during their ‘where my girls at?’ lyric.

“I can’t help but notice...there seems to be a really attractive redhead behind you there. Who is that? Can you get me her number?”

“Her name’s Chloe.” The photo disappeared and Beca was fighting a losing battle at hiding her
smile as she scratched her nose. “And I thought you’re married.”

“I am, but exceptions can be made. Can you get me her number?”

“Well, theoretically I could.”

Seth pulled an iPhone out of his pocket. “Awesome!”

“But I’m sorry to inform you, she’s engaged.”

“What? Aw, no, really?”

“Really.”

“Who’s the lucky guy?”

Beca had fully given up on hiding her smile. “Me.” She brought her left hand up to point at the ring on her finger. The audience erupted in cheers, and Seth grinned at her. Obviously he knew, but it was flattering for Chloe nonetheless.

“Congratulations,” he said once the applause began to die down. “On your engagement, and of course on the success of this record.”

“Thank you.”

“We’ll be right back with Katy Perry. Beca Mitchell, everyone!”

The screen faded to black and into blaring commercials, and Chloe sat, staring at the screen but not seeing, stuck in a perpetual thought loop of did that really just happen?

She sat through Katy’s performance of a song Beca created, and got to see Beca one last time as all
the guests from the night joined Katy and Seth to wave goodbye.

When she finally shook herself out of her stupor and picked up her phone, she had more than a hundred text messages and fourteen missed calls.

She ignored them all and called Beca, hoping she would answer despite it being 4:30am in New York.

“Hello?” came Beca’s sleepy voice over the phone.

“Hi, baby. It’s so late there, I’m sorry.”

“Mm. No, it’s okay. I’m still on California time.”

“I just watched it.”

“You did? What’d you think?”

“I thought it was perfect. And you were so great, Beca, really. And you looked so nice.”

“Thanks,” Beca said through a yawn.

“I cannot believe they brought out that convention performance. Did you know that was going to happen?”

“Yeah. Not until today though.”

“So embarrassing,” Chloe said with a laugh, pinching the bridge of her nose.

“Sorry,” Beca said, laughing a little, too.
“How was the rest of your day?”

“It was fine. Busy, you know.”

“Yeah.” They were quiet a moment, and then Chloe continued, “I’m so proud of you, Beca.”

“Thanks, babe.” Beca yawned again. “I miss you.”

Chloe sighed and rested her cheek against her knee, eyes surveying the empty home that felt three times as large as usual. “I miss you, too. I know you have to be up in a couple hours, so get some good sleep, okay?”

“Mm. Okay. G’night, Chlo. Love you.”

“Love you, too. Goodnight.”
I Wanna Be With You

Chapter Summary

Sometimes, you need to find a way to make the distance more bearable.

With Beca's absence came the freedom of transportation. She had Beca's car at her disposal for the week and its convenience was a reminder of the sketchiness and inconvenience of the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority, which was the kickstarter to how she found herself on Saturday, sitting in a chair across from a car salesman at a Mazda dealership, waiting for him to finish drafting what seemed to be endless documents.

“All right, Miss Beale. Everything came back clear for you, so if you're ready to sign…”

Chloe smiled and accepted the documents that were still warm off the printer. “Sounds great. Do you have a pen I can borrow?”

She couldn’t help but hop around in joy as she accepted the keys to her new car, a 2015 Mazda3 in a gold-tinted metallic silver color that, much to her amusement, was officially called “Titanium Flash Mica.” (The name didn’t have anything to do with her color choice. Really.) The salesman laughed at her glee and opened the driver’s side door for her and she slid behind the wheel of the car - of her car - and pressed the ignition button to feel it purr to life.

For a split second, when she’d given her phone to the salesman to take a photo with her new car, she regretted her decision. Not buyer’s remorse, but that she did it without Beca, that it was something they would have had fun doing together, test driving and ganging up on the salesman to negotiate, and while it wasn't a spontaneous decision to buy a car and had already chosen what she wanted and where she would buy it weeks ago, she hadn't planned to do it at that precise time.

But she needed something to fill her time, and frankly, she needed her own car. She was twenty-five and in a sprawling metropolis and not having one had interfered with her ability to go where she wanted, when she wanted, as efficiently as she wanted, to do what she wanted - for an entire year. And that was long enough, she figured.

Her drive home was freeing, more freeing than it ever felt in Beca’s Corvette, even with the top
down, because this was hers, and only hers, and she worked hard and saved for a year and made financial sacrifices she didn’t want to make in order to have this freedom.

Plus, Beca was largely absent again that day, communication-wise in addition to the obvious physicality, and it gave her something to do.

She decided to keep her new purchase a secret for now, even keeping it off social media in case Beca decided to check it. It would be a fun little surprise when she returned.

Her drive home gave her time to think, the much-needed and much-missed brain space that came with a long drive. There was something calming about driving that was its own version of peace and quiet. It was the kind of solitude she didn't mind; two hours alone in the car was actually desirable, but two hours alone at home was maddening.

She wondered how a year had gone by so quickly. It felt like it was last month that she was on stage with her Bellas in Denmark, celebrating their win. It felt like last week that she was starting her new job, and now the school year was almost finished. It felt like yesterday that she was ringing in the new year at that party, when she asked Beca to marry her, when Beca slipped a diamond onto her finger. She glanced at the jewel, protruding prominently as her fingers curled over the steering wheel, and smiled.

How had they already been engaged for five months? Nearly half a year. They still hadn't picked a date - other than a season - or a location, or a traditional versus modern ceremony. Her mother was starting to harass her about it during their weekly phone calls, and of course she was expecting Chloe to take Beca home with her to Florida and get married in her family’s church. She repeatedly dismissed her with a standard, “We’re not in a rush, Mom. Please stop asking,” which was usually met with excuses about needing to clear her calendar and inform Chloe's aunts, uncles, and cousins so they could clear their calendars as well.

They were both dancing around it a little, Chloe admitted to herself. Not out of apprehension, she was sure of that, but out of not knowing where to begin. Sure, she had her fairytale wedding organized in her mind and some photos saved on her computer of things she liked, but when it came to getting the ball rolling and making phone calls and such, she felt a little lost.

No wonder Cynthia Rose hired a wedding planner, she thought with a sigh.

She remembered something Aubrey had said to her when she visited at Halloween. Something about getting married before things got too crazy.
Things were already getting crazy. And it was probably only going to get crazier. She gnawed at her thumbnail until Aubrey’s voice in her head chastised her for it.

Maybe they were avoiding starting to plan it because they didn't want to plan it.

Chloe loved being spontaneous and while Beca didn't much care for it, she cared even less for elaborate formal events, a point she drilled home every year at the Bellas’ Prom Night Do-Over. She showed up in torn jeans and flannel or a hoodie or a tee, declaring it her right to break the party’s dress code, as captain. Chloe would always pout about it and bat her eyelashes at Beca and eventually Beca would give in and let Chloe do something like put a corsage on her or, in the case of the year of Beca essentially squealing like a pig, taking the roll-on glitter to her before she knew what it was. She griped about that for a solid week, finding glitter in places she hadn't thought humanly possible. And Chloe had laughed in delight every time she mentioned it.

It wasn't that Beca didn't like dressing up; she simply hated the stuffiness of scripted evenings and the lack of originality that came with things like the Chicken Dance and Conga lines.

Chloe wished she'd taken the time at the dealership to sync her iPhone with the car’s hands-free system, suddenly overwhelmed by the need to call Beca. It was just past 3:00, which made it 6:00 in New York and from what she could remember from the itinerary in her email inbox, Beca was scheduled to wrap up her day at 7:00.

She blew out a breath to calm herself, knowing she wouldn’t be able to talk to Beca at that exact moment anyway.

Before turning toward home, she pulled into the drive-thru of Taco Bell.

Because she could.

Chloe texted Beca shortly after 7:00 pm New York time.

Hi!
Hey you. Sup?

Nothing. Can we Skype instead of text?

There was a pressing question Chloe wanted to ask her, and she didn't want to ask it over text. She wasn't sure about asking it over Skype either. She’d have to wait and see how she felt.

Yea. Fair warning I'm still wearing the clown makeup.

Chloe giggled and pulled her computer into her lap to launch the application. She saw Beca come online a few seconds later and rang her. She failed at containing the squeal that bubbled up in her, finally seeing Beca's face after three whole days.

And Beca hadn't been lying. She was completely made up.

“Are you...did they put fake eyelashes on you?” Chloe said, laughing.

“Shut up.”

“I missed your face.”

“This is hardly my face.”

“It's still your face. And I missed it.”

She knew Beca was blushing, not that she could really see it under the layers of makeup and the video chat quality.

“I missed your face, too.” Beca was lying on her side on her hotel bed, wearing a white v-neck tee and Chloe couldn't see what else. The room looked nice; she remembered the word ‘Marquis’ was in the name of the hotel. “How've you been?”
“I’m fine. I mean, I miss you. Duh,” Chloe said, poking out her tongue. “But I’m okay. I’ve been helping the Prom committee.”

“Of course you have,” Beca said with a grin.

“They need more staff chaperones and I said I’d help. Whaddya say - Beca Mitchell, will you go to Prom with me?” That wasn’t the pressing question.

Beca laughed and Chloe kept her smile steady. “Wait. Are you joking?”

“Nope. Why not?”

“You know I hated your Prom nights, right?”

“You didn't hate them. And this would be you keeping me company while I make sure no one spikes the punch or hooks up under the bleachers, not putting on a gown and slow dancing under a disco ball.”

“For the record, I'm not opposed to slow dancing with you.”

Chloe flipped her hair over her shoulder proudly. “Is that a yes?”

“Maybe. What day is it?”

“The fourth.”

She watched Beca's attention slip from their video window and she knew Beca was checking her calendar. “Okay. That's a yes,” she said a few seconds later.

Chloe clapped and bounced in her seat in the couch. “Yay!”
“Whoa, you're making me car sick, Chlo.”

She settled quickly, flashing an apologetic smile. “Sorry.”

Her smile shifted into a lip bite, and Beca caught it immediately. “What?”

“Nothing,” she said quickly, wiping the look off her face and hoping Beca would let it go. She wanted to ask Beca, but it still didn’t feel right.

“Chloe…” Beca said slowly. “What are you thinking about?”

She laughed, high and fast, and she knew better to think it would throw her off, and she was right when she saw Beca staring at her through the screen, eyebrows raised in expectation. “Nothing. Nothing. I'll tell you later. I promise.”

Beca's eyebrows fell into their normal position and Chloe watched her resettle herself a little on her bed. “If you say so.”

Chloe drew an X on her chest with her finger. “Cross my heart.”

“Alright,” Beca said, voice still holding a touch of suspicion. “So, when I was looking at the calendar - I don't know where the year went, but, like, our anniversary is next week.”

Chloe tried not to giggle too much, since that was exactly what was on her mind, and ever since a particular thought lodged itself in her brain on her drive home, she was bubbly at the mention of it. Because it was really soon. “Yeah it is! But you know what they say: time flies when you're having fun.”

Beca rolled her eyes a little bit smiled. “I guess that's true. Anyway, is there anything you want to do? Dinner? Mini road trip? A spa thing?”

There was only one thing Chloe wanted to do, and it wasn't any of Beca's suggestions. She smiled
and shook her head, and said, “Leave it to me, okay?”

“You keep planning all these elaborate romantic things. Are you ever going to let me have a chance to sweep you off your feet?”

“Well, my birthday’s coming,” she said with a batting of eyelashes. “I promise to not plan anything for it.”

“Oh wow, that's generous,” Beca said, laughing. “Thanks.”

“Let me do this, and I won't ever plan anything romantic ever again. I promise.”

“That's a big fucking lie!”

“I wouldn't lie to you!”

“You're lying right now!” Beca screeched with a laugh.

“Okay, maybe I won't be able to never plan anything romantic ever again. It seems a little early in the game to abandon romance.”

“Ya think?”

Chloe laughed with Beca, missing being able to reach over and touch her. She sure looked pretty though, even through the screen and sometimes fuzzy connection. Chloe shifted in her seat, biting her lip for a second to work up a little courage to do something she knew Beca would like. And then she grabbed her computer and stood, heading for the stairs.

“Where we goin’?”

“Upstairs,” Chloe said, glancing at the screen to see her head bouncing in and out of the frame in the tiny preview window within Beca's larger frame.
Beca was smiling. “Why are we going upstairs?”

“Because that's where the bed is.”

“Chloe Beale,” Beca said with an affected deep southern accent, a hand pressed to her chest. “I do declare. Are you suggesting we...be intimate with one another over this here fancy moving picture box?”

“Why did you suddenly become a southern belle?” Chloe set her computer on Beca's pillow and started to climb into bed when she noticed her battery being at a dangerous 23%, and that wouldn't do - not for this.

“I have no idea,” Beca said, laughing.

“Do I need to offer your family a dowry, too, now? Am I about to embark on a secret virtual love affair that no one can know about?”

Beca actually snorted in laughter, wiping the corners of her eyes. “But really though, are you being serious right now? We’re gonna do this?”

Chloe leaned forward, closer to the camera, and then bounced back. “If you want to. I need to go back down and grab my charger first, though. Be right back.”

“I'll be here!”

Contrary to her statement, Beca wasn't there when Chloe returned and slid onto the bed with a little more fanfare than was necessary, having expected Beca to be waiting and watching. Instead, the bed on the other side of the screen was empty.

“Baby?” she called.

“One sec!” came a distant reply.
While waiting, Chloe got herself situated in bed, lying on her side and playing with the angle of her laptop so it would, hopefully, be at least semi-flattering as she kept only her upper half in frame. At the last second, she slipped out of the yoga pants she'd been lounging in all evening.

Beca showed up a few minutes later. “Sorry, I had to get that shit off my face.” Her face was indeed scrubbed clean of the layers of professional makeup, and the false eyelashes were gone. Her hair was still loose, though, with all its smooth, perfect, professionally managed waves.

“Welcome back,” Chloe said, smiling at her.

“So. How do we do this?” Beca asked, scooting lower until she was lying down and mirroring Chloe. “We just...like, get down to it?”

Chloe shrugged. “It's not like I've done this before.”

“I find that hard to believe.”

“Excuse you,” she scoffed. “I've never had need or reason to.”

“Fine, fine,” Beca said, holding up a hand defensively. “So, I guess I don't have to ask you what you're wearing, in this scenario.”

“You don't know what I'm wearing,” Chloe teased. “Not on the bottom anyway. Or under this shirt. If anything.” She ran her hand over her stomach, slipping under the edge of her gray tank top, letting the motion push it up a little. The way Beca's eyes snapped to the movement made a tingle crawl up her spine.

“That's true,” Beca said after staring and then shifting her focus back to Chloe's face. “But you could show me.”

“You want me to take my shirt off?” Chloe asked, shifting a little as though to make ready and liking the excitement she saw flash in Beca's eyes. “That seems a little fast.” And the disappointment that followed.
“Well, I mean. If you want. It's okay if you don't.”

“I will. I just thought maybe, you know…” She pushed her hand a little higher under her top and then reversed its path, Beca's eyes glued to it, to disappear out of frame. She trailed her fingers down, grazing the front of her navy blue panties, teasing herself just enough to pull an authentic sigh from herself.

She kept her eyes on Beca, watching her reaction and the way her lips parted, focus at the edge of the screen where Chloe knew her arm disappeared.

“Maybe what?” Beca asked suddenly.

Chloe gave a shrug of her right shoulder, the one not pressed into the mattress, and the motion inadvertently pulled her hand back up against herself, a quiet inhale making its way to Beca's ears.

Beca reached for her computer and Chloe heard the telltale sound of the volume being turned up several clicks. “Maybe what?” she repeated.

Chloe exhaled lazily, letting her fingertips trail patterns along her thigh. “Maybe we could...take our time.”

Beca huffed a little. “Take our time?”

“So impatient,” Chloe said, smiling. She liked affecting Beca this way, and having complete control of the situation. “You’d think this was one of your consolation fantasies or something.”

“You remember that?”

Chloe’s mind spun through everything that had transpired on New Year’s Day shortly before Beca saying she wanted to try intimacy over Skype: the way Beca had looked sitting astride her, and the intensity of Beca’s eyes staring down at her, waiting and watching for them to climax together. She let her fingers drift higher, grazing lightly. “Of course I remember.” She paused for effect as much as to tease herself, and then pressed her fingers firmly. She let the accompanying moan slip out and watched a blush that she knew would be taking up residence on Beca’s face creep into place.
“Oh...wow...um...okay then...” Beca stuttered. She was still on her side like Chloe, but she was obviously struggling to figure out what to do, alternately levering herself up with her elbow, then tucking her arm under her pillow, until she finally turned onto her back and looked to her right for the screen.

Chloe watched her get settled, trying three times to get her hair lying in an apparently acceptable manner that was both comfortable and out of her face. And while the screen only had Beca’s upper half in view like Chloe’s, the angle of Beca’s arm reaching out of frame told Chloe exactly where her hand was.

And if the angle didn’t tell her, the way Beca’s eyelashes fluttered would have.

The knowledge of it, and not being able to see it, made Chloe’s pulse race. She rolled onto her back quickly, her apparent eagerness drawing a chuckle out of Beca.

“I thought we were taking it slow?”

“That was before you started touching yourself.”

Beca huffed a laugh. “How do you know that’s what I’m doing?”

“Because I have eyes, Bec. And I know what you look like the first time I touch you.”

“I wish it was you touching me.”

Cold heat rolled over Chloe at the words, and at Beca’s tone. And Chloe could see the slight movement in Beca’s arm, a dead giveaway that she was right. “Me, too,” she breathed, spreading her legs a little to tease herself more properly. The thin material between her legs was already damp, the combination of voyeurism and exhibitionism doing wonders for her libido. Her natural instinct was to ignore it, because in their usual situation, Beca would find out for herself soon enough. But, Beca was trapped on the other side of her thirteen inch screen and on the other side of the country. She wouldn’t know if she didn’t tell her.

Which of course pushed all of Chloe’s little self-conscious buttons. She wasn’t afraid of talking
dirty, not by any means. She just always felt a little silly, until she was really into it. Which she knew she would be a lot more quickly if she did something to accelerate things.

So, she started with saying something.

“I’m already wet,” she tried, working to keep her voice even, or at least the kind of uneven that was sexy.

It must have worked, because she saw, and heard, Beca react to it instantly, her arm giving a particularly obvious motion downward with a simultaneous, “Mmmph,” as she bit her lip, staring back at Chloe.

“Are you?” Chloe asked. Beca nodded. “If I can say it, you can say it,” she encouraged. She wanted to hear the words come from Beca’s lips, to hear the desire that would come with them.

“Yeah,” Beca breathed, eyes flickering back and forth between Chloe’s face and her chest, which, Chloe noticed in her selfie preview, was displaying her arousal quite obviously through her thin tank top. She watched Beca and waited patiently. “Yeah...yes. I’m so wet.”

Chloe didn’t know what effect she expected the words to have on her, but she wasn’t ready for the ball of fire that punched her in the stomach. “Good…” she breathed, taking a second to gather herself while she worked to keep her touch slow and steady between her legs. Beca’s eyes were starting to spend less and less time making contact with her own, and Chloe felt a smirk try to tug its way into place, flattered by the ravenous attention.

She liked being made to feel attractive, and she liked making Beca happy. So she brought her free hand up from where it had been idly lying on her stomach, moving slowly under her shirt until she covered, and then squeezed, her breast.

Beca’s moan of acknowledgment beat her own and she saw the hint of a quick flurry of motion, and with the way Beca’s lips stayed parted, the corners of her eyes narrowing, Chloe knew she’d slipped past the barrier of whatever she was wearing on her lower half.

The thought ratcheted Chloe’s arousal up tenfold and she did the same, briefly, teasing herself, wanting to feel how turned on this was making her and then placing the soaked lace barrier between herself and her fingers once again. ‘Very much so,’ was the answer to that question.
Invigorated by Beca’s enthusiasm, she sat up quickly to pull her tank top up and off. She laid back down, having to deal with her loose hair as Beca had, almost forgetting Beca was on the other side of her computer, until she glanced to her left to see her face, even more flushed now.

“God…” Beca said with a slight groan, eyes glued to Chloe’s bare chest. “How are you so hot?”

Chloe offered her one of her sexiest smiles, and it was completely wasted, but she knew it would be, and she was fine with that. To better acknowledge her, she brought her hand up again, using her fingertips to tease the pebbled, sensitive tip of her breast, circling it slowly. It was barely more than a tickle for her, but Beca’s shoulder seemed to move a little more obviously, enjoying the show. So she circled it again, and then pinched it, and pulled, which drew a moan out of her and a groan of empathy, or maybe jealousy, out of Beca. She saw Beca’s free hand pop into the frame, mimicking on her own breast what Chloe had just done.

And Chloe moaned again. Beca was always mind-blowingly sexy to her, and watching her get lost in arousal was easily one of Chloe’s favorite things. “Take your shirt off,” she demanded more so than asked.

Beca was moving immediately, not bothering to sit up more than what she needed to get her tee over her head. She threw it behind her with such gusto it made Chloe giggle, which Beca flashed a smile at in response as her hand immediately returned to her bare breast, fingers playing over it without much direction or intent other than, probably, ‘everywhere.’ Her other hand disappeared out of frame again, a throaty moan following a moment later.

It was the moan that made Chloe stop trying to tease herself. She slipped her hand under the waistband and opened her legs further, running her fingers over herself gratuitously. “Beca…” she whined. “I need you.”

“I need you, too,” Beca croaked. Her breasts were jostling slightly with her efforts out of frame. She wasn’t caressing the one anymore, more like holding it to have something to hold, and her eyes were starting to stay closed longer and longer every time she blinked.

Which Chloe was fine with; if Beca needed to close her eyes to focus on getting herself there, she was totally cool with it.

But she still wanted Beca’s eyes on her, at least for a bit longer. And she knew a sure-fire way to keep them on her.
She reached for her computer, nudging the corner of it to push it back and rotate it a little, widening the angle and bringing her hips into the frame, or more specifically, her navy blue panties and the fact that her hand was moving with a good bit of activity within them.

“Fuck…” Beca squeaked, staring for a second and then looking up at Chloe’s face.

Chloe smiled at Beca, watching her struggle to keep her eyes up. “It’s okay,” Chloe said. “I want you to look.”

She watched Beca’s eyes drop and Chloe gave a roll of her hips. She saw Beca’s pace change, slowing down but becoming more exaggerated, and Chloe moaned, knowing why. She had to ask though. “Are you inside?”

Beca nodded, eyes flicking up for a second before re-fixating on Chloe’s hand.

Chloe swallowed, feeling the tendrils of her climax creeping their way into existence. “Good. That’s good.”

“Fuck, I’m so wet, Chlo.”

Beca’s sudden complete sentence almost startled her, but with the comprehension of it, she settled - as much as she could in the situation, anyway. She held her breath and bit her lip, imagining Beca and how she felt under her fingers, how the muscles in Beca’s thighs would twitch when she touched her in a certain way that she loved, how Beca’s hips would roll, how fingers in Chloe’s hair would pull her closer between her legs. “God, you taste so good,” she finally said with an exhale. A whimper was the only response she got. “I wish I could taste you right now.”

“Jesus, me, too.” Beca’s quick, vigorous movements were back, and Chloe knew what that meant.

“Are you close, baby?”

Beca nodded, focus still locked on Chloe’s hand.

So Chloe reached down with her free hand and hooked her thumb under the elastic and pushed
them down, lifting her hips to get them lower, until they were around her upper thighs. She couldn’t reach to push them any lower, and she didn’t care to sit up and stop what she was doing to accomplish it, and while it forced her legs closer together, it seemed to amplify what she was doing. And while she was acutely aware that she was now completely nude and on camera, she didn’t care, because the broken, high-pitched sounds coming from Beca were more than enough to quell any potential anxiety that could have come with it because Jesus this was sexy.

“I…” Beca started, voice cracking.

Chloe watched her face, waiting for the telltale ticks she knew so well. Her favorite was the way only her left eye would twitch, like a half-wink, and while it was hard to see what Beca’s eyes were doing as they were perpetually downcast, she caught the twitch, and the tendrils that were creeping in rooted themselves firmly.

“Bec?” she asked, hoping Beca would hear the desperation in her voice. She was almost at the point of no return and didn’t want to trip over the edge of the cliff without Beca.

Beca nodded, sharply, eyes finally snapping back to Chloe’s face.

Which was enough for Chloe, falling over the cliff with a groan as her thighs clamped closed on her hand to ride it out. She watched Beca fall a second later, nothing but a silent scream as her shoulders lifted off the bed, her body tense as they watched each other.

They were both still after, aside from the rising and falling of their chests as they caught their breath.

Beca’s eyes were closed, and Chloe used the pause to reach over and nudge her computer parallel to her once again and then returned to her side to be able to see the screen more comfortably and tugged the sheet over herself, immediately chilly without the benefit of cuddling. She smiled at Beca when she finally reopened her eyes.

“Wow,” Beca said quietly, still somewhat immobile.

Chloe giggled and brought her hand up, wiggling her fingers at Beca and then taking her middle finger between her lips playfully to suck on it.
“Fuck,” Beca breathed, watching her until she pulled her hand back with a pop as her finger slipped from her lips.

“Wish it was yours,” she said with a wink.

Beca groaned and rolled onto her side and kept rolling, pressing her face into her pillow. “Chloeeeee.”

Chloe laughed. “What?” she asked innocently, while laughing.

Beca rolled her head back enough to peek at Chloe with one eye. “I miss you.”

“Aww,” Chloe said, quieting her laughter. “I miss you, too, baby. Hurry up and come home.”

“Thursday.” Beca resettled onto her side, and Chloe pretended not to notice the way she surreptitiously tucked a finger into the corner of her mouth, since she clearly wasn’t doing it for show.

But Chloe noticed it, and enjoyed the little thrill it sent through her. “That’s four more days,” she whined.

Beca’s hand tucked itself back under her pillow. “I know. I’m sorry. But you’ll have summer vacation soon, right? If I have to go somewhere again, you’re coming with me.”

“I thought I just came with you,” Chloe cracked, not missing a beat.

Beca rolled her eyes, grinning. “Shut up.”

Chloe pressed her lips together, failing miserably at hiding her smile. “I’m excited to go on a trip with you. We used to travel all the time with the Bellas. And we haven’t gone anywhere since Copenhagen. Except Portland,” she forced herself to amend for the sake of accuracy. “And Malibu. But those don’t really count.”
“Yeah, it’ll be fun. I wonder where I’ll go next? I feel like this kind of stuff is either here or there and not really anywhere else.” She was quiet, and Chloe could see her thinking. “Maybe Miami? That’d be cool, you’d get a free trip home. Or Chicago? Austin has a cool music scene.”

“That would all be cool.” Chloe paused, taking a second to evaluate how she was feeling about...everything. “You know, we haven’t talked about where we want to go for our honeymoon yet.”

Beca shifted. “We haven’t talked about the nine thousand other things that have to happen before the honeymoon, either.”

“Well, forget about that stuff for now,” she said with a shake of her head and wave of a hand. “Let’s have fun thinking of where we want to go. I mean, babe, we have twenty grand to blow on a crazy trip! We can daydream, and actually do it. What do you think - tropical or mountains?”

“I feel like mountains? Not that I can ski.”

“You can’t ski?!” Chloe said incredulously.

“Did you just meet me?” Beca said, equally incredulous. “Do I look like someone who would ski, and ski well?”

Chloe grinned. “I could teach you. Though I prefer snowboarding.”

“That sounds even worse!”

“It’s easier, in my opinion. I bet you could do it. You’re kind of like a skater chick who doesn’t skate. And you’re way more coordinated than you ever give yourself credit for. I had to teach you all that choreography, remember? I bet you’d pick up a board pretty quickly.”

“I think I’ll watch you from the comfort of the couch.”

“We’ll see about that,” Chloe teased. “So, okay, we’re going to the mountains. Where can we go and spend twenty thousand bucks on a ski trip?”
“Switzerland, probably?”

“Ooh, Switzerland! Oh, but...if we get married in like, March or April kinda like we talked about, the season’s probably going to be over or almost over and everything will be crappy. We have to go somewhere in the southern hemisphere.”

“Excuse you, Miss Geography,” Beca said, laughing.

“What? Our daydream has to be realistic since it’s realistic for us! We could probably go to, like, Argentina. Ooh, or New Zealand! They have mountains!”

“New Zealand?”

“Yeah! What do you think?”

“Can I hold a koala?”

“That’s Australia, baby,” Chloe said with a sympathetic chuckle.

“Well, if we’re going all the way to New Zealand to go skiing, we can go to Australia so I can hold a koala.”

Chloe was still giggling, not expecting cuddling a marsupial to be the thing Beca wanted to do most on their honeymoon. “Okay, deal. New Zealand and Australia.”

“And a koala!”

“Yes, yes, we’ll find you a koala somewhere.” If Chloe could have reached through her screen to pinch Beca’s cheek, she would have. She was just too adorable sometimes.

“I’ll also accept a wallaby if a koala is unavailable.”
“Noted.” The way Beca was smiling at her, enjoying the conversation, stirred up the nerve to ask Beca what she hoped would be received well. She suddenly felt like she was proposing all over again. “Hey, Bec? I was thinking…”

“About?”

“Neither of us are really...into the wedding planning thing…”

“We are not hiring Aubrey as our wedding planner.”

“Oh gosh! No, no. Of course not.”

“Thank God.”

“So I was thinking…” she kept her eyes on Beca’s, watching for any preliminary reactions of jumping to conclusions. Seeing none, she took a breath and continued. “For our anniversary, when you get back?”

“What about it?” Beca asked, smiling at her a little.

“What if we elope?”
“Elope?!” Beca was clearly taken aback. She had even jerked backwards a couple inches, hand to her chest.

“It's okay if you don't want to,” Chloe said quickly. “It was just an idea.” She chewed on her lip, resisting the temptation to chew on her thumbnail instead. Beca's reaction had been markedly different in her imagination. “Forget it.”

“No, I…” Beca's index finger tapped a random rhythm against her sternum. Thinking. “I...you caught me a little off-guard.”

“You don't have to decide right now. It's a big deal, I know.” She wished she’d waited to ask until Beca was home. She desperately needed to touch her, or properly look into her eyes to see how she was feeling. They could see each other through the video feed, but there was no eye contact. She suddenly felt terribly disconnected.

“What would we do? Run to Vegas? Get married by Elvis?”

Chloe's attention snapped out of her thoughts. That wasn't a rejection. “We can do whatever you want.”

“Going to the courthouse is a thing, right?”

Chloe’s back straightened a little, in excitement. “Yeah, that's a thing.”

“Maybe that could be our thing?” Beca was smiling.
Beca was smiling.

“Yeah? You think?”

“How many people are going to put us through the wringer if we do this?”

“Fuck ‘em.” Chloe saw the surprise on Beca's face at her expletive and smiled. “This is for us. Not them.”

“We’d need witnesses or something right?”

“Yeah. I mean, it can be whomever. Like, the other couples waiting. I saw Kelly Clarkson tweet that she was a witness for a couple because she happened to be there.”

Beca laughed. “I don't think Kelly Clarkson is going to be our witness, babe. Oh, wait, it says here for twenty bucks, they’ll provide a witness.”

“I know it won’t be Kelly Clarkson,” Chloe said, rolling her eyes, stomach flip flopping suddenly. “Wait. Does that mean you want to do it?”

Beca was shaking her head but still smiling. “You're insane. Let's do it.”

“Oh my gosh. Oh my gosh!” Chloe sat up, filled with the need to grab Beca and hug her. Instead she grabbed her computer and held it up to accommodate her elevated position. “We’re getting married next week.”

“We’re getting married next week!” Beca repeated, giving a little cheer with her hands.

They stayed up, talking over their computers, until Beca fell asleep in front of the screen sometime around three in the morning California time. Beca had insisted she was fine to stay up (until nearly
six a.m. her time), that her first commitment of the day wasn't until a lunch interview with Variety.

Chloe swore her to secrecy over their new plan, which Beca readily agreed to. There had also been a conversation about the unglamorous things to consider. Things Chloe could look into in the days leading up to it. Things Beca needed to make Chloe aware of.

Beca admitted to being nervous how her bosses would take the news, once it was done. She was open about her relationship and engagement to a woman, declaring it on national television even, but the PR team had been making comments to her about staging outings with certain male celebrities to get the tabloids’ tongues wagging and get her face in front of more people. After all, a girl who gets around with famous guys garners a lot more attention than one who’s settled down and married. Beca had argued that the press and public loves lesbian couples, and that they’re, apparently, a hot one at that. It shut them up, more or less. For the time being.

Chloe didn’t like it one bit. Her life and her relationship weren’t pawns in a publicity stunt. It was gross that it was even something up for discussion, that this was probably a discussion had time and again with celebrities in all genres. It made her wonder how much of Hollywood was staged; apparently far more than she had ever considered possible.

Chloe was the one to cross the worst bridge of them all, forcing herself to detach her pride and emotions, and tell Beca she would look into getting a prenuptial agreement. She didn’t ask Beca if she wanted one, if she thought they would ever need one. Those were questions that led to statements like, “I know we’ll be together forever,” and “I would never try to take anything from you,” which, in five or ten or twenty years could come back to haunt them. She had decided months ago, after Anika Schmidt questioned her about it, that it was ultimately the right thing to do. That having one didn’t mean she believed their marriage would fail. That in reality, half of all marriages end in divorce. That it is simply in their best interests to make an agreement now, rather than, if they were in the unlucky fifty percent, fighting about it in court.

Not that Chloe would ever try to take something from Beca that she had earned. Or vice versa.

But people did weird things when they were hurting.

So, during on their video call, Chloe googled it, and found a do-it-yourself agreement on a legal documents website she’d seen advertised on TV repeatedly. They agreed on “what's mine is mine and what's yours is yours,” and to split the value of anything owned jointly an even fifty-fifty. Just in case something from the internet wasn’t legit, she promised to have Suzanne Washington’s attorney husband look at it before Beca got home. Chloe would be sure to swear her to secrecy as well. She was a bit of a wild card, being a Bella fangirl, but Chloe assured Beca she wouldn’t do something to ruin it, like post about it on an a cappella Facebook group or blog; Suzanne championed their relationship, and wouldn’t jeopardize it.
The logistics of it were turning out to be less and less like the version of “let’s run to the courthouse and get married” portrayed on TV and in the movies.

While Chloe looked up the prenup, Beca figured out which courthouse was most convenient, and they were pleasantly surprised to find one less than thirty minutes from their house.

They had to resign to themselves that, as romantic as it would be to get married on their anniversary - and only ever have one such date to remember instead of two, as Beca cheekily pointed out - their anniversary was Thursday and Chloe had to work, and couldn’t take time off. There was no way they could make it from school to the courthouse and through the bureaucracy and a ceremony in the two hours between class ending and the courthouse closing. Which led to having to find a different courthouse, one closer to Chloe’s campus.

So they agreed to get their license on Thursday, and go back Friday. Plus, it was by appointment only. On Wednesdays or Fridays. So romantic. Which, despite her internal comment, Chloe did find incredibly romantic. She could marry Beca in the sewers beneath the streets of Los Angeles and it would still be romantic.

“Four o’clock?” Beca asked, eyes visibly scanning her browser while Chloe watched.

“May 27th?”

“Mhm.”

“May 27th, 2016,” Chloe stated. Committing it to her forever memory. The day her new life would truly begin. Their new life.

“That’s the day.”

“Book it.”

“Done,” Beca said with a particularly enthusiastic clicking of her trackpad.
It was weird and kind of amazing that, over the course of an hour, they’d planned their entire wedding; a far cry from the months of stress and thousands of dollars she’d witnessed friends go through. Theirs was going to cost a hundred and fifty dollars.

“I think this was a productive evening,” Beca said with a smile once they returned from a bathroom break, both confident they had everything they needed.

“I’ll say,” Chloe replied, giggling. There was still one - well, two - things Chloe made a mental note of needing, but they could take care of that with a quick errand when Beca was home.

On Monday, as promised, Chloe asked Suzanne to have her husband review their agreement. She didn't add the detail that they were actually getting married this week, and thus avoided the need to worry about her spilling the beans. She already knew they were getting married, so this favor wouldn't be out of the ordinary.

Of course, it didn't preclude the enthusiastic hug that came with the acceptance of performing said favor.

Chloe stayed at school late, prepping various awards for her students, things like Silliest Storyteller, The Egg Award (for egg-cellent achievement, of course), and The Marble Award (for someone who did a marble-ous job, obviously). Every student would receive a certificate on Awards Night. She didn't believe in awards simply for participation; Chloe was far too competitive for that. She did, however, believe each student excelled at something, and that it was worth recognizing.

Tuesday was a raucous day in her classroom. They might only be six-years-old, but they knew the school year was almost over, and that it meant freedom. Her students all seemed to and claimed to love school - *ah, to be that age again* - and she believed they did. They were excited by notion, however, of upcoming trips to Disneyland and the like. They were ready to be finished. And frankly, so was Chloe.

She was thankful that Awards Night was technically Awards Afternoon, happening immediately after school. It was sure to be long; she knew most of the teachers, at least in elementary, had done exactly as she had, and recognizing a few hundred students one by one was not going to be speedy. Then add the awards for the Middle and High school students that Chloe was obligated to sit through for moral support, to make it to the end for the faculty awards, and she was going to be at school well into the evening.
She was proud of her rugrats, each one of them walking across the stage with an amusing amount of concentration and poise as she had them practice that day in the classroom. They’d grown so much in just nine months. She wished Beca could be there, to see how much they’d changed from when she met a few of them at the Fall Festival. She’d have liked more of her colleagues to meet her, especially now.

But more than anything, she wished Beca could be there when it was her name that was called, at the very end of the night, as the Teacher of the Year.

It wasn’t an award she actively competed for; she just did her job the best she could. But it felt pretty damn great to earn it, and she thanked Principal Sheridan as she accepted the wooden plaque with the black engraved nameplate proudly declaring Chloe Beale, Kindergarten as the 2015-16 West Hollywood Academy for the Performing Arts Teacher of the Year. She was grateful she didn’t have to give some awkward acceptance speech, but she did have to stand at the foot of the stairs next to the stage and listen to her Principal talk about all the reasons she deserved it.

“Congratulations.”

Chloe jumped, the word being whispered in her ear as the audience, what little of it remained, applauded the end of the ceremony. She whirled, recognizing the voice.

“Beca!” she said with a squeal, throwing her arms around Beca’s neck to hug her fiercely, nearly dropping her plaque in the process.

She felt a kiss press to her ear. “Hi, babe.”

“What are you doing here?” Chloe said, feeling breathless as she dropped her arms from Beca’s neck to grab her hand instead and look at her.

“I can leave if you want?” Beca said with a jerk of her head toward the door.

“No! You just surprised me.”

Beca smiled. “That was the plan.”
“Why didn’t you tell me?”

“I didn’t know if I’d be able to leave early or not, so I didn’t want to get your hopes up and have it not work out. But I knew your awards thing was today so once I found out I could, I had them change my flight.”

Chloe couldn’t help herself and hugged Beca again, parting with a firm but gentle kiss. “I’m so happy.”

“Me, too,” Beca said, still smiling. “Is that your boss?” she asked, glancing over Chloe’s shoulder, presumably toward Principal Sheridan.

“She’s the Principal, yeah.”

“She said some really nice things about you.”

Chloe shrugged, feeling a little shy about the whole thing. “Yeah, I guess so.”

Beca squeezed her hand. “You guess so? Just take the credit and be proud of yourself, I am.”

Chloe whined at that, not because she didn’t want to, or because she was sad, but because Beca was just too dang sweet sometimes that it made her insides twist in the best way.

“Want to introduce me? I feel like I should at least say hi.”

“Okay!”

“Ready?” Beca asked in the doorway of Chloe’s classroom, her bag on her shoulder and suitcase by her side.
“Yep!” Chloe grabbed her keys and turned off the lights, locking her room and reaching for Beca’s hand again.

“I had the car service bring me straight here from the airport,” Beca said, handing off her rolling suitcase to Chloe so she could pull out her phone. “Let me call an Uber.”

Excitement leaped in Chloe; she forgot about her little surprise parked in the rear of the school. “You don’t have to do that.”

“We’re not taking the bus.”

“No, we’re not. Come on.” She led Beca out the back entrance to the staff parking lot, to her zippy little car, still gleaming new with dealer plates on it.

“Chlo?” Beca asked as Chloe directed their path directly toward it.

“So,” she started, fiddling with her keys to press a button and pop the trunk, “I might have gone shopping while you were gone.”

“You bought a car?”

“Yep!” Chloe dropped Beca’s hand and kept walking, wheeling her suitcase around to heft it into the trunk. She unlocked the doors and circled back to the passenger side to open it for Beca, gesturing for her to hop in. “It’s been a year,” she continued once she slid into the driver’s seat. “I figured it was time. And also, that if I had to take that bus one more day, I would...well, I’d do something someone would regret.”

Beca laughed at that. “Well, good for you, babe.”

“You know what color it is?” Chloe asked as she started the car.

“Looks dark. Something silvery?”
Chloe turned in her seat, letting a sexy little smirk settle into place. “It’s called Titanium.”

Beca’s head swiveled so quickly, Chloe actually worried she might have given herself whiplash. “What?”

“Just a coincidence. But,” she said with a breathy sigh, “a nice one. I can’t help but wonder what it would be like to listen to it in here sometime. With you.” She could see Beca shift in her seat. “And unlike yours, my car has a back seat.”

“I thought you had to be professional at school?”

“I do.” Chloe leaned across the center console anyway, slipping her hand behind Beca’s neck to pull her into a kiss that they were both quickly fighting over for control. “When parents are around,” she added when she pulled back to take a breath. “But this is the staff parking lot. No parents.”

A whimper escaped Beca, which Chloe readily caught with another kiss. She had half a mind to push herself over the console and into Beca’s lap, but she didn’t need a colleague walking by and seeing that. So she eased the heat of the kiss until she finished it with a soft peck to Beca’s lips. “Let’s go home.”

They’d stumbled their way into the house and up to the bedroom, forgetting Beca’s suitcase in the trunk of Chloe’s car, but there was a new toothbrush in one of the bathroom drawers, so they agreed it could stay there until the morning.

“What are you doing tomorrow afternoon?” Chloe asked later (much later), playing with Beca’s fingers as they laid in bed, stretched out side by side, toes touching.

“Nothing really. Was probably going to work on some new music.”

“New music?” Chloe said, curious since Beca hadn’t mentioned having a new project.
“Just my own stuff. I haven’t been able to mess around for awhile. Why do you ask?”

“Oh! Yeah, I get that. But if you weren’t busy, I was thinking maybe I could pick you up after school?”

“Okay, sure. Where are we going?”

“I was thinking,” Chloe said, lacing and re-lacing their fingers together, “that if we’re getting married on Friday…” she paused, having to let that phrase rattle around in her brain for a second. She glanced at Beca and could see it doing the same to her. “That we should go buy wedding rings.”

“But you have a ring, honey. And I said you don’t have to get me some expensive thing.”

“No, I know,” Chloe said, running her thumb over the Barden class ring that sat on Beca’s fourth finger and served as her engagement ring. “But we should have proper bands. I want us to have real wedding rings.”

Beca wiggled her way onto her side to face Chloe, tucking their clasped hands into the gap between their pillows, and leaned into Chloe to bring their lips together. “Okay, let’s go ring shopping.”
Chloe was anxious all day Wednesday, made worse by students who were cooperating less and less with each passing hour. It was like they could smell the end of the school year looming.

She had her own version of End-Of-Year-itis. She couldn't wait to walk into the jewelry store, hand-in-hand with Beca, and pick out a matching set of wedding bands.

They were a symbol that it was real, that they were really doing this.

Engagements could feel flippant - not that she ever felt flippant about theirs. But engagements were a holding pattern, an intermediate state of being on the sliding scale of single to married.

And she was really, really, ready to slide to the other end of the scale and be married.

She rushed out of her classroom as quickly as she could, but she was forced to stop by Suzanne’s classroom first.

“Hey, Mrs. Washington,” she said, trying to come across as calm and normal as possible.

“Oh, hi, Miss Beale! How are you doing?”

“I’m fine, thanks for asking. I have an appointment I need to get to, but I was wondering if your husband able to review that prenup yet?”

“Yes, yes he looked at it last night. I meant to come find you at lunch today, but I was roped into recess duty. You know how it is, when someone is assigned it and they don’t want to do it they’ll find someone who’s nice enough to accommodate -”

“I know, it’s terrible,” Chloe said, cutting her off impatiently. “What did he say? Is it legit?”
“Oh yes, he said it’s perfectly legal. You just need a notary when you sign.”

“Great, thanks so much!” she chirped, giving a wave as she took her leave. “Gotta run, see you later!”

Chloe beeped her horn outside the house, tapping her fingers against the steering wheel eagerly to the beat of the song on the radio, as she waited for Beca.

"You could have come in, you know," Beca said as she climbed in next to Chloe. "Instead of honking at me like you're picking me up for a high school date."

"Your dates honked at you when they picked you up?" Chloe said with a frown. "That's not very romantic."

"Says the woman who honked for me so we can go buy wedding rings."

"Hey. I'm excited and didn't want to slow us down."

"Who's to say my dates weren't excited to be with me and get the good times started?"

"Oh my gosh," Chloe said with a groan. "I don't want to think about your 'good times' unless they're with me."

"Aww." Beca patted Chloe's knee. "Don't be jealous. You've definitely given me the best good times."

Chloe reached over and squeezed Beca's thigh. "Damn right I have. Oh, Suzanne said her husband said that prenup is legit."
Chloe grabbed Beca's hand after opening the door for her, following her into the jewelry store. It felt exactly like she thought it would - nervous excitement. But a good kind of nervous. And full of happiness. A greeter at the entrance directed them to the set of counters that housed their wedding and engagement rings, where a warm-seeming woman stood awaiting a customer. Chloe saw the woman look both of them over, eyes pausing on their linked hands.

Chloe held her breath; the country had come a long way in terms of equality and acceptance, but every new person she met, with whom she shared that her partner was a woman and not a man, was a potential negative experience waiting to happen.

She felt pretty confident, however, that a twenty-something woman working the ring counter at a Beverly Hills jeweler wouldn't be thrown by a same-sex couple.

"And how may I help this lovely couple today?" the employee asked pleasantly. Chloe exhaled.

"We’re getting married,” Beca said, stepping up to the glass counter, Chloe in tow.

"Congratulations.”

“Thanks,” Chloe said, and was surprised when Beca took the lead.

"We need wedding bands. A matching set, preferably.”

"Well you certainly came to the right place,” the woman said cheekily, and Chloe saw Beca try to hide her eye roll behind a glance down toward the jewelry. “Now, are you wanting simple bands, or something more intricate?”

Beca glanced at Chloe for the answer. “Simple. With engravings.”

“We can engrave most any ring here so that won’t be an issue. If you'd follow me down…” They followed the worker along two cases to one that proudly displayed an array of bands. “Do you have a preference on metals?”

Chloe looked at the ring on her finger, thinking. She wanted it to match her engagement ring and
she wasn't sure if she's ready to transition from the fancy bauble to a simple band. It made her proud, wearing it. “Babe, this is platinum, right?”

“Yeah.”

“Okay, platinum for me.”

“Me, too,” Beca added, smiling at the worker.

“Great. Let me get you sized and I'll show you some options I think you'll like.”

A short while later, Beca and Chloe split to opposite ends of the counter, tiny borrowed pencils in hand, writing in secret the engravings their chosen rings would hold. Chloe had known from pretty much Day One of recognizing her feelings for Beca what it would say, should she ever have the chance. She wrote it neatly, capital letters in the spaces provided, and chose a script from the examples. She was done in seconds and handed it back to the employee, and it gave her time to watch Beca across the glass, thinking, starting to write, hesitating, getting a new paper, and then writing with purpose.

Beca handed in her paper with an apology for taking a while, which Chloe scoffed at and squeezed her around her waist.

“It will only take a few minutes to do the engravings. I'll be right back.”

Chloe kept her arm around Beca's waist and felt Beca tip her head to rest it on her shoulder. “This is really happening,” Beca said.

“ Seems that way.”

“Are you happy?”

Chloe pulled back from Beca to look at her with an expression she was sure had to read as absolute flabbergastation. “Am I happy?”
“Yeah. Are you happy?”

“Bec...I've never been happier in my life.”

Beca smiled at her and pulled her back to stand close again. “Just checking.”

“You butt,” Chloe said with a hip check into Beca. “Don't tease me.”

“I wasn't teasing!” Beca's face told her the opposite.

“Okay ladies,” the employee said, interrupting their fun. “Chloe, this is yours,” she continued, handing a ring box to Chloe. “I mean, it's Beca's ring. Beca, this is Chloe's. Since you were secretive about your engravings I assumed you didn't want the other to see it in the middle of our store.”

“You assumed correctly,” Chloe said with a smile, tucking the box into her purse.

If Chloe was anxious on Wednesday, she was bouncing off the walls on Thursday, with the excitement of going to the courthouse to get their marriage license on top of their first anniversary.

It started with waking up to Beca having made chocolate chip pancakes and bacon for her for breakfast. It continued with Beca showing up uninvited but not unwelcome in her shower, almost making Chloe late for work. Though they had to part ways so Chloe could go to school, that didn’t stop Beca from making her smile all day.

It started with texts popping up all morning. Quaint messages about how happy she makes Beca, about the color of her eyes, about the way her hair looks first thing in the morning. There were strings of words that felt like lyrics to a song Chloe couldn’t place.

*When I close my eyes, it's only you I see*
Flowers showed up at lunchtime. Two roses, one white, one red, their stems twisted around each other. The card simply read, “Will you?” Chloe smiled at it, and took a photo, sending it to Beca with the caption, Absolutely. How’s tomorrow for you? ;)

I think I can make tomorrow work.

Chloe had arranged for flowers to be sent to the house for Beca, too, but those were far more traditional - a dozen red roses with a card that stated how much she loved Beca. Certainly nothing like what Beca had sent; Chloe knew everything about flowers and their meanings, and she knew Beca knew, which made it all the more special. White and red? Unity. Two roses, stems twisted together? Marriage. It was a one-two punch. Three, if you counted the card.

Beca was a romantic through and through, even though she would deny it to most people until her last breath.

Chloe waited in the lobby of the courthouse after school, waving emphatically when Beca walked in, eyes half on her phone and half glancing around the room until she spotted Chloe and stuffed her phone in her bag.

“Hey,” Beca said, rushing to her. “Sorry I’m late, traffic was a nightmare.”

“It's okay!” Chloe said. She was too excited to care that Beca was ten minutes late. “Come on. I figured out where we need to go.”

After getting held up for an extra minute by the security guard thanks to the metal on Beca’s boots setting off the detector three times, they were side by side at a counter, a blank form between them with a bold header declaring it an Application for Marriage License.

“It's weird that we have to apply to get married,” Beca said, looking at the paper. “When you really
“Yeah,” Chloe said with a repetitive clicking of the pen in her hand as she read through it. “I mean, I get it. But it's weird.” She pointed at the page. “Hey, this doesn't ask for a Bride and Groom. It says ‘Party A’ and ‘Party B.’ That's really cool.”

“Well, now we have to decide who’s the A and who's the B in this marriage,” Beca said, throwing a smirk at Chloe that made her heart flutter. It was definitely more the word ‘marriage’ that caused the fluttering, but the smirk didn’t hurt either. “I’ll be B, for Beca.”

“I could be B for Beale.”

“Just be A; Beale comes before Mitchell.”

Chloe couldn’t stop the snort of laughter from escaping.

“Alphabetically,” Beca amended, elbowing Chloe.

Chloe giggled and started filling in the blanks with her name, pausing when she got to the section about changing her name. She knew enough about this process to know if either of them were to change it, now was the time, as it was a whole ordeal to do it later. It was scary to think about not being a Beale anymore. Family was everything to her, and yes, a name was just a name but it was so much more than that.

“I think I’m going to change mine.”

Chloe looked up at Beca, surprised, to see her watching where Chloe had been hesitating. “What?”

“Yeah. I’ve been thinking about it. And...you know, I don’t really like my family? Generally speaking.”

Chloe didn’t know whether to smile or cry, and she was considering a mixture of both. “You want to take my last name?”
“Yeah, I think - no. Yes. Yes I do. Like...legally. I’m going to have to stay Mitchell like...professionally. Because that’s how I’m estab-oof!”

Chloe half-tackled Beca in a hug, squeezing her tight and almost knocking her into the couple that was at the counter next to them, filling out the same form. She apologized over Beca’s shoulder, receiving a knowing smile in return. For some reason, Chloe had never really considered Beca taking her name, not beyond the initial ‘that’s one option of many.’ But suddenly it was everything to her.

“C’mon, babe. They’re going to close soon,” Beca said, smiling when she eased Chloe back. She pointed at the paper. “Get to it.”

“Right, okay,” Chloe said, shaking her hand when she realized it was trembling as she resumed filling out her personal information. After signing the bottom of the form she passed it to Beca and watched her do the same, giving her a nudge when she filled in REBECCA for her first name.

“Shut up.”

And instead of skipping the blank for the ‘New Last Name’ like Chloe did, Beca stopped and neatly printed BEALE in the box.

When they finished, they waited for a clerk, to whom Beca handed the completed form with a smile, receiving little by way of a response.

The woman looked the form over and clipped it to a stand, immediately typing on the computer at her station. Transcribing their information, Chloe assumed.

“I need ID for both of you,” she mumbled while typing, and Chloe and Beca set their Driver Licenses on the counter side by side, waiting for her to finish. Once she did, she picked up their IDs, swiped them through her computer, and handed them back, barely taking the time to compare the photos on their licenses to their faces. A moment later, the printer next to her whirred to life and spit out a multi-colored piece of paper and she handed it back to Beca. “Review it, make sure it’s accurate. If it is, both of you sign on line twenty-six.”

“Looks good to me,” Beca said, handing it to Chloe to check.
And Chloe had to pause for a second, because this wasn’t an application; this was a *license*, and once they signed, they were a handful of additional signatures away from being legally married. It was amazing and slightly terrifying. But mostly amazing. She clicked her pen and signed in her section and passed it back to Beca with the pen, and watched her sign.

The clerk signed her name and sent them on their way, Beca folding the license into thirds to tuck it into her bag.

“So, that’s it then,” Chloe said, feeling a little out-of-body as she pushed the glass door open to exit the courthouse, Beca following.

“That’s it.”

“This time tomorrow, we’re going to be married.”

“That’s the plan!”

Despite the romance of the day, the evening was relatively normal.

As normal as the last day they could tick the “Single” box on their tax returns, anyway.

Chloe was in her closet, flipping through hangers, trying to decide what she would wear to their wedding tomorrow afternoon. It wasn’t going to be a fancy affair by any means, but she wanted to look nice nonetheless. On her computer she had seven dream wedding dresses, fancy, lacy, beaded, expensive. All but forgotten.

Beca was on the phone ordering Thai food for delivery.

“What are you going to wear tomorrow?” she asked once she heard Beca end the call.
“Dunno,” was Beca’s response, and she showed up a moment later in her side of the closet across from Chloe. “Clothes, I suppose.”

“That’s a good start.” Chloe paused in the middle of her sundress section - yes, her closet had sections based upon style, so what? - flipping back and forth between a white one and a light blue number. “Is it weird if I wear white? I always assumed I would.”

Beca smiled at her through the tunnel that connected the two sides of the closet. “As long as you don’t mean it to represent being a virginal bride.”

Chloe responded with a poking out of her tongue. The white dress was the same she’d worn to Beca’s contract signing at Capitol, but more importantly, to their romantic evening at the Santa Monica Pier to celebrate it. It had been one of their first real dates, with cotton candy, and roller coasters and a carousel and Ferris wheel, and an incredible sunset over the Pacific Ocean. And mind-blowing sex when they got home, she remembered fondly.

A year later, and it was still mind-blowing. She wondered how she got so lucky.

She pulled the halter top dress out, looking at it and pondering.

“If you’re wearing a white dress, does that mean I have to wear a black suit?” Beca asked, pulling a blazer out of the back of her closet.

“Party A is wearing a white dress. Party B can wear whatever she feels comfortable in.”

Beca returned the blazer and pulled out another hanger, a blue and black flannel hanging over it. She held it up, eyebrows raised.

“Except that,” Chloe said, swirling her finger in its general direction. “Or anything in that family.”

“Okay, okay,” Beca said with a light-hearted sigh. She pulled the blazer out again, along with a white silk v-neck blouse Chloe didn’t remember seeing on her in the past. Beca held them up for approval and Chloe nodded. “What about jeans?” Beca continued.
“You want to wear jeans to our wedding?” Chloe pulled a hanging garment bag off the far end of the closet rod and worked her dress into it.

“I mean, nice ones. Without holes and stuff.”

She watched Beca hang the two items back up and pull a pair of dark wash jeans off the closet shelf, having to stand on her tiptoes to reach it. She unfurled them with a shake, and Chloe could see the price tag still attached at the pocket. “With the blouse and jacket?” Chloe asked.

“Yeah. And...no boots. I’ll wear heels.” She turned around to her hanging shoe rack, much emptier than Chloe’s since most of Beca’s shoes were too clunky to fit in the compartments and were instead strewn about the closet floor, and pulled out a pair of glossy black pumps.

“Okay, fine,” Chloe said. The thought of jeans at her wedding made her itch, but she knew Beca would look nice and would be comfortable, and in the end it didn’t really matter who was wearing what.

“Sweet.” Beca turned and left the closet, jeans and shoes in hand, and Chloe looked over her shoulder to see her appear a few seconds later, setting the items down on her desk in the corner.

“Hey, Bec?” she asked when she heard the telltale squeak of their bed, knowing Beca had plopped down on it.

“Yeah?”

“It feels weird to like...meet at the courthouse tomorrow, like we’re meeting for coffee. And I don’t want to leave my car at school overnight.” She picked out the shoes she wanted to wear with her dress and placed them in the bottom of the garment bag, departing the closet to rifle through the dresser near their bed. “Do you think you could take me to work in the morning and come pick me up?”

“Sure, no prob.”

She found her beige strapless bra and a matching thong and while neither were particularly sexy as she hadn’t had the time or thought to run to Frederick’s of Hollywood to get something more racy, she figured she could save that for their proper honeymoon. Which reminded her…
“Our honeymoon!”

“What about it?” Beca asked, glancing up from her laptop.

“We need to book our trip!”

Beca patted the bed next to her and Chloe sat. “You mean this trip?” She swiveled the computer on her thighs toward Chloe, screen full of stunning photos of snowy mountains, skiers, and a rustic-looking lodge.

“Oh my gosh,” she exclaimed, grabbing the computer from Beca. “You’re booking it?”

“Well, I’ve been looking at options. Reading reviews on Tripadvisor and whatever. This place seems like the winner. I wasn’t going to book it without talking to you first. I don’t for sure know your summer schedule.”

Chloe leaned over and kissed Beca. “Thanks, baby. Can we do it this weekend? I want to be able to focus on it and my mind is kind of elsewhere tonight.”

Beca smiled and leaned in for another kiss, this one lasting a little longer than the previous. “Wonder why that is?” Beca asked when they parted.

“ Might have something to do with marrying the love of my life tomorrow,” Chloe said with a grin and another peck to Beca’s lips. The doorbell rang, signalling the arrival of their dinner, and interrupted the further kissing Chloe was considering. “Come on, let’s go eat.” She scooted off the bed and headed down the spiral stairs, hearing Beca a few steps behind her. “By the way, have you written your vows yet?”

“Wait, we’re supposed to write vows?”

Chloe spun on her heel at the foot of the stairs, corralling Beca by grabbing both railings. “You wanted to use the default ones? Better or worse and all that?”
“Um...no?” Beca tried, drawing out the ‘o’ several syllables. There was panic on her face that was sweet, in its own way.

“It’s okay,” Chloe said with a smile, trying to relieve the stress. “They can be whatever you want. I don’t care, as long as you mean it.”

Beca nodded, panic lessening.

“But I’m writing my own.”
I Do

Chapter Summary

The moment we've all been waiting 8 months for! (And that Beca and Chloe have been waiting 5 years for.)

Chloe wasn’t prepared for the level of anxiety she would be hit with Friday morning after Beca dropped her off at school.

She was shaky and jumpy and so nauseated she had to skip lunch.

Her friends asked her what was wrong, telling her she didn’t look well, which only made her feel worse.

She finally forced herself to eat a granola bar and apple from her stash in her teacher’s cabinet so she wouldn’t pass out later.

It was confusing, because she wasn’t anxious, yet she was riddled with anxiety. Or maybe she was classifying her emotions incorrectly. Whatever it was, she needed time to speed up so the feeling would go away.

During afternoon recess, she stayed in her classroom, with the lights off, and simply breathed for five minutes until she felt the roiling in her gut ease. With a final exhale, she pulled her journal out of her bag and flipped it open to where she’d been jotting notes and thoughts for months to be rearranged into a narrative statement that would serve as her wedding vows. She was finished, really, but she wanted to recite them from memory, and to be sure she didn’t forget anything.

The bell on the playground rang too soon and yet not quickly enough.

She dismissed her students at three o’clock, following them out with her purse and garment bag over her shoulder, detouring into the women’s staff restroom near the office.
She stood in front of the mirror and decided she didn’t look nearly as pale as she did in the morning when she glanced at herself in her compact after the earlier comment. The thing was, was that she didn’t feel the need to be nervous, and yet she was, and that was actually kind of not fair. It was really not fair. She wasn’t scared or nervous to get married.

“Sack up, dude,” she said to herself, and then chuckled at her full adoption of Beca’s colorful vocabulary.

Beca.

The thought of her was instantly calming. And while all the nerves were due to Beca, that one singular sentence yanked Chloe’s thoughts back into reality. She was going to marry Beca, who made her happier than any person ever had or could ever hope to, who made her feel like a whole person, who made her feel like she could do anything.

It was that feeling she wound up and held onto as she whipped the zipper down on the garment bag to change.

“Someone’s lookin’ foxy. You got a hot date?”

Chloe was almost home-free from the school building without someone stopping her. So close. “Thanks, Anika,” she said to her former enemy, whose face was sincere. “I do, so I gotta run.”

She left with a wave of two fingers, hands full, one with her garment bag over her shoulder now containing her work clothes, a tote bag that held her hair and makeup products, and her purse which held, most importantly, Beca’s wedding band.

She’d checked her purse no fewer than three times throughout the day to make sure it was still tucked into the inner zippered pocket.

When she exited the building, she realized she had no idea if Beca was even there yet, having been too preoccupied to check her phone, which was still set on Do Not Disturb from the school day.
But Beca was there, parked in one of the visitor spaces, standing at the rear bumper, phone pressed to her ear as she talked, gesturing with her free hand to emphasize whatever it was she was saying. And she looked...well, she looked fucking sexy, if Chloe was honest with herself. And why wouldn’t she be honest with herself? With her crisp white silk blouse tucked into her dark jeans that literally hugged every possible curve, and the fitted black blazer that accentuated her waist, and the pumps that were gleaming in the afternoon sunlight, and her hair which was loose in its natural waves, but as Chloe got closer, she could tell it had a tiny braid running along her left side to pull it back and keep it out of her face. The fact that she was wearing chrome aviator sunglasses didn’t do a damn thing to quell Chloe’s urge to run up to her and pin her against the hood of her car. She was majorly, majorly rocking the chic, powerful chick look.

“Hey, I gotta go. I’ll hit you back tomorrow,” Chloe heard Beca say when she was closer and had been spotted. She wedged her phone into her pocket and took an exaggerated step forward to greet Chloe with a kiss. “Hey babe. You look really nice.”

Chloe felt a little breathless from the swirl of emotions stirred up - Beca’s attractiveness, her kiss, her compliment, the fact that she was picking her up so they could go get married. “Thanks. You look…wow,” she finished with a giggle that made Beca’s mouth screw up into a smile that was a little cocky and a little embarrassed.

“I’ll take that as a compliment?” Beca said as she took the tote bag from Chloe’s hand and walked around the car to open the passenger door and set the bag on the floor, popping the trunk with the remote in her hand at the same time.

Chloe flipped the garment bag off her shoulder and into the trunk, not caring whether or not it laid flat since her clothes were a jumbled mess in it already. She closed it and smiled; Beca was still holding the car door for her, waiting for her to get in. “Why thank you,” she said as she stepped in and sat down, tucking her skirt in carefully so it didn’t get caught in the door when Beca closed it.

“Ready?” Beca asked, backing out of the parking space.

“As I’ll ever be. Do you have everything?”

Beca took a breath as though to say something, and then paused, exhaling. “I was about to say I forgot the license at home, but something tells me that joke wouldn’t fly today.”

Chloe huffed and swatted Beca’s leg. “Not funny.”
“I didn’t make the joke!” Beca said with a laugh.

Chloe swatted her again and then soothed the spot, leaving her hand on Beca’s thigh. “No, but you thought about it!”

“But the fact that I didn’t say it counts for something!”

“Shut up and drive,” Chloe said with a laugh.

Despite having an appointment, and despite being on time, they were forced to wait. In true government fashion.

“I’m glad we have a few minutes,” Beca said when they sat down on a bench in the hallway near the door that housed the civil ceremonies. “I got something for you.”

“You did?” Chloe said excitedly. She hadn’t thought to get Beca anything, which she immediately kicked herself for.

“It’s nothing fancy.” Beca reached into her purse and pulled out a small white cardboard box. She opened it, revealing a single white orchid blossom. She lifted it out and set the box aside. “It’s for your hair.”

“Oh, Bec…” Chloe started, having to bite her lip to stop the waterworks before they started. There would be time for that in a few minutes. “I love it.” She turned her head. “Put it in for me?”

“With pleasure.”

She could see the petals of the delicate flower trembling a little, and she smiled to herself. It was the first real moment of Beca appearing nervous about all this, other than her second of panic about vows.

Beca combed her fingers through Chloe’s hair a few times first, smoothing it until she could slide
the clip holding the flower in to rest securely just behind her left ear. “Beautiful.” Her hand drifted down to catch Chloe’s chin with a finger and bring her back to face her again. “You’re beautiful.”

Chloe felt warmth blossom in her chest and she blew out a shaky breath, smiling at Beca. “You’re really trying your hardest to make me cry before we even get in there.”

“I’m not, I swear,” Beca said, eyes going wide with sincerity. But then they narrowed, corners crinkling. “But I could start trying.”

“Save it for the ceremony so we at least have one photo without me being a crying mess.”

Beca sat up straight. “Wait, photos? What photos?”

“Calm down,” Chloe said with a laugh. “Didn’t you read the FAQ? They have a photographer that takes a picture of each ceremony that we can buy.”

“What, like when they take your picture on a roller coaster and you can buy it afterwards?”

Chloe had to laugh again. “Something like that. You didn’t think that today, of all days, you’d get away with us not having a picture together.”

“A girl can dream,” Beca said with an airy sigh and a cheeky smile, and Chloe knew she was teasing.

“Speaking of…” Chloe said, pulling her phone out of her purse to swipe open the camera. “Come here.” She pulled Beca closer and into frame to take a selfie, plus a few extras before Beca tried to escape. Which she didn’t, readily submitting to the mini photo shoot.

The door next to them swung open with a burst of activity to startle them, a man and a giggly woman rushing out, presumably just married, followed by a handful of presumed friends and, finally, a woman in a pantsuit holding a clipboard. “Beale-Mitchell?”

“Holy shit,” Beca said, immediately clapping her hand over her mouth. “I’m sorry, don’t take that the wrong way,” she rushed, speaking through her fingers.
Chloe’s reaction had been much the same, though internal, as her stomach was in her throat. She shook her head, taking a breath to be able to smile at Beca. “It’s okay. We’re okay.” She picked up her purse with one hand and stood, holding the other out for Beca to take. “I love you.”

“I love you, too.”

There wasn’t music or her father to walk her down the aisle. There weren’t pews full of family and friends with fancy flower arrangements adorning them. There weren’t a dozen members of a wedding party and a pastor in fancy robes and her soon-to-be spouse waiting for her at an altar.

“Oh, can you notarize something for us real quick, before we start?” Chloe asked the clerk at the door, rational thought not quite lost. “It’s a marriage thing, not like, a random thing.”

“Sure. It’s a ten dollar fee,” the clerk said, guiding them to her desk in the corner.

“We need to do this now,” Chloe said to Beca, pulling the prenuptial agreement out of her purse. “And we never have to think about it again.”

“I know, babe.”

She set it down on the desk and borrowed one of the dozen pens sitting in a cup and flipped to the last page, signing above her printed name. She handed the pen to Beca who did the same. They had to hand over their IDs again, and the agreement was notarized and finished. “There, done. Now, let’s do this.”

So, instead of the hundreds of friends, and the fresh flowers, and “Canon in D,” and a heavy dress with a long train and a veil, Chloe walked down the aisle with Beca at a normal pace toward an older woman with graying hair and wire-rimmed glasses on her nose wearing a plain black robe, standing behind a small wooden podium under a fairly tacky arch covered in fake flowers and greenery.

“Ladies,” she said with a smile. “I’m the Deputy Commissioner of Civil Marriages for Los Angeles County and I’ll be conducting your ceremony today. May I have your license?”
“Oh, yeah, hang on.” Beca dug in her bag and handed the folded paper to the clerk.

“And your rings?”

“Right here,” Chloe said, pulling the small box out of her purse to pass it and Beca did the same. She watched the Commissioner unbox the rings and set them separately aside before handing the boxes back to the girls as she scanned the license. “Oh, and we have our own vows. Or...well, I do.”

“Okay. You can put your personal things to the side over there,” she said with a glance toward the empty chairs in the room.

Beca took Chloe’s purse and set it with hers on a chair in the front row, and Chloe didn’t miss the slight look of apprehension on Beca’s face at the mention of the vows. But, to her pleasant surprise, Beca said, “I have my own, too.”

“Wonderful. Now, who’s who?”

“Beca,” said with a raising of her hand.

“And Chloe,” Chloe said with a wave.

“You make a beautiful couple. Are you ready to begin?”

Chloe took a breath and turned to face Beca, who was holding her breath, too. They both noticed, and exhaled with shared nervous laughter. “You ready?”

Beca nodded and reached out, slipping her hands into Chloe’s. “Ready.”

“Okay then. We are gathered here in the presence of this witness…” Chloe spared a thought toward the clerk in the back of the room. “For the purpose of uniting in matrimony Chloe Marie Beale and Rebecca Ann Mitchell.”
Chloe scrunched her nose at the use of Beca’s legal name and Beca gave a helpless shrug.

She could feel it, the hot stinging behind her eyes already starting.

“The contract of marriage is most solemn and is not to be taken into lightly, but thoughtfully and seriously, and with a deep realization of its obligations and responsibilities.”

Beca grimaced jokingly, making Chloe giggle and glance at the Commissioner apologetically.

“Chloe, do you take Rebecca to be your lawfully wedded spouse?”

Chloe took a mental inventory of her emotions. She was shockingly calm, though her heart was pounding, and she knew her hands were clammy but so were Beca’s. For being the event absolutely nothing like she had ever dreamed it to be, it was perfect.

She squeezed Beca’s hands. “I do.”

“Rebecca, do you take Chloe to be your lawfully wedded spouse?”

Beca’s lips twitched, in the way that told Chloe she wanted to say something, and if she knew Beca, and she was sure she knew her pretty darn well, she was thinking about making a wisecrack about Party A and Party B. But instead, the twitching stopped, and she smiled softly, and squeezed Chloe’s hands in return. “I do.”

“Chloe, you may say your vows.”

Chloe took a breath, swallowing the lump in her throat and putting every ounce of focus on Beca’s eyes to steady herself. It didn’t help as much as she wanted it to, because she could see Beca’s emotions starting to falter, too. But Beca was smiling, and that was enough.

“Beca, when I first met you, you were a stubborn, attitude-y girl who blew me off.” She saw Beca’s eyes widen, but Chloe smiled and kept talking. “But once you let me get to know you, I saw right through that façade to the beautiful soul inside, and I’m the luckiest girl in the world to be
standing here right now, saying these words to you: I promise to be your lover, companion, and friend. Your partner in parenthood, when we get there. Your ally in conflict, when we have to take down some Deutchbags.” Beca sniffed a laugh. “Your biggest fan when you take over the world and your toughest adversary when you tell yourself you aren’t good enough to do it. Your consolation in disappointment on the worst days, and your accomplice in mischief on the best. This is my vow to you, my equal in all things.”

“Damn it, Chloe,” Beca whispered with a smile, shaking a hand out of Chloe’s grip to wipe the tears that were trailing down her cheeks.

Chloe used the moment to do the same, feeling a tear rolling down her right cheek. She brushed it away and held her hand out to rejoin Beca’s when she was ready.

“Rebecca? Your vows.”

Beca sucked in a breath and relocked her hands with Chloe’s. “I...okay, so, I suck at writing. Like, vows. I tried. I really did. But I kind of failed. At the traditional thing. So. I did what I know.”

Chloe smiled at Beca, squeezing her hands in encouragement. “I don’t care what format it’s in.”

“Okay,” Beca said with an exhale and a clearing of her throat.

Chloe’s heart fluttered, more than it already was, if that was even possible. “Did you write me a song?”

“I...okay, I wrote one...I was going to use it to propose to you. Because you like that sort of thing. But you kind of threw a wrench in my plan.”

Chloe giggled and bit her lip. “Sing it for me now?”

Beca glanced around the sparse room. Nervous. But her eyes found Chloe’s again, and she took a breath, quietly singing a lilting melody, that was maybe a little off-key thanks to her emotions. Not that Chloe cared.
“Will you
Spend all your days with me?
A family of our own
As we start our lives anew.
Oh, are you the one who stays with me
Through seasons of my life?
Chloe, will you be my wife?”

Chloe’s mind drifted the tiniest bit to the roses she’d received yesterday, and the note that read, “Will you?”

“Will you
Commit yourself to me
Knowing we were meant to be?
We will have our day.
There is nothing standing in our way.

“All that’s left between us are some vows to say.” Beca stopped and shook her head at the line, and Chloe squeezed her hand to tell her it was okay.

“Just you and me
And nothing in our way.”

Chloe knew tears were streaming down her cheeks, but she couldn’t bring herself to let go of Beca’s hands to do anything about it, so she just let them fall.

“So, I guess what I’m saying...is that I promise to be here for you. Good times and bad. Always.”

Of course Beca had expressed herself through song. It was the absolutely perfect way to do it, and Chloe was sure her heart was in a melted puddle all over the floor.
“Chloe?” The clerk’s voice startled Chloe out of her reverie and she looked over to see her holding out her hand, ring between her fingers.

Chloe finally dropped Beca’s hands and pushed the tears away, hoping her makeup wasn’t running; she had purposely worn waterproof mascara, but you never knew. She took the ring and turned back to Beca, who held out her left hand expectantly. Chloe noticed her class ring was gone.

“A ring is a tangible symbol of everlasting love that seals the vows of your marriage. Chloe, place and hold the ring on Beca’s left hand and repeat after me: ‘Rebecca.’”

Chloe bit her lip and then smiled, slipping the band over Beca’s finger into place. “Rebecca.” She didn’t miss the tiny glare she got in return.

“‘With this ring, I thee wed.’”

She took a breath, memorizing the moment. “With this ring, I thee wed.”

“Now, Rebecca?”

Beca reached out and took the other ring, not bothering to take her eyes off Chloe, who held up her left hand and splayed her fingers.

“Please do the same for Chloe. ‘Chloe…’”

Chloe felt the cold metal of the ring slip over her fingertip, down along her finger, until it nestled perfectly against her engagement ring, and the warmth of Beca’s fingers, holding it in place.

“Chloe.”

“‘With this ring, I thee wed.’”

“With this ring, I thee wed.” Beca rejoined their hands immediately.
“By virtue of the authority vested in me as Deputy Commissioner of Civil Marriages for the County of Los Angeles, I now pronounce you married under the laws of the State of California. You may seal your commitment with a kiss.”

Beca’s arms were around her neck before she had a chance to think, lips pressed to Chloe’s. Chloe caught her around the waist, pulling her close and almost lifting her off the ground, earning her a squawk of protest through the kiss. “Put me down,” Beca said before kissing her again. Chloe laughed against her, doing her best to kiss while grinning.

“Congratulations, and may you have a long and happy life together. Kathy, I need you up here to sign as witness?”

Chloe pressed one more kiss to Beca’s lips and allowed her attention to return to the Commissioner, who was scribbling with a pen, followed by the clerk. A moment later she handed the license to Chloe.

“That’s it?” Chloe asked, shocked when she glanced at the clock on the wall to see scarcely more than five minutes had passed.

“That’s it, you’re all set,” the Commissioner said with a warm smile, though she was shuffling papers in a way that was a clear signal that their time was up.

Beca retrieved their bags and passed Chloe’s to her, immediately grabbing her hand again to hold it. Chloe smiled down at it, at Beca’s left hand, finally sporting a proper symbol of her love.

“You can look up your photos with your license number online,” the clerk said as they neared the exit. “They’ll be up shortly.”

In the emotion and intensity of the moment, she’d completely forgotten there was a photographer in the room. She looked back, and sure enough, a man with a camera was fiddling with buttons on his large digital camera mounted on a tripod. She was grateful for it.

“Thanks,” she said and leaned into the bar handle on the door with Beca to push it open and exit into the busy hallway full of civic employees and members of the public coming and going. There were three other obvious couples waiting on the line of benches they had waited at, and Chloe smiled at each of them as they passed.
They left the courthouse and walked back to Beca’s car, Beca getting the door for Chloe once again, to drive home.

Their home.

Married.

“You really wanna try this?” Beca asked as she tossed her bag through the door to one somewhere behind the couch, followed by Chloe’s tote and purse.

“Duh! How many wedding days do you think I’ll have? I can do this, just don’t expect grace, or to go very far. Just lean into me.” Chloe wrapped an arm around Beca, high on her back.

Beca slid her arm around around Chloe’s neck, the other braced against her shoulder. “On three?”

“After three. Ready?”

“Ready.”

“Okay. One.” Chloe adjusted her stance, wishing she wasn't in stilettos.

“Two.”

“Three. Jump!”

Beca hopped and Chloe swooped her arm down under Beca’s knees, catching her in an easy hold.

“That wasn’t so hard,” Chloe said, grateful that she had decided to use the high school’s weight
room to keep up her muscle tone and that Beca was sufficiently tiny. “No promises that I won’t bang your head on the doorframe though.”

“You really know how to woo a girl.”

Chloe giggled. “Hush. Don’t make me laugh, I might drop you.” She twisted at the waist to step over the threshold of their home, leading with Beca’s feet so she could have a chance to protect herself if Chloe misjudged the distance.

She managed fine, though, and used their proximity to kiss Beca before setting her down carefully. It was dark inside, the shades drawn to block out the late afternoon sun. She used Beca for balance as she unbuckled her heels and slipped them off. She jumped when her bare foot landed on something, but it was soft and flattened easily. When she moved her other foot and it brushed something similar. “Beca, what…” She looked down, the ambient light illuminating just enough so she could see dark rose petals strewn all along the floor, from the door, past the couch, to the stairs where the kitchen windows let in more light and she could see petals pooled under the staircase, suggesting they’d been tossed along there as well, many of them fluttering through the spaces between the steps.

“I mean…I figured…” Beca scratched at the back of her neck, looking a little awkward. “It’s not cliché?”

“It’s completely cliché,” Chloe said, pulling Beca into an embrace. “And I completely love it.”

She felt Beca’s frame relax. “Yeah? Okay, I didn’t want it to be, like, too much. But…I didn’t want to just come home to our regular boring house.”

“Our house is not boring.” Chloe kissed Beca’s cheek and let her lips drift along until they touched her ear. “I can’t help but notice, they appear to lead to our bedroom.” She nipped the edge of her earlobe, avoiding the earring there.

“Very observant,” Beca said, sounding a little breathless.

Chloe took a step backwards, feeling the soft petals under her feet, and then another, and then she saw Beca pull off her heels and take a couple long strides to catch up with her, snaring Chloe around the waist to pull them flush again.
“Hi,” Chloe said quietly, marveling in the way the low light made Beca’s eyes sparkle.

A slight smile touched Beca’s lips. “Hey.”

“Take your wife to bed?”

She felt Beca lean forward, forcing her to take a step back, and another, and another until the banister pressed into her back and Beca kept leaning until she captured Chloe’s lips, giving her such a smoldering kiss that her knees actually, literally weakened. But Beca’s hold on her caught her, and once the kiss ended, she was stable again. “I’ll take my wife to bed if you’ll take yours.”

“Mmm. Gladly.” Chloe delivered her own smoldering kiss until Beca whimpered against her and loosened her hold so Chloe could slip out and start up the stairs, pulling a very content-looking Beca behind her.

It was markedly different.

Chloe could feel it.

Through the tantalizingly sweet pleasure, as soft lips trailed along her chest, following down the edge of one dress strap, down and along the dip in her cleavage to travel back up the other side where they slowed at her neck, suckling gently, she could feel it.

She couldn’t quite put her finger on what it was; some kind of new feeling of...peace. Security. Like they had all the time in the world.

We do.

Her hands moved over Beca’s back, the smooth silk warm under her fingers. The room was filled with the scent of roses, and when Beca had laid her down on the bed, she felt the coolness of the petals under her, tickling the backs of her arms and knees. She pulled at the silk, working it out of Beca’s jeans slowly, careful not to rip it.
“Take this off?” she asked when she finally had it free, fingers having to trail around Beca’s waist and unbutton her jeans to get the front of it loose. She let her fingertips linger, drawing lazy circles against the bare skin there.

Beca had to sit up and back, knees on either side of Chloe’s hips. Chloe watched her, crossing her arms and grasping the edge of her blouse and lifting it up and over her head. She shook her hair loose out of it and dropped the shirt over the side of the bed and paused, doing nothing more. Just sitting there, looking down at Chloe.

Chloe kept expecting her to say something, but she didn’t. The silence was almost becoming excruciating when Beca finally moved, running her hands down Chloe’s arms until she got to her hands, where she tucked her fingers into Chloe’s left palm and lifted it up to press her lips to the rings that now took up permanent residence there.

“I really want to know what my ring says,” Beca said, smile starting to creep into view as she kissed Chloe’s fingers again. “Can we look?”

Chloe gasped excitedly. She’d almost forgotten about the engravings they’d chosen for each other, in the midst of all the other things happening. “Can we?”

Beca started wiggling the band off Chloe’s finger. “I promise to put this right back on.”

“You better.” Chloe held out her right hand so Beca could drop the ring into it.

“It’s dark in here, can you see?” Beca asked, leaning over to switch on the lamp on her nightstand before Chloe could answer.

Chloe rubbed her thumb over the warm ring in her hand for a moment, trying to make sure she had all her crazy little emotions properly accounted for before she took the ring between her fingers and held it up where she could see it, rotating it until the inside of the band caught the light.

*We are titanium.*

“Shoot us down, but we won’t fall, we are titanium,” Beca sang quietly.
Chloe caught the sob that tried to escape, doing her best to convert it to a laugh. She nodded, squeezing her eyes closed to try to curtail the tears. When she opened them, Beca was still looking down at her, smiling. She handed the ring back to Beca and let her slip it into its rightful place.

“My turn,” Beca said, wiggling her hand at Chloe, who slipped the ring down and handed it to her.

She watched Beca lean into the light, tilting it just-so. She could see the moment when Beca was able to read it, her expression changing from intent focus to soft poignancy. Chloe sang, mirroring Beca’s soft tone from a moment earlier. “I have loved you for a thousand years...I’ll love you for a thousand more.”

1000 years.

Beca sat back, and Chloe could tell she was tearing up and fighting it. “Jesus, we’re cheesy,” Beca said with a shake of her head. She gave the ring back to Chloe and straightened her fingers so she could slip it back on easily. “Don’t you tell the girls how cheesy you make me. They’ll never let me live it down.”

“I’ll describe our wedding day, and your incredible thoughtfulness, with any level of cheese I see fit.” Chloe looped her finger between the cups of Beca’s bra - off-white lace, she noted and appreciated - and gave a tug to bring her back down until she was supporting herself above Chloe on her hands and knees. “Now. Make love to me.”

“As you wish.”
When Chloe woke Saturday morning, she had a feeling of disorientation, of wondering if she was back at Barden, startling herself out of a recurring dream. But when she finally opened her eyes, a wilted orchid blossom rested on her nightstand, and the arm draped heavy across her waist led to, when she tilted her head enough to see it, a hand that sported a gleaming silvery band on its ring finger.

She rubbed her eyes and nothing disappeared, so it was with a smile and a noisy stretch that she rolled over under the arm to be met with a mess of brunette hair and the sound of the heavy breaths that told her Beca was still out cold, asleep on her stomach.

She pulled the blankets higher and guided Beca's arm from her waist to bend and lie between them so she could scoot in and be the one doing the arm-draping. Part of her was content to watch Beca sleep, but a bigger part of her wanted Beca to wake up and bask in the just-married afterglow with her.

"Beca..." she whispered, pressing a kiss to Beca's shoulder. The steady breathing seemed to change a little, not quite so deep. "Baby..." she tried, parting her lips against Beca's back, starting to move and shift until she could slip her knee up and over Beca's waist to rest on her elbows and knees over her. She pulled Beca's hair away from her face and she could see movement under her eyelids, telling Chloe she was awake and faking sleep. If the eyes didn't, the hint of a smile touching the corner of Beca's mouth did. "Wake up, Mrs. Beale."

Beca cracked an eye open at that. "Took you long enough to bust that one out."

Chloe rested her chin on Beca's shoulder, too close to really make eye contact, but it was just as good. "I've been preoccupied."

"Can't imagine with what."

Chloe sat back enough to press a wet kiss to the side of Beca's neck, making her wriggle and stretch beneath her. "Refresh your memory?"

"Vaguely. Maybe you should try again."
Chloe giggled and sat up, comfortable astride the dip of Beca's spine. She trailed her fingers along her back, using fingernails to make Beca shiver. "How 'bout now?"

"That rings a bell." Beca stretched again and Chloe felt her feet bop into the middle of her back. "You just gonna keep sitting on me?"

"Your butt makes a good chair." Chloe wiggled to accentuate her point.

Beca gave a firm buck of her hips. "Get your ass off mine, Mrs. Beale."

With a whoop and a giggle Chloe slid off her mount and settled next to Beca, finally getting to look at her properly. "We're both Mrs. Beale now. Is it going to be confusing?"

"How many people do we know that are going to call us Mrs. anything?"

"Well, everyone I work with. My kids."

"They already call you Miss Beale so that's not a big change, and I'll make them call me Beca next time I have to interact with them if you think it's confusing. But I'm pretty sure we can figure out which one of us someone is talking to."

Chloe smiled at Beca's extensive thought process, appreciating it. "I can't believe we're married," she said with a whisper and another giggle.

"Pretty fucking righteous, yeah?" Beca said with a grin.

Chloe high-fived her hand into the one Beca's opened up for it. "Pretty fucking righteous. Can we tell our friends now?" she asked excitedly.

"So we can let them yell at us about excluding them? Sure."

"Let me call Aubrey first, okay? I don't want her to find out on Facebook again."
Beca was already on her way back to sleep. "Do you see me rushing to post anything?"

Chloe leaned in to kiss Beca's cheek. "Thanks, honey."

Her phone wasn't on her nightstand like usual, and it was with fondness that she remembered they'd abandoned their purses at the front door upon their return and hadn't had need or desire to go downstairs again after making it to bed.

So she pulled an old T-shirt out of her dresser and slipped it on as she descended the stairs to leave Beca to sleep while she had what was sure to be a very...spirited conversation with her best friend.

"This is Aubrey Posen."

"Bree, it's Saturday, and it's me. Why do you always answer that way?"

"Because there's always room for professionalism," Aubrey said with an air of superiority. "Hey, Chloe," she added with a much more casual tone.

"Hi."

"What's new? How are you?"

Chloe laughed. "Um, I'm fine."

"What's funny?"

"Nothing. How's Eric?" Chloe figured she could get Aubrey in a nice warm spot of her emotions by getting her to talk about her boyfriend before dropping the news.
"Oh, he's good. I mean, he's really stressed out right now. He's studying for the bar exam, and Chloe, let me tell you: the exams we took at Barden had nothing on what he's dealing with."

"I believe it. How are things? Between you?"

"They're good. Really good. The distance is hard, but he tries to come out here once a month or so. I need to get out there again, see you guys, too."

"Yes you do! Are you still thinking about moving out here? Maybe getting married?"

"It’s only been seven months, Chloe."

“Excuse you, but who was it that was harassing me about hurrying up and proposing after five months?"

“You know it was different with you two. How's that going by the way? Did you finally pick a date?"

Chloe gave an awkward chuckle. “Erm, funny you should ask.”

“You did! Finally! Let me get my calendar open, hang on.” Chloe heard her voice change as the call was put on speaker so Aubrey could, presumably, talk and schedule at the same time. “Okay, when's the big day?"

“May 27th.”

“May 27th! That's...Chloe that's an entire year from now.”

“2016.”

“Twenty six...wait. What? Chloe, I'm confused.”
“So, funny story!” Chloe said, hoping to keep spirits high.

“Chloe…”

“Okay, Bree, please don't get mad. But Beca and I, we didn't want all the stress and drama of a big wedding and we figured if we didn't want that, why should we do it? Because it's about us and, not, like, fulfilling everyone else’s expectations.”

“Uh huh…”

Chloe couldn't get a read on Aubrey’s tone, her responses being too trite. “Soooo what I'm saying is...is that...we got married. Yesterday.”

“Chloe!”

Chloe pulled the phone from her ear at the shrill tone, easing it back after a second.

“You got married?!”

“Um, yeah.”

“Chloe, that's amazing! Oh my God, I wish I was there, I want to hug you so much right now!”

“So you're not mad?”

“Oh, Chloe. Of course I'm not mad. Do I wish I could have been there for you? Absolutely. But you guys did what made you happy. That's what matters. And if you're happy, I'm happy.”

Chloe took a breath and exhaled with a smile. “You don't know how much that means to me.” She fell into the couch to prop up her feet, free of worry.
“I can't believe you didn't tell me that was your plan!”

“It wasn't our plan. It was an idea on Saturday and it was happening on Friday.”

“You actually eloped. I've never known anyone who eloped! And you're the last person I'd expect to do it.”

Chloe shrugged to herself. “I never thought I would either. But I think we just...got tired of not being married.”

“Well God knows you've been on that road long enough. I don't blame you. What did you do? Did you go to Vegas?!”

“No no no, we went to the courthouse after school. It doesn't sound very romantic, I know. But it really was perfect for us. Oh, there should be pictures. I have to find them today and send them to you.”

“Does anyone else know? Chloe I swear, if this is already all over Facebook and I'm the last to find out again -”

“You're literally the first person we’ve told. I promise.”

“Okay good. Oh, oh no. Chloe, what’s your mom going to say?”

Chloe sighed and pinched the bridge of her nose, dreading that phone call to come. “Probably a lot of things about how I’ve taken something from her that would have made her so happy and ruined the family reunion she was already planning.”

Aubrey hummed knowingly. “It’ll be okay. She’ll get over it. And I'm so happy for you guys. Is Beca there? I'd like to talk to her, too.”

“She's still asleep, but I'll tell her to call you.”
“She better. She's basically my sister-in-law now. So what's next? Are you going to have a belated reception so we can all celebrate? Honeymoon?”

“A belated reception? Maybe that would be a good compromise...but honeymoon, yeah. When I’m done in a couple weeks.”

“Ooh, where are you going?”

She tried to affect an Australian accent. “We’re going Down Under, mate!”

“Wow! Australia?! Does Amy know? She’d probably have a lot of recommendations for you. Or...maybe that’s not the best idea.”

Chloe laughed. “I think I’ll skip the Amy recommendations. And it’s mostly New Zealand. We’re going to a ski resort there. But we can't not go to Australia if we’re going to be right there.”

“You're going skiing for your honeymoon? Is Beca aware of this?”

Chloe laughed. “I had her pick between mountains or beach and she chose mountains. But she's convinced she's going to break herself if she tries.”

“She's more coordinated than she gives herself credit for. Even if she hates sports.”

“That's what I said!” Chloe put her phone on speaker and pulled her computer into her lap, eager to find the photos from their ceremony. “Hey, Bree, can I let you go? I'm going to have to have more of these conversations today and I’d actually like to spend some time with my wife, too.”

“Oh, of course! Your wife - I cannot even believe it. I can, but wow. Send me those pictures. I'm sure you guys were beautiful and crying all over each other like the cheeseballs you are.”

“Don't say that to Beca; she'll think I told you how much of a sap she is.”

“Oh please. Anyone who spends more than ten minutes with her when she's around you would
know that. She's not fooling anybody and never has. You'll let me know when you're going out of
town? And if you decide to have a reception thing?"

“Totes. Talk to you soon.”

“Bye. Love you.”

“You, too. Bye.”

Chloe started to pull up the county’s website, and then stopped herself. Because looking at their
wedding photos should be something she does with Beca, not by herself, despite Beca being asleep
and Chloe being eager. So instead, she checked her personal and work emails, ignoring the itch to
look until it became impossible to ignore, sending her upstairs with her computer to wake up Beca
and make her look at the pictures and have some fun sharing the news with their friends.

She didn't bother to be gentle or graceful when she climbed back into bed, being sure to jostle Beca
enough until she woke up with a groan.

“Now what?” she mumbled, face still pressed into the pillow as she looked at Chloe through one
eye.

“Get up. It's almost noon.”

“You wore me out,” she huffed as she lazily pushed herself up to sit against the headboard next to
Chloe. “Why do I have to be up?”

“Because,” Chloe said, typing on her computer, “we have wedding pictures to download.”

“Mm, okay.” Beca rubbed her eyes and sat up straighter to scoot closer to Chloe. “You need the
license number, right? It's still in my bag.”

“Which is downstairs,” Chloe said with a sigh. “Be right back.” She scampered downstairs and dug
the page out of Beca's purse and back up to their room to hop onto the bed. “Take two.”
“We need to find a safe place to keep that, FYI.”

“I know.” Chloe unfolded it and handed it to Beca. “Can you pick up one of those fireproof safes this week? We should have one anyway. Okay, read the numbers to me.”

Chloe typed in the sequence of numbers and a rudimentary web page popped up containing a dozen or so thumbnail images. “That's us!” she said with a squeal as she clicked into the first one.

“Not bad for a courthouse photographer,” Beca said as Chloe clicked through them to download each one. “Oh...”

“Ooh!”

They both pointed at the same time at the photo that popped up, one that managed to capture the moment after Chloe’s vows with both of them wiping tears away with matching smiles as Beca cursed her for making her cry.

Chloe kept it open. “I love this one.”

“Me, too. Keep going.”

Chloe downloaded it and kept clicking until she'd captured them all into a folder that she opened so they could scroll through them more easily. “So what's going to be our Facebook announcement?”

“Nothing with me crying.”

Chloe giggled and swiped through the image previews again. “Honey, you're crying in literally every picture.”

“I am not. Go back...back...not in that one.”
“You were crying, you just can't tell.”

“Exactly.”

“I'm making a weird face because I'm talking. We are not using that one.” She ignored Beca's huff and scrolled again. “I think this one.” She stopped on a photo taken during their ring exchange, of Beca slipping the ring onto her finger without taking her eyes off Chloe's face, both grinning at one another.

“Okay,” Beca agreed. “Hey, you called Aubrey? Don’t post that yet.”

Chloe took her hands off her computer. “Yep! Hung up with her right before I woke you up.”

“How’d she take it? Appalled she wasn’t informed?”

“No, not appalled. She would have liked to know of course, but she was really happy for us. Said you should call her later.”

Beca nodded. “Cool.” And then she groaned. “Oh, God, I’m gonna have to tell my dad.”

“And I’m going to have to tell my mom. Which is probably going to be way worse than your dad.”

“Which parent is going to take the news worse isn’t a competition, my dear.”

“No, no, I know.” Chloe smiled apologetically. “I didn’t mean it that way. Maybe we ask if they’ll Skype with us later. Maybe if we’re together and face-to-face with them, or whatever, they won’t get so...offended.”

“So they can see how happy we are and shit?”

Chloe laughed. “Yeah, how happy we are - and shit.” She pointed at her computer screen. “Okay, can I post that now?”
“Fine, fine, post it. Let me go get my phone so I can partake in this feeding frenzy, too.”

Chloe watched Beca crawl out of bed, stark naked, and disappear down the stairs to return a minute later, phone in hand as she thumbed at the screen and climbed back up next to Chloe. Chloe took the moment to appreciate it - not sexually, but in the way it illustrated Beca’s level of comfort with her. Of trust. Because Beca wasn’t usually one to wander around naked unless it was to or from the bathroom, but sometimes she did, when they were having a particularly notable time “bonding.” She wondered if, now that they were married, that was going to change. If with two simple words Beca’s final walls came crumbling down once and for all.

“Go ahead,” Beca said absently, pulling the covers over her with one hand and a shiver. “I’m trying to figure out how to change my name on this damn thing.”

“I’m going to do it by changing my relationship status, so you’ll have to go accept it before it shows up.”

“Well hang on, I can’t find the thing on my phone.”

It took a good five minutes and Chloe resorting to Googling it on the computer right in front of her until Beca figured out how to change her name on Facebook so Chloe could go into her own account to set up the Life Event and upload their photo.

“You ready to drop this bomb?”

Beca held up her phone. “I’m having major déjà vu right now. Wait, your mom didn’t get Facebook, did she?”

“No. But your dad’s on here, you know.”

“Ugh, I forgot” Beca said, posture sagging. “He was mad that he found out we were engaged through Facebook. I can’t do that to him again. So...let me just call him and get it over with. No, stay,” Beca added when Chloe made a move to leave the bed. “Let’s call him together on speaker and be like, ‘Yaaaay happy times, guess what, Dad!,’ okay?”
“You’re going to say, ‘yay happy times?’” Chloe said with a giggle as Beca called her father, tapping the button on her screen to put the call on to speakerphone.

“Beca! How’s my favorite daughter?”

Beca rolled her eyes. “I’m your only daughter. Chloe’s here with me, too.”

“Hi, Doc!” Chloe said, doing her best to keep her tone ‘yay happy times.’

“Oh, hi, Chloe! How has my future daughter-in-law been?”

Chloe looked at Beca with a nervous smile. “Good, thanks.”

“School year about wrapped up for you, too? We’re finishing up finals.”

“Almost. We have a couple more weeks. Kids are ready to be done, though. You know how it is.” Chloe noticed Beca was smiling at her, a kind of soft, curious smile that Chloe couldn’t fully define.

“Senioritis.”

“Even as Kindergartners.”

Doctor Mitchell laughed and Beca nudge Chloe.

“So hey, Dad?”

“Hmm?”

“We called you for a reason.”
Chloe watched Beca worry her lower lip.

“Is everything okay?”

“Oh, yeah, no everything’s fine, Dad. It’s just…” Beca took a breath. “You know how you called Chloe your future daughter-in-law?”

“Yes. Beca, what’s going on?”

“Well she...kind of is your daughter-in-law. Now.”

The length of silence was deafening.

“Beca? What are you saying?”

“I’m saying...Chloe and I are married. We got married. Yesterday.”

“You’re...married?”

Chloe gave her best attempt at jazz hands and mouthed yaaaaay! at Beca, who seemed unsure if she should laugh at her or grump at her.

“Yeah. I’m married. We’re married.”

Chloe reached over to hold one of Beca’s hands.

“You didn’t invite us? Beca, I don’t understand.”

“We didn’t invite anyone, Dad. That was the point.”
Doctor Mitchell sighed. “So that’s it? I’ll never be able to give my little girl away?”

Beca rolled her eyes and pointed at herself, mouthing I win. “I’m not going to apologize for getting married my way.”

“And you shouldn’t.” He sighed again. “I can respect that. I just wish I could have been there for your big day to support you.”

“I know.”

“Well, I guess congratulations are in order. And welcome to the family, Chloe.”

“Thanks!”

“I’d been planning to pitch in for your wedding. But that’s moot now. Do you need anything there? Can I help you with something?”

“We’re fine, Dad.”

Chloe waved her free hand to get Beca’s attention and whispered, “Can I?”

Beca gestured at the phone in permission.

“Hey, Doc.”

“You can call me Dad, now, if you want.”

Chloe looked at Beca, not sure what to do with that. She didn’t know if she was ready or felt comfortable with that. She loved Doctor Mitchell, but she had a father. “You’ll always be Doc to me, Doc!” she said sweetly. “But if I may suggest, if you’re looking to do something to...acknowledge this: the Bellas are trying to raise money for a new minibus. That could be appropriate, given how Beca and I met. I know they could really use it. Emily’s struggling with the whole sponsorship thing.”
Beca smiled at her.

“Okay, I’ll consider it.”

“Thanks, Doc.”

“We need to let you go. I still need to talk to Mom, and Chloe needs to call her family, too, and we have to tell to our friends. You’ll tell Sheila?”

“I’ll tell her.”

“I’ll also allow you the honor of informing your sister and her family.”

“Beca…” He sounded tired immediately, and Chloe didn’t blame him one bit. She was just glad Beca wasn’t going to be the one to tell her hateful Aunt Jeanette about their nuptials.

“Thanks, Dad. I’ll talk to you later, okay?”

“Alright. Love you, girls.”

“Bye, Dad.”

“Bye,” Chloe added before Beca disconnected the call.

Beca heaved a deep sigh when it was over. “That wasn’t so bad, but my God, the guilt.”

Chloe nodded, slipping her arm around Beca’s shoulders to give her a squeeze. “It’s really the worst part. Let’s have some fun now, okay?”
“You got it, babe. Let’s make it Facebook Official.”
“And now we wait for the avalanche,” Beca says after tapping the ‘approve’ button on her phone.

The avalanche took approximately seven seconds to begin, starting with two Likes by Chloe’s high school friends which were immediately followed by a deluge of comments ranging from confusion from the Facebook friends that somehow were still ignorant to their relationship, to disbelief and that they were playing a joke, to elated congratulations.

But it was Chloe’s post in the Bellas’ group that was the real dynamite to the mountaintop.

Emily Junk YOU. GUYS. WHAT. WHAT. WHAT.

Beca (Mitchell) Beale Em, do you get notifications when we post or something? You're a scary fast commenter.

Stacie Conrad We all do. For this exact reason. And, wait - Beca Beale? You're Beca Beale now?

Cynthia Rose Adams Damn, I would have bet the ranch on you taking her name, Red.

Chloe Beale \_(ツ)_/¯

Fat “Amy” Patricia Does this mean I can’t call you The Big B.M. anymore? Now you’re The Big B.B.? Oh! Oh that’s so much better. YAS.
**Beca (Mitchell) Beale** THANKS GUYS. YOUR WELL WISHES MEAN A LOT. REALLY FEELING THE LOVE.

**Stacie Conrad** Oh shit, sorry B. THIS IS AMAZING! Congratulations!!

**Cynthia Rose Adams** Welcome to the club, ladies!

**Emily Junk** You guys are so cute. I can’t. I can’t. I’m crying. <3 <3

**Chloe Beale** Emily Junk Aren’t we adorbs??

**Jesse Swanson** You got married?

**Fat “Amy” Patricia** What is this man child still doing in here? Junk, you had one job!

**Emily Junk** I have 8 jobs with the Bellas, Amy. And a real job. And school. I’m sorry, Beca! I’ll try to do better!

**Beca (Mitchell) Beale** It’s fine, Em. You’re doing a good job.

**Cynthia Rose Adams** Why’d you run off and get hitched? Who’s knocked up?

**Florenca Fuentes** ¡Felicidades!

**Chloe Beale** No one’s knocked up.

**Fat “Amy” Patricia** *cough*yet*cough*

**Fat “Amy” Patricia** *cough*honeymoon*cough*
Beca (Mitchell) Beale That’s not how it works with two women, Amy.

Lilly Onakuramara I helped deliver a baby under a bridge.

Jessica & Ashley Amazing! Congrats! -J

Jessica & Ashley Aww, this is so adorable. Congratulations, you deserve it so much. xo -A

Stacie Conrad I second CR’s question.

Beca (Mitchell) Beale Thanks JA

Fat “Amy” Patricia Anything’s possible with Bloe. Remember to use protection.

Beca (Mitchell) Beale AMY

Fat “Amy” Patricia Sorry you big BB

Fat “Amy” Patricia BB-8! YOU’RE BB-8 NOW!

“I’m changing my name back to Mitchell,” Beca said aloud, interrupting their silent conversation.

“You better not.”

Beca (Mitchell) Beale In case any of you are wondering why we didn’t invite you, THIS RIGHT HERE is your answer.

Chloe Beale We got tired of not being married. So we got married! To answer your question.
Chloe Beale She’s kidding.

Beca (Mitchell) Beale I’m not kidding.

Chloe Beale Heads up we might put together a belated reception or something. Need to see my girls again! This is a good excuse.

“We’re having a reception now?”

“It’s just an idea. It doesn’t have to be like, a real wedding reception. We can just plan a Bellas reunion.”

Stacie Conrad As long as we don’t find out about it once it’s already happened.

Fat “Amy” Patricia ooOoooo SNAP

Emily Junk Be nice you guys!

“Okay, I’m tapping out,” Beca said, tossing her phone aside into the duvet. “We’ve poked the hornet’s nest enough for today. I’m going to take a shower.”

Chloe watched Beca roll out of bed and disappear into the bathroom.

Beca re-appeared a few seconds later, head peeking around the door with a grin. “Get in here, wife.”

Chloe Beale gtg!!

Fat “Amy” Patricia Welp. We all know what that means. Brown chicken brown cowwww!
Despite it being a three-day weekend thanks to Memorial Day and it being their mini staycation fake honeymoon, the weekend was...ordinary.

That is, if you were to consider spending seventy-two nonstop hours in bed ordinary. Literally. (Not figuratively; that would result in severe dehydration and muscle cramps.) The exceptions were to answer the door for food delivery or to go to the kitchen for leftovers or beverages.

Chloe watched Beca like a hawk the entire weekend, wanting to see what else might have changed as the result of the addition of a ring to her finger.

By the end of Saturday, she decided her theory about Beca's comfort level with “casual nudity” was sound. She didn't bother to get dressed except when she had to answer the door, and though she kept her shirt on while they ate in bed - “I'm not going to scald my boobs with wonton soup” - it came off as soon as she was done.

Chloe appreciated it on many levels, from the convenience of expediting sex to the relatively innocent fun of being able to grab a handful of whatever, whenever, to the eye candy, to (and most importantly) the knowledge that Beca didn't care anymore. She didn't care if Chloe saw her slouched in bed unflatteringly. She didn't care if Chloe's hands roamed during conversation (not that she did before). She enjoyed it when Chloe would grab her from behind on her way downstairs or to the bathroom to pull her flush against her own nude form and run her hands down the front of Beca's body.

It was the very physical embodiment of “what's mine is yours.”

Chloe marveled in it.

Beca seemed to, as well. Because for every roaming hand of Chloe's, there was one of Beca's. For each time Chloe wrapped herself around Beca, Beca stretched herself out atop Chloe. And for every boob grab, there was a butt slap.

They were laughing Monday afternoon, over nothing and everything, until she collapsed on the bed and Beca crawled over her, eyes tearing from laughter. And Beca held herself up, dark hair swinging, and Chloe felt her heart...crack.
Not in the breaking way.

But in the way that a fractured bone is set. Or a dislocated shoulder is popped back into place.

It made her burst into tears.

“Chloe? Oh God, Chloe, what’s wrong?” Beca asked, moving off her to lay next to her, as though to be sure she wasn’t physically hurting Chloe in some way.

Because of course Beca would do that, would want to immediately make sure there was nothing she could do to stop whatever was causing her emotional pain.

Chloe shook her head, taking a breath to try to calm herself. Because it wasn't pain at all. “Nothing,” she said between sobs.

“Nothing?” Beca looked at her, worried and confused, her hand roaming over Chloe as though checking for wounds. “What’s happening? Why are you crying?”

She shook her head again, managing to laugh while crying. “Sorry. I’m okay.”

“You’re okay?” Beca said with a light laugh, reaching up to hold her hand to Chloe’s cheek. “You don’t look okay.”


“Because bursting into tears for no reason equals fine.” Beca’s hand took turns on Chloe’s face, brushing tears away on the right side, then the left, and the right again.

“I think,” Chloe took a stuttering breath. “I think I just fell in love with you all over again?”

Beca still looked confused, but she was smiling. “What? What’d I do?”
She felt the tears subsiding. “Nothing. Literally nothing.” Only, it was nothing and everything, and it made no sense. “If you could hear my thoughts right now, you’d think I’m crazy.” She took another deep breath, finally able to exhale steadily.

Beca leaned close to whisper, “I already think you’re crazy.” Chloe laughed at that, and Beca seemed to relax, settling comfortably alongside her. “Are you sure you’re okay?”

Chloe nodded and turned onto her side to hug Beca close. “I’m fine. I’m just happy. Really, really happy.”

Lips pressed against her forehead. “I’m happy, too.”

Chloe’s conversation with her mother went about as well as could be expected. Though it was probably her fault, choosing to do it without the idea of the security that could come with having Beca with her for it. She decided she didn’t want Beca to be the recipient of whatever her mother would dole out, because even though this elopement had been Chloe’s idea, Beca would undoubtedly take things personally and feel that it was her fault.

The thing with her mother was that she cared so much that she had an uncanny ability to inflict deadly levels of guilt upon her with scarcely a sigh of disappointment.

“I’ve been waiting my entire life to see my little girl walk down that aisle. Oh, you would have been such a beautiful bride.”

“I’ll send you pictures.”

“What am I supposed to tell everyone? We’ve all cleared our calendars.”

“I never gave you a date, and I never told you to tell anyone to clear their calendars. You took it upon yourself to do that.”
“We’ve all been waiting to see you. You haven’t been home in so long. I was looking forward to you coming home soon.”

“I never said we’d…” Chloe blew out a breath and counted to three. “Mom, I gotta go.

“I just wanted to see my little girl on her big day.”

“I know, Mom. But this is my life.”

“I’m not part of your life anymore?”

Chloe’s hand balled into a fist on her knee and she counted to three again. “Of course you are. But I had to do this for me. I need to let you go now.”

“When will I hear from you again? You’re always too busy to call your mother.”

“Soon. I’ll call you soon.”

“We’ll see.”

Chloe sighed. “I love you, Mom. Talk to you later.”

“I love you, too, sweetheart.”

Beca re-appeared just in time, climbing the stairs with her hands full, a paper bag in one hand, a bottle of wine under her arm, and a corkscrew and two glasses in her other hand. And she was dressed, in the same tee and yoga pants she’d been out of more than in all weekend. “Sushi’s here!”

“Yay!” Chloe put her phone aside and straightened the bedding so Beca could put things down and join her. “Can we book our trip while we eat?”
“Let’s do it.”

What they discovered, as they sat side by side, each with their computer to more easily compare things, is that it was damn hard to spend twenty grand on a trip for two people. It was the bubbliest of champagne problems to have, and despite upgrading their twelve-hour flight to Christchurch to the fanciest possible class that gave them seats that converted into actual beds, and booking a cabin adjacent to the ski resort with private access to the runs, and equipment rentals (skis and snowboards), plus side trips to hot springs and a spa for two weeks, plus a week in and between Sydney and Brisbane, they barely cracked eight thousand dollars, thanks to the generous exchange rate.

Briefly, they toyed with the idea of flying whatever Bellas were available out to join them for that reunion that was suddenly an event they were responsible for planning, but it was too last minute to be fair, if only a few of the girls were free to get away for more than a couple days.

Plus, it was their honeymoon.

“We’ll figure it out,” Chloe said, weary of the icky feeling that came with trying to spend more money.

“Maybe it’s a down payment on a new house.”

The last two weeks of the school year flew by - a much-needed reprieve from the way the entirety of the month of May crawled.

Beca was her date to the high school Prom, as promised. Chloe had much more fun there than at her own Senior Prom, despite spending most of the night monitoring the refreshments while Beca helped keep a sharp eye out for any attempts to spike the beverages. They did get to have a slow dance when another faculty member volunteered to relieve them for a bit, and they might have taken advantage of the break to steal away under the bleachers for some good, old fashioned making out until it came to an abrupt ending when another couple, this one comprised of two students, showed up for the same apparent purpose.

“What are you two doing under here?” Chloe asked after jumping away from Beca in a way she hoped wasn’t super incriminating.
“N-nothing, Miss Beale.”

“Then I suggest you rejoin your friends on the dance floor.” Chloe pointed, and used her best teacher voice which, apparently, didn’t go unnoticed by Beca, who chuckled behind her.

The students stumbled out in a rush of nervous laughter and once they were alone again, Beca’s arms slipped around her waist from behind. “Everyone’s here in the high school building, right?”

“Yes. Why?”

“So your building is empty?”

Chloe felt Beca squeeze her tighter, and then release her run her hands down the skirt of Chloe’s dress. “It should be. Why are you asking?”

Lips traveled along the side of her neck. “Can I see your classroom?”

Chloe felt herself nodding. “Okay.”

“I keep feeling like I forgot something,” Chloe said as she handed her two suitcases to the driver. She had a third bag, the largest duffle bag that would qualify as a carry-on item, over her shoulder that she tossed into the back of the SUV herself on top of the suitcases.

“I don’t know how you have three bags. It’s a honeymoon, Chlo. You don’t need that many clothes.” Beca was smiling, and bumped fists with the driver - the same driver she had most every day. “As long as you have a toothbrush and your passport, you’re set.”

Chloe laughed, and then gasped. “Oh my gosh, my passport!”

“You’re not serious.”
Chloe ran back into the house and upstairs, digging through her dresser until she found the navy blue booklet that she honestly couldn’t believe she almost left without.

“Sorry,” she said, breathless as she climbed into the backseat next to Beca.

“Seriously, Chlo?”

“I’m sorry! I have it now. You have yours, right?”

Beca rolled her eyes and gave the driver the go-ahead with a wave of her hand. “Of course I have mine.”

“Oh course I have mine,” Chloe said with a mocking tone as they stood in the check-in area Air New Zealand, out of the way of the rest of the arriving passengers.

“Shut up.”

“I guess there’s a reason they want us here three hours before an international flight. So when cocky chicks like you forget their passport, they have actually stand a chance at catching their flight.”

“Shut up. I swear, I put it in my bag.” Beca was pouting, obviously embarrassed after having criticized Chloe. “There he is, wait here.”

Chloe watched Beca run out, their driver having been nice enough to go back to the house and find Beca’s passport and bring it back for her. Beca hopped onto the running board of the SUV to grab it from him through the window as they had some kind of exchange of words that ended with Beca giving him the finger and the driver laughing as he merged back into the airport traffic.

“Can we go on our honeymoon now?” Chloe asked, already heading for one of the self check-in kiosks, bags in tow.
“I don’t want to hear one more word of this incident,” Beca said as she pointed her invaluable travel document at Chloe threateningly before poking at the screen and slapping it down to be scanned by the machine. “Not a peep.”

Chloe giggled, running her fingers up Beca’s back to make her squirm. “My lips are sealed.”

“Last time I was on a plane this time of year,” Chloe said as she settled into the left side of their pair of space-age-looking airplane seats, “I was on my way to LA to move in with you. Now we’re going on our honeymoon.”

She felt Beca seek out her hand and hold it. “Crazy, what can happen in a year.” Beca lifted their hands to her lips to kiss the back of Chloe’s. “Okay, let’s check out this kickass in-flight entertainment system.”
We're The Beales

It was not without effort that they *almost* made it through the seemingly endless flight without someone’s hands meandering where they shouldn’t when on an airplane.

Not that they weren't already card-carrying members of the Mile High Club thanks to their trip to Cöpenhagen.

Beca tried more than once, especially after they converted their seats into beds to try to get some sleep. And Chloe had indulged her, letting Beca’s wandering hand work her up fairly decently under the dark of the airplane cabin and the blankets they shared. But the cabin lights came on in preparation for landing, startling them apart and forcing them to gather themselves.

“Oh, look!” Chloe said as they descended on the escalator, spotting a man holding a sign with *BEALE* written on it. “One name for both of us!”

“That's how this whole ‘being married’ thing tends to work, Chlo.”

Chloe poked her tongue out at Beca's snark. “Hi!” she said, greeting the man. “That's us! We’re the Beales!” She grinned at Beca. “I'm not going to get tired of saying that any time soon.”

Beca rolled her eyes but smiled, reaching out to shake the man’s hand. “I'm Beca. This is Chloe. You're taking us to the resort?”

The resort was, to put it mildly, *really* nice. It was made nicer by the private road they turned onto which led them to a rustic-looking log cabin. There were a few other similar lodges on the road in a kind of lazy, wide cul de sac with plenty of space and trees between them for privacy.

“I don't even remember when the last time I saw snow was,” Chloe said excitedly, nose almost pressed to the glass of the window to look out at the mountain range.

“You'll get your fill of it here, that's for sure.” Beca stepped out of the car after the driver opened the door for her, Chloe sliding across the seat to follow.
“This is so pretty!” She said as she grabbed Beca's hand. The temperature wasn't too extreme, hovering somewhere around freezing. Chilly, definitely, for two girls who've spent the last several years in the south and on the west coast, but not unbearable.

“You ladies go on. It should be open. I'll have your bags up in a moment.”

Chloe couldn't help it and squealed, taking off in a sprint toward the cabin and dragging Beca behind her. She climbed the steps onto a deck that appeared to wrap around the structure and tossed the door open with enough fanfare to make Beca laugh.

“Ooh! It's so nice!”

“Really nice!”

It was - really nice. Wooden beams criss-crossed the large, open design which boasted an oversized L-shaped couch facing a fireplace that already had a blaze going. A massive TV was mounted above it. There was a pool table in a corner with what appeared to be the necessary gear to convert it into a ping pong table. The kitchen was huge and boasted stainless steel appliances and, supposedly, the fridge and pantry were pre-stocked for them. A quick opening and closing of doors confirmed that.

“Look up there,” Beca said, pointing.

Chloe took a step back to see a second level to the cabin, open but made secure by additional beams for a railing. She took another step back and caught the distinct straight line of the edge of a bed. “Oh my gosh, the bedroom’s upstairs! Come on!”

They were both laughing by the time they climbed the stairs, racing each other up the wide staircase to the elevated bedroom. It overlooked the main room and it had its own fireplace. Beca found the bathroom, calling for Chloe to come check it out because…

“It has a Jacuzzi tub!” Beca said excitedly, leaning over it to check out the view from the window next to it. “Oh my God, come on. Even better. Come on.”
Chloe laughed at Beca's excitement; it's not that Beca never got excited about things, but rarely was it so palpable, and now was one of those times. Chloe followed her down the stairs, almost running into her when she stopped abruptly.

“Sorry, we were just checking out the place,” she was saying to their driver.

“No problem. There’s a list of telephone numbers on the refrigerator for anything you might need - a car, grocery service, repairs and the like. You’ll find a marked trail off the rear steps that will take you to a chair lift, dedicated to our guests here. It will take you up to the main ski area. That's where you'll pick up your equipment. There's split logs alongside the house for the fireplace. Make sure you keep the flue open when you’ve a fire going - don't want to smoke yourselves out. Close it if you’re not using it. I'll lock up behind me. There are keys for both of you on the hooks by the door here.”

“Got it,” Beca said with one of her little salutes Chloe had grown so fond of.

“I'll take your bags to the upper level and be out of your way. Congratulations, ladies.”

Chloe grabbed Beca's hand to bump shoulders. “Thanks! What were you going to show me, babe?”

“Oh! Come on!”

Chloe laughed as Beca jogged through the main room to the sliding glass doors. She threw it open to step out onto the rear portion of the deck.

“Oh...it's beautiful.” The back of the house overlooked the snow covered mountains of the resort, pure white and charcoal gray peaks visible where the snow was thin and the meadows at the lower elevations below them. It was nearing evening, and the sky was starting to hint at a stunning sunset to come.

“Oh, yeah it is. But that's not…” Beca tugged Chloe's hand and pointed. “Ta-da!”

Chloe laughed. “This is what you were excited about? Not our stunning view of snow capped mountains and lush green meadows? But a hot tub?”
“There is a hot tub on our deck. Outside.”

“And you're excited about it?”

“Are you fucking kidding me, Chlo? Of course I am! We can be out here when it’s dark and cold and…” A different kind of smile crept over Beca's face as she pulled Chloe close enough to get her arms around her waist. “And maybe have a little fun, hm?”

Chloe felt her body temperature spike instantly, having grown accustomed long ago to Beca's suggestive tone. “You'd like that?”

“I might,” Beca teased as she leaned in to capture Chloe's lips in a soft kiss with just enough heat to promise there was more to come.

“I might, too,” Chloe whispered as she pulled Beca closer, arms working their way under her jacket to get a better hold around her.

Beca hummed against her and then broke away, brushing her lips over Chloe's cheek before stepping out of her embrace altogether. “Looks like the sun is going down soon. Let's find something to eat and figure out how this thing works. I’m starving.”

Chloe nodded, already feeling a little breathless. “You get that uncovered and running. I'll grab some snacks and find our bathing suits.”

Chloe was almost back inside when Beca's voice stopped her.

“We don't need our swimsuits.”

Chloe was damn near giddy by the time they were organized. She'd found all kinds of cheese and crackers and fruit and laid it out on a couple plates. The wine chiller and rack were also stocked and she pulled out a bottle of rosé, popping it open to let it breathe for a few minutes as she arranged everything on the ledge around one side of the hot tub. Beca had figured out the controls and it was rolling nicely, clouds of steam evaporating into the evening sky.
“So, Mrs. Beale.”

Chloe turned from her project to see Beca standing in the doorway wearing a cozy-looking bathrobe with the resort’s logo embroidered on the left pocket. She had another robe over her arm, and her hair was tied up into a high, sloppy ponytail.

Chloe smiled at her. “Can I help you, Mrs. Beale?”

“You're wearing entirely too many clothes for this honeymoon.”

Chloe arched an eyebrow at Beca. “Is that so?”

“Mhm.” Beca found the tail end of the belt keeping her robe closed and gave it a playful, seductive twirl. “Get in here and change. Or...strip. Would be more accurate.”

Chloe crossed the wooden deck until Beca blocked her entrance to the cabin, standing close. She walked her fingers up along the lapel of Beca's robe. “You're implying you have nothing on under this?”

“That would be what I'm implying.”

“Hmm…” Chloe said thoughtfully, turning her hand to slip it into Beca's robe along her waist and glide it up along her ribs and down to her hip, nothing but smooth skin under her palm.

“You trying to call my bluff?”

Chloe smiled. “And failing.” She ran her hand north again, letting it cup soft flesh for a moment, just long enough to draw a puff of an exhale out of Beca before snagging the extra robe off her arm and pushing past to use the bathroom and shed her clothes.

When she re-emerged with a stack of towels under her arm, Beca was waiting for her inside, leaning against the closed and curtained half of the glass doors, ankles crossed, hands behind her
back for support, whistling some tune. She stopped. “Not even gonna bother to tie it?”

Chloe glanced down at her open robe. She'd left it untied on purpose to tease Beca before she'd drop it altogether outside. “Do you want me to?” she asked, reaching for the belt with absolutely no intention of actually doing so.

“No,” was Beca's quick reply.

“Didn't think so. Let's go. I don't want to miss the sunset.”

The temperature had dropped considerably while they prepared for their evening, and the gusto with which they had been approaching this event started to falter a little when their bare feet hit the cold surface of the deck.

“We just have to go for it,” Chloe said with a curt nod. “We’ll be cold for two seconds and it'll be over. Come on.”

She took a breath and climbed the steps up, hesitating another second as she looked down at Beca who was watching her with amusement, arms crossed around herself for warmth. Chloe counted to three and pushed her robe off her shoulders and hung it on a hook attached to the side of the cabin within arm’s reach. She laughed at Beca's wolf whistle as she quickly stepped down and into the warm, churning water, instantly sighing.

“Ohh, honey. Get in here. This is amazing.” She pushed herself across the tub to sit on the submerged seat across from the stairs, quite ready to enjoy the peep show that would come with Beca dropping her robe right in front of her. She stretched her arms out along the edge, the cold air’s sharpness lessened by the steam that floated over her.

“Yes, coming,” Beca said as she hopped up the steps. She reached for the belt on her robe.

“Ah ah,” Chloe tutted. “Slowly.”

“Seriously? It's cold.”
Chloe waved her hand toward Beca. “Seriously. Take your time. I want to see my wife strip for me.” She smiled at the blush that hit Beca's cheeks, one of excitement, not bashfulness.

“If I'd have known you wanted that,” Beca said, cocking a hip to the side as she pulled one end of her robe’s belt up from where it hung and let it glide through her fingers, “I'd have worn more layers. This is going to be over kind of quickly.”


She added her own weak beatboxing to it, making Beca laugh as she twirled her belt like she’d done earlier before untying it. Beca held the sides of her robe together, setting her hips rocking side to side a little to Chloe's beat until she released it to let it drift open, giving Chloe a mostly obscured but still exciting sneak peak at what lay under it - which was absolutely nothing.

Chloe snared her bottom lip with her teeth, impatience and arousal washing over her.

The reaction didn't go unnoticed by Beca, who threw such a strong smirk at her that she actually whimpered, just from the look.

“Okay, let's get this show on the road,” Chloe said, waving her hand to beckon her in as she pushed herself across the tub to the stairs where Beca stood. She rested her hands on the tops of Beca's feet and looked up at her, making a show of enjoying the steep vertical angle. “I've been horny since we left L.A. Get in here.”

Beca grinned and shrugged her robe off to hang it by Chloe's and step down. Chloe moved back enough to give Beca room, but immediately gathered her in her arms and pulled her close, guiding Beca's legs around her waist to sit in her lap.

“My boobs are going to get cold if you don't let me all the way in,” Beca said as she looped her arms around Chloe's neck.

Chloe hugged Beca, an arm across her back to press her upper body closer until their chests were flush. “Guess I'll have to find a way to keep them warm.” She finished her statement by lifting her chin to pull Beca into a kiss.

It was slow, and warm, and wet, just like the oasis they rested in. It was Chloe's tongue that made
the first gentle brush into Beca's mouth, drawing a quiet sound out of both of them. She tried to pull Beca closer, but there was nowhere for her to go, making Beca chuckle through their kiss. But Chloe cut off her amusement quickly, shifting the gentle caress of her tongue to a possessive one. It made Beca moan and lean into her until Chloe's back pressed against the edge of the hot tub so Beca could take the upper hand, using height to her advantage to kiss down into Chloe until she surrendered with a whimper and let Beca claim her mouth for her own.

Chloe let her hands drift, sliding down Beca's back until they disappeared below the surface, to her waist, until they cupped under round flesh to lift and pull her impossibly closer.

The elevation broke their kiss and Beca's left hand slid from where it had been trying to work its way into Chloe's tightly tied hair to slap against the edge of the hot tub. "Lifting me out of the water isn't going to keep me warm, baby." She laughed and forced her weight down against Chloe's hands, only for Chloe to lift her again.

Chloe smiled up at her. "This is fun. You're, like, weightless." She felt Beca sink back into her lap and this time Chloe anchored her with an arm around her waist. "Stop floating away from me."

"Stop launching me like you're a trampoline and I will."

"Sometimes I like to play with my food before I eat it."

She felt more than heard the air rush out of Beca, followed by a wordless opening and closing of her mouth. Speechless. It was a rarity with Beca nowadays, and Chloe savored it. Instead of letting Beca gape like a fish, she pulled her down by the back of her neck and into another kiss, this one more heated than the previous. She ran her hands around Beca's waist and hips and legs, and then up out of the water to take Beca's breasts in her warm, wet hands, skin cold and straining in her palm. Beca sighed against their kiss and arched into the touch, hands grappling at Chloe’s shoulders and neck, nowhere to go with Chloe’s hair being tied up, something Chloe was regretting very much at the moment. But she had other things to tend to than worry about her hair, and she massaged the softness under her hands until she decided to let a hand trail around and down Beca’s back.

Her touch was met with goosebumps, and in any other environment, they would be a good thing, but Beca’s skin was cold under her hand, and as much as she loved having Beca in her lap, it was leaving her too exposed. Chloe quieted their kiss until they were trading gentle, lingering pecks, and then she eased Beca backwards, past the bend of her knees, to let her sink into the deeper center of the tub.
“Thanks,” Beca said, teeth chattering a little. “Didn’t realize I was so cold.”

Chloe scooted lower, too, letting the water rise to her chin. “Can’t imagine why,” she answered with a snicker.

She felt Beca’s hand snag her ankle and pull, drawing her into the deep part, and she let herself be turned until her back fit against Beca’s chest, arms encircling her waist from behind. Lips grazed the edge of her ear, followed by a nudge with a nose against her cheek. “Look up.”

Chloe had forgotten her earlier excitement about the impending sunset, emotions having been replaced by a different kind of excitement.

The sky was ablaze with pinks and oranges and yellows, highlighting the streaks of clouds and giving the mountains a rosy tint. The rear of the cabin must have faced north, because the cosmic fireworks were to the left but the night sky was already showing to the right, the transition between the two almost impossible to distinguish somewhere in the middle. She gasped at the sight, and again at the unexpected graze of fingertips between her thighs as Beca pulled her backwards until, Chloe assumed, she settled on the bench, legs parted enough for Chloe to fit between them.

Chloe floated a little in the current but was held in place by the arm around her waist and the hand between her legs, tracing slow, firm patterns that were making Chloe see stars that didn’t exist in the sky. She let herself be held as the darkness above slid over them completely, Beca’s mouth at her neck, touch slipping inside to pull wetness back with it to where Beca’s - and Chloe’s - attention was focused. She wanted to brace herself against something and grind, and push, but Beca was being so, so gentle that instead she leaned back and folded her hands behind Beca’s neck, letting herself float and drift and be kept within reach by the hand that was starting to move a shade quicker, a touch firmer, to draw a moan from Chloe’s parted lips.

It was clear Beca was in no hurry, and Chloe was content to wait it out until whenever Beca chose to gift it to her, letting her know with quiet, undemanding sighs.

Her eyes were open as much as they were closed, and when Beca's arm disappeared from her waist and she caught movement out of the corner of her eye, she twisted a little to see better. Beca lifted her eyebrows at her over the glass of wine she was sipping, fingers not faltering in their patient rhythm.

“Got thirsty,” she said with a smile as she lowered the glass and moved to return it.
“Give it,” Chloe said, withdrawing her arms from Beca's neck to reach for the glass, which Beca passed to her, but not before demanding payment in the form of a kiss.

“Good, right?”

Chloe knew Beca was referring specifically to the wine, which was indeed good, but everything was good at the moment. The water, the crisp air, the night sky and its blanket of stars that didn't look anything like the sky she was used to seeing, the way Beca was looking at her with mirth in her eyes that told her she knew exactly what the unhurried pace was doing to Chloe, the way Beca dropped her head to trail kisses down the side of her neck to her shoulder, the way Beca slipped inside and just held her that way, unmoving, until Chloe whimpered, needing at least a little more than what she was receiving.

She was considering issuing a plea when Beca withdrew to press quick, tight circles against Chloe’s hypersensitive body. Chloe tried to say thank you, but it came out a garbled mess of syllables that made Beca chuckle in her ear before tugging on it with her teeth.

Chloe didn’t know she was as close as she was, but suddenly she was tumbling, a quiet storm rather than the usual blinding lightning. She heard herself take an exaggerated breath, as though she’d forgotten to breathe, and struggle to sit up, brain temporarily failing at figuring out how to navigate its body under water.

“Whoa, hey, I got you.”

There was a streak of smugness in Beca’s otherwise concerned tone, and Chloe, despite her disorientation, noticed it. “I know you do,” she said, managing to get her limbs to start listening to her and tilt her weight correctly to sit back up in the water and turn in Beca’s arms.

Beca was smiling, hands stroking up and down Chloe’s back lovingly. “This is nice.”

Chloe sighed in agreement and leaned forward, watching Beca’s eyes flutter closed in anticipation, but the only thing Beca’s lips touched was Chloe’s shoulder as she leaned past her, reaching for the plate of snacks she’d laid out what felt like hours ago, to grab a couple slices of cheese and a handful of grapes. She popped one into her mouth and sat back, grinning at Beca who looked confused and a little offended, but ultimately amused as she returned the smile and opened her mouth.
“Gimme.”

Chloe held up a grape, pinched between her fingers, aiming with one eye squeezed shut. “Think you can catch it?”

“Think you can make it?”

“I know I can.” She took a few test motions with her wrist, judging angle and distance. She was still shaky. “If I miss, it’s your fault.”

“Don’t blame me for your shitty aim.”

“Rude,” Chloe admonished, flinging the grape pointedly in Beca’s general direction rather than with careful aim, making her jump and try to duck, but she wasn’t quick enough. It bounced off Beca’s shoulder and landed somewhere in the water to get swept up in the bubbles.

“You missed.”

“Stop running your mouth and let me try again.”

Beca clicked her teeth and opened her mouth again. Her frame was tense, and Chloe faked throwing the next grape, making Beca flinch hard and Chloe laughed at her for it.

“Okay, okay, for real this time,” Chloe said, shaking out her shoulders and cracking her neck.

Beca didn’t seem particularly trusting, but she barely flinched as Chloe tossed the fruit, almost making it but it bounced off the corner of Beca’s mouth, another grape lost to the waters.

“Fail,” Beca said, shaking her head.

“How about we try this instead. Body shot style,” Chloe added before placing a grape between her teeth, then settling it between her lips as she beckoned Beca forward with the crook of a finger.
Beca pushed off the edge of the tub to get to her, capturing Chloe's mouth. Chloe felt the grape get plucked from her lips and, presumably, tucked into Beca's cheek as they kissed. When Beca retreated, she was chewing victoriously, and Chloe almost forgot to keep her hand clutching the remainder of her snacks above water, saving the cheese at the last moment. She popped a slice into her mouth and offered the other to Beca, setting it against her outstretched tongue.

“Shall we go in?”

“Want to? I am getting all pruney,” Beca said, holding up her hands to examine them.

“Yeah.” Chloe pushed past Beca to climb out, knowing full well she was being watched. “I think I'm finished playing with my food now.”

“Shit.”

Matching bathrobes were forgotten along the stairs that led to the cabin’s elevated bedroom. Chloe sat on the foot of the bed, intending to scoot back and pull Beca with her, but Beca was in her lap before she had a chance, rooting her in place. It was a more stable version of their earlier position in the hot tub before Chloe had relinquished it for the sake of Beca’s warmth.

But it was warm in the cabin, amplified by the fire crackling a few feet from the king-sized bed, and made warmer still by the heat radiating off Beca as she claimed Chloe’s mouth for her own. Chloe could feel Beca was struggling to be patient, to be slow; she was jumpy, the kind that let on to the fact that she thought every touch would be the touch. Beca squirmed in her lap, lifting and twisting and sitting and lifting again, begging for contact when all Chloe was giving her were teasing grazes of a fingernail along the inside of her knee or a rough squeeze of her thigh.

Chloe winced when Beca worked her hair loose, pulling a little too hard when the tie got caught up, but it sent a zing of pleasure through her and her hips bucked up involuntarily, growing impatient as well. But she’d had her fun already - it was Beca’s turn, and as fingers finally pushed their way into Chloe’s loose hair to tangle and hold, Chloe grasped Beca around the waist and stood, just long enough to turn and lay her down, making her squeak in surprise. Chloe followed her down, holding herself up as she countered Beca’s possessive kiss with one of her own, licking deep into her mouth until Beca groaned.
She changed her angle then, lavishing the side of Beca’s neck with attention. There was a time not so long ago that Chloe would have felt compelled to leave a mark, to mottle her fair skin with symbols of possession, of love and lust. But the rings they shared, that Beca would wear every day, now served that purpose. So instead, she didn’t linger in any one spot too long, nipping and kissing until Beca’s hands, wandering aimlessly along Chloe’s back, turned into claws, nails digging in when Chloe found that spot on her neck.

Chloe’d had the thought in the back of her mind for a year now, the challenge, the curiosity if she could drive Beca to climax solely from that special spot. She debated: would it be more likely if she was desperate for it, like now, or after one or two given in a more traditional manner, if her body’s sensitivity would be heightened.

She decided on the latter and relinquished her attention there to slide backwards, dropping kisses down the center of Beca’s chest and detouring to the right, easily snagging a hardened peak between her teeth, making Beca gasp and then sigh when teeth became soft lips that suckled gently, then more firmly until her back arched off the bed and Chloe released her.

“Fuck, Chloe…please…” Beca’s hands were on Chloe’s shoulders, pushing, her body rolling with impatience.

“I’m getting there,” Chloe said through a contented chuckle as she gave the same service to Beca’s right breast as she’d just given to her left, making Beca arch all over again.

Chloe’s own impatience wore at her and the last few inches were passed hurriedly, not more than a few kisses down Beca’s abdomen before Chloe was on her stomach and pushing Beca’s legs further apart to make room for herself. Not that she had to try; it was less pushing and more…hands being pulled by Beca’s thighs parting for her.

“Beca…baby…” Chloe glanced up at Beca, but her eyes were screwed shut, body tense with anticipation. “You’re so…”

“I know. Just -” Beca’s pleading was cut off with a strangled gasp as Chloe leaned in to glide her tongue up and along Beca.

She pulled back for a moment, just long enough for Beca to huff in frustration before doing it again, slower this time, only to withdraw again.

“God dammit, stop teasing me,” Beca bit, hand reaching down to tangle in Chloe’s hair, and
though Chloe fully expected to be yanked in, she didn’t give so much as a tug. She just held her, and Chloe could hear her breathing hard. Waiting.

Chloe shifted a little, moving back a bit to have a better angle, and slipped her hands under Beca, propping her higher atop her hands and then deciding it was no good.

“Throw one of those pillows down here would you?” she asked.

“What? Oh my God, take all the pillows just hurry up.” Beca swung two of them down, almost knocking her in the face if not for Chloe reaching up to block and grab them.

She pushed one under Beca and left the other one to the side, leaning down to more comfortably reach Beca.

Beca might have been begging her to hurry, and while Chloe fully planned to take her time, she wasn’t going to tease her. She tasted her again, loving the way Beca shivered at the contact. She nudged her legs a little wider and trailed her tongue down until it slipped in easily.

“Fuck,” was Beca’s strained response, the hand still in Chloe’s hair clutching but still not pulling, just holding.

Chloe hummed an acknowledgment, not able to speak given her tongue was otherwise occupied. She pressed deeper, slick warmth enveloping her. It made her moan and Beca repeated it immediately, pressing herself down against Chloe. When Chloe withdrew, Beca clearly thought her tactics were changing, because her exclamation of surprise when Chloe glided right back in actually startled Chloe, almost making her laugh and disrupting her work - almost, but not quite.

“Oh, that’s...that’s...a thing you’re doing...”

All Chloe could do was hum, so she hummed, and shifted a little to duck her shoulder under Beca’s knee to pull her down and pitch her hips higher. Her other hand pressed against Beca’s other inner thigh, keeping her open for the slow back and forth of her tongue.

It wasn’t that Chloe had never done it before. Of course she did, innumerable times, as a brief tease before moving on to the main event. But there was something about tonight, about the concept of being on her honeymoon, with her wife, that made Chloe want to be lackadaisical, to take her time.
- as much as their libidos would allow anyway. She wanted to go slowly, to push Beca there leisurely as Beca had done for her earlier under the stars.

And there was something so...absolutely intimate about it, to be connected so thoroughly. As the thought flitted through her mind, Chloe reached deeper and curled her tongue as she pulled back, drawing a moan that might have been agony or pleasure from Beca. She hovered a little, bringing her fingertips to brush the swollen nerves begging for Chloe’s attention. She only touched, pressing but not moving, as she pushed back in.

“F-f-fuck…” Beca stuttered, hips lifting off the pillow and only aiding Chloe’s efforts, drawing a broken whine out of the back of Beca’s throat.

Chloe adjusted her hold around Beca and gave in, just a little, and picked up her pace, letting her fingers rock side to side, which, amusingly, made Beca’s body jolt every time her touch rolled to the right.

“What are you…”

Chloe glanced up at Beca again, this time her eyes were open, and she was sweating, and she looked a little delirious. And maybe she was, because Chloe was certain she’d been torturing Beca this way for at least half an hour, long enough for her jaw to actually be kind of tired.

A thought zipped through her mind about that not having been an issue for a long time and she couldn’t stop the laugh that bubbled up, forcing her to pull back for a second to compose herself.

“’s so funny?” Beca said breathlessly.

Chloe shook her head. “Tell you later. I’m busy.”

She returned to the task at hand, but she decided enough was enough, giving Beca the pressure and friction with her fingers that she was longing for and receiving a groan of gratitude in return. She slipped back inside, feeling the warmth increasing, the tiny pulses that told her Beca was close. She kept her rhythm steady, and Beca seemed to teeter on the edge for an almost frustratingly long time, gasping and swearing and arching until she crumbled, her whole body spasming, and Chloe felt it around her tongue which was a unique feeling, one she wondered why she hadn’t experienced before. One she’d be certain to repeat.
Soon.

She held still, letting Beca calm down and start breathing steadily again.

“Jesus,” Beca said, weakly patting Chloe’s head, which made Chloe smile, best she could anyway as she eased her tongue forward again. “Nonononono baby...I can’t…”

Chloe only chuckled and kept going, using featherlight pressure against Beca, knowing how sensitive she was. Beca begged her to stop, and then she begged her not to stop, and then she fell apart again.

She finally pulled Chloe’s hair in earnest, tugging her up and away. “You have to stop,” she said, voice rough and strained.

“I could do this all night, though,” she said with a smile as she let Beca guide her back up and over her until they were face to face. And while that was a bit of a white lie because her jaw really was killing her and her tongue was exhausted which was a new feeling in itself, the sentiment was true.

Beca tried to laugh and shook her head. “Can’t.”

Chloe propped herself up on her elbow and tugged the pillow out from under Beca so she could settle against her comfortably, and though Beca clearly was expecting her descending mouth to be for a kiss, Chloe grasped Beca’s chin and tilted her head up and to the side to drag her tongue up her neck and back to The Spot.

Beca flailed against her, one hand fisting in messy red hair, the other being snared by Chloe’s free hand to be grasped and pinned down against the bed. “Je...oh...fu…”

Beca’s lost ability to form words told Chloe her theory might have a chance at being proven right, and despite the strange ache at the base of her tongue - a pleasant reminder nonetheless - she bathed Beca’s neck with it, feeling her writhe under her.

“Fuck…” finally made it past Beca’s lips and only served to encourage Chloe further, starting to suck on the area that was setting Beca on fire all over again, and while it wasn’t her intent to mark her, she knew she would this time, because she could feel Beca’s hips pitching up into hers urgently.
A sudden, broken gasp rushed past Chloe’s ear and Beca froze under her and then sagged, trembling a little.

Chloe soothed the spot that she could see was already bruising and then lifted her head, unable to stop the smug smirk that was forcing its way onto her face.

“What the fuck?” Beca finally said, not much louder than a whisper, before she groaned, loud in contrast to her words from a second earlier. She tried to stretch and finally pushed Chloe off her weakly, making Chloe laugh as she easily fell to the side, feeling as winded as Beca looked.

“I’ve been wanting to do that forever,” she said, watching Beca stare at the ceiling as though she was taking an inventory of the functioning of her body.

Beca finally turned her head to look at her, still flushed and sweating. “Which part?”

“All of it,” Chloe said with a shrug. “But, specifically…” She reached over, index finger extended, intending to draw a line down the side of Beca’s neck with her fingernail, but Beca’s hand surprised her, shooting out to grab her finger and twist it off course.

“Don’t.”

Chloe ignored the interception and let Beca hold onto her finger. “We should practice that.”

“Practice?”

“The fun we could have if I could make you come just by touching your neck…”

“That...that’s not...I was already…”

“Might need a lot of practice though. Not that I mind. Not that you’d mind.”
Beca blew out a breath and tossed Chloe’s hand back to her. “Whatever.”

Chloe laughed and sat up a little to see Beca better. “You who likes to do it in risky places, I thought you’d love that.”

“I’m too fucking exhausted to think about it right now,” Beca said, taking another deep breath and slow exhale. “But yes.”

Chloe grinned at her and leaned down, kissing her properly after what felt like ages of separation. “I love you,” she said, and kissed her again.

Beca nodded against her and lifted a hand to rest against Chloe’s cheek, and Chloe could feel it trembling, still. “I love you, too.”

After a moment of indulgent kisses, Chloe sat back again. “For the record, I'm super horny after all that.”

Beca’s eyes snapped over to her, and though her expression read extreme interest, the rest of her appeared to be made out of lead, not moving a muscle. “Baby, I can’t right now. You broke me.”

“I can wait.” Chloe slid back down to lay side by side with Beca, and she noticed it recreated their little Skype encounter during Beca’s New York trip, and she remembered how much Beca had enjoyed it...so she let her hand wander a little, keeping Beca’s attention up on her face as her own fingers slipped between her legs, drawing a quiet gasp. “Or not.”

Beca looked confused, and started to say something when Chloe let herself moan a little and shift her leg so her knee touched Beca’s. Chloe watched her track the length of her arm to where her hand rested, teasing herself slowly.

Beca seemed taken aback, physically drawing away a little, but Chloe realized it was so she could see better, having been too close initially. Her focus bounced between Chloe’s hand and her eyes, and Chloe shook her head. “It’s okay. I want you to look.”

Beca seemed to remember that statement from that night, too, and a sound that might have qualified for a groan escaped Beca as her eyes fell.
Chloe knew this was one of those moments, the moments that were bold reminders of the trust they had in one another. That they didn’t need to be ashamed, or bashful, and if Beca was too spent to help, Chloe wasn’t offended and could handle it herself. Beca watching was almost as good, anyway.

“You turn me on so much,” she breathed, reaching with her free hand to rest it on Beca’s hip as her other moved with more purpose.

“You feel good?” Beca asked, breathless.

Chloe nodded and moaned. “So good.” She’d been close already, after the intensity of the time spent on Beca, and she could feel it, the throb that told her she was close, and with it, the rush of excitement that came with knowing she was close. “I want you to touch me,” she tried, voice starting to break, hoping Beca could muster the energy.

And she did, turning quickly onto her side and moving close, reaching for Chloe.

“I need to feel you. Baby, please.” Chloe felt Beca’s fingers trail over her own and then they pressed into her with the sweet burning pressure, curling just-so. She gasped and kept her own fingers moving, quicker now that Beca was inside her, and she felt the heat spreading as Beca watched her from above, a look of absolute wonderment on her face as she simply held her hand in place, giving Chloe something more to feel.

“I’m gonna...fuck…”

“Yeah,” Beca whispered, leaning closer until their lips were nearly flush. “Yes, baby. Come for me.”

Chloe’s climax hit her hard, harder than she had been expecting, apparently more keyed up than she thought she was, and she came with a cry that Beca caught by sealing her mouth over Chloe’s and kissing her breathless until Chloe melted back into the bed.

When she reopened her eyes, Beca was still above her, watching with a soft smile as she made Chloe’s body twitch involuntarily with the fingers that were moving lazily between Chloe’s legs, no real pattern or purpose, it seemed, other than to touch.
Chloe’s stomach rumbled, breaking the peace of the moment humorously, making them both laugh. “Sorry, I’m so hungry.”

Beca leaned down and pressed another kiss to Chloe’s lips before sitting up, still a little unsteady. “We never had, like, dinner.”

Chloe groaned and stretched, trying to ignore her sudden hunger.

“You stay here. I’m going to attempt to get down those stairs if my legs will let me…”

Chloe giggled.

“And raid the fridge. Want anything specific?”

“Food. All the food.”
"Wake up."

"Mmph."

"Beca, wake up."

"'s vacation. Sleepy time."

"I'm going to leave without you if you don't wake up."

Beca cracked an eye open and Chloe giggled. Beca looked a bedraggled mess, and she took full credit and pride for it.

"I'm not spending this whole trip inside. We came to a ski resort. We're going out."

Beca groaned and rolled over onto her back. "So you're not just waking me up, you're waking me up for physical activity."

Chloe leaned over her and smirked. "Something tells me if I was waking you up for a different kind of physical activity, you wouldn't be complaining."
Beca almost answered, but then she hesitated and shook her head. "Yes I would. This girl needs a break. Like, give me the day."

Chloe laughed and reached out to try to tickle Beca's stomach, but her hands got caught before she could do much damage. "You say that like I didn't pull a muscle in my tongue last night."

Beca looked horrified until she realized Chloe was kidding. "Oh thank God. You can't be out of commission the first day of our honeymoon."

"Could you imagine?"

"I don't want to."

Chloe patted Beca’s cheek. “Would be a travesty. Now get up. I made breakfast and it's going to take awhile to get ready and down to the lodge and get our equipment."

"I am not skiing."

Chloe pushed herself off the bed to the suitcases she'd unzipped before waking Beca; she'd unpack properly later. She found the cold weather gear they purchased before the trip and tossed coats and pants and gloves and hats and socks onto the bed as Beca wrestled out of the covers.

"You're right," Chloe said. “You're not skiing."

"Thank God."

"You're snowboarding."

"This is a waste of time," Beca said as she got her foot measured. "I'm not strapping a death board onto my feet."
"You aren't going to die. I'm not going to let you."

Chloe already had her boots on, and an employee - Mark, by his name tag - was helping Beca to get her into the proper size.

"We can arrange lessons for you," he said as he handed Beca a pair of black boots.

"Not necessary. Won't be doing it."

Chloe just smiled at her as she watched her shove her feet into the boots and fix her pants over top of them. "Uh huh."

"Let's set you girls up with some boards. Follow me."

Chloe picked one out for herself immediately, one that had purple and blue stripes running diagonally over it. Beca stared at the wall stacked with snowboards, eyes scanning but not taking action.

"Okay," Chloe said, handing her board to the worker for the moment. "How about this one?" She pointed at a black and white one. "It matches your outfit."

"Eh," Beca said with a shrug.

"No 'eh.' You don't get to be grumpy gills on our honeymoon."

"Sorry," Beca said quickly, changing her stance.

"Ohh, you two American ladies are married then?"

Beca glanced at the guy who was suddenly a little too interested for Chloe’s taste. "We are. To each other."
"That's a shame. Pauly back there and me, we had a bet I'd get one of your numbers."

Beca laughed at that and glanced at the blond guy working the desk. "What's the bet?"

"Fifty bucks and bragging rights."

"Well, in that case, do you have a pen?"

"Uh, Bec?" Chloe said, confused.

Beca shushed her and accepted the pen that Mark pulled out of his pocket. "Here's the number for the phone at our cabin. I think. I don't understand how phone numbers work here. Too many damn digits." She scribbled on his palm.

"She's not..." Chloe felt panicky. Beca was not seriously giving some guy her (their) number. And on their honeymoon?? "Beca, what are you doing?" She tried to step in between them. "She's not...Beca...she's my wife and I don't."

Beca hushed her and winked at Mark, handing the pen back to him. "But please don't call us. We aren't interested. For obvious reasons. I mean, you seem nice and all, but -."

"Beca!"

"Right. Go collect on your bet. And I guess I'll take that black and white board if I have to."

Mark disappeared after handing the snowboard to Beca, and Chloe watched him return to the desk, waving his hand in his friend’s face and obviously demanding he pay up.

“Someone’s possessive,” Beca cracked, and Chloe felt an elbow, impact lessened by her insulated layers, hit her ribs.
“Excuse me for not liking to see my wife giving her number to some guy.”

“He's not some guy. He's Mark, and I think we really hit it off, don't you?”

Chloe snapped her head around to look at Beca, instantly offended but she's met with Beca's cocky smile and she relaxed. Just Beca being Beca.

“Okay, you jokester. You've delayed the inevitable long enough. Put your boots on and let's go.”

Chloe couldn't help but giggle at Beca, who stood on the packed snow of the bottom of the ski slopes clearly not wanting to be any part of this but trying her best to hide it.

She looked so cute in her black and gray camouflage-patterned snow pants and white jacket that had black accents on it to coordinate, and her goggles perched on her head, and the helmet she had so far refused to put on dangling from her elbow, and the single braid Chloe had done for her laying over her shoulder, and a snowboard nearly as tall as she standing on end next to her.

No, cute wasn't really the right word.

Beca looked hot. The look suited her personality, and Chloe wondered how she never had turned into that skater chick she seemed so apt to be. Her guess was an overprotective father.

“So, first I'm going to show you how to stand up.”

“I'm standing,” Beca said, gesturing at herself.

“On your board, silly,” Chloe said, letting her own board tip and fall flat against the snow. “Let's get you strapped in first.”

“Last time you wanted me to strap something on, our surroundings were a little different.”
Chloe giggled at Beca's wisecrack, feeling a quick little flush at the memory as she walked over to Beca to help her.

“I brought it, you know.”

Chloe froze where she was, hands in mid air as she reached for Beca's snowboard. “You did?”

“Mhmm.” Beca was smirking at her. “Sure you still wanna be out here?”

Chloe's mind clouded, and then she shook her head. “We have all night, every night, for the rest of forever to have sex. We do not have forever to snowboard in New Zealand. Now, toss your board down.”

Beca laughed. “With pleasure.” She gave her hand a shove to send it to the snow parallel to Chloe's.

“Now, you're probably going to go goofy because you're a lefty, but...just stand there.”

“Goofy?”

“It's a stance.” Chloe walked around and stood behind Beca and gave her a shove, watching her step out with her right foot to catch herself.

“Hey!” Beca said, spinning. “What the hell?”

“I was figuring out your stance. You’re going goofy. It means whether you have your left or right foot bearing your weight, whichever is more comfortable. Eventually you might go both ways -”

Beca snorted and Chloe puppeted her gloved fingers closed.

“Regular means your right bears your weight. That's me. Goofy means it's your left. That's you. So, let me just...come here, come over here.” She knelt down in the snow and fiddled with what would be the binding for Beca’s left foot and then waved at Beca until she had her hand around her ankle
Beca put her weight on it and the board immediately slid, resulting in her cursing and yanking her foot out of Chloe’s grasp and Chloe laughing as she reached to pull the snowboard back into place. “It’s going to move. It’s supposed to move. Just keep your other foot planted, okay?” She grabbed Beca’s foot again and pushed her heel into the binding and wrenched the straps down over her boot. She reached for Beca’s other foot and laughed when hands came down on her head for balance as she cranked the last strap down over Beca’s toes.

She sat back, out of Beca’s reach, and grinned up at her. “Look at you. On a snowboard.” She hopped up and pulled the helmet off Beca’s elbow, shoving it back into her hands. “Put it on. You won’t look dumb. You look hot. And you aren’t going to fall or go anywhere. Just keep your knees bent and don’t wiggle.”

“Helmets are for -”

“- people who prefer to live. Everyone’s wearing one. Put it on. No arguing,” Chloe said, waiting until Beca dropped her goggles around her neck and popped the helmet on, chinstrap swinging loose. “Good. See? I’m wearing mine, too,” Chloe said, strapping her own on - but not before making her twin braids were arranged properly for maximum cuteness factor.

“You look like Wendy. Like from Wendy’s,” Beca said, stance starting to relax a little, as she realized she wasn’t going to slide away and die.

Chloe shook her head to make her braids swing. “I was going for Pippi Longstocking. But I’ll take it.” Her outfit was white top to bottom, save for her blue goggles and the two-colored board she was strapping her feet onto, facing Beca. “Okay, so, you’re still standing, that’s so good!”

She clapped, and Beca rolled her eyes. “Yeah, I’m really killing it on the slopes here.”

“You will.” Chloe rocked herself side to side a few times, getting re-familiarized with how it felt to be on a snowboard, and then hopped forward, promptly shoving Beca in the chest to tip her down onto the seat of her pants, landing with a grunt.

“Why do you keep pushing me? And now I’m not standing.”

“I know,” Chloe said with a laugh and sat herself down. “You gotta learn to stand up so when you
“Well, it’s not like it can be that hard,” Beca said as she tried to push herself up, failing miserably twice while Chloe just watched, until she stopped. “Fine. How?”

“Eventually you’ll learn that I know what I’m doing,” she said, grinning at Beca. “Okay, so just watch me. Pretend we’re on an actual slope. You want to be facing downhill, so your board’s like...crosswise against it.”

“No fucking way.”

“Your board is sideways, you’re not going to just fly down. Now watch. Just kick your heels into the side of the mountain and grab the board with your hand, between your feet, pull, and push yourself up with your other hand so your butt’s over the board, and then, you just...stand.” She popped up with ease and then waved her hands at Beca. “Now you.”

She watched Beca try to get her bearings, failing the first time until Chloe reminded her to get her butt over the board, not the snow, and she was able to tip herself forward and stand, almost pinching her fingers in the process.

“Knees bent! You’re going to be squatting all day.”

“Great,” Beca said. “I haven’t worked out in weeks.”

“Well you’re going to get one today, babe. And good, you did great. Do it again.” She shoved Beca back down, earning a fumbling gloved middle finger in return while she laughed, watching Beca work to get herself upright. She made her do it five more times before she reached down and unsnapped the bindings on her own board and flipped it over so it wouldn’t drift away, crossing to take Beca’s hands in hers. “I’m just going to pull you a little, okay? There’s nowhere for you to go, it’s like, totally flat here. But if you get scared, just sit down. That’s all you have to do, is sit down. And you’ll stop.”

“You’re going to kill me,” Beca said with a forced smile. “And I’m strapped on this death board so I can’t even try to run.”

“Nope, you’re at my mercy,” Chloe said with a wink, which distracted Beca long enough for Chloe to get her moving, walking to pull her. “See? You’re doing it!”
“I feel like a kid. No, there are kids here better than me.”

“It’s all practice. You’ll be a pro by the time we go home. So, this is all about your center of gravity and your knees. Shift your center of gravity, and you’ll turn. Try it.”

The concentration on Beca’s face was amusingly adorable, because her level of determination rivaled that of any competition Chloe danced alongside her in. She realized it was probably infinitely beneficial that she spent the better part of four years teaching Beca how to dance - no, not how to dance; Beca was a natural dancer, when she let herself be, but she taught her choreographed dancing. This was no different, all five-six-seven-eights, and Beca was no quitter, even though she threatened half a dozen times before Chloe had walked her in a complete circle and she could actually lean into a turn without swearing about being off-balance. She only swore twice on the return journey, learning how to turn the other way.

“You’re doing great, baby,” Chloe said when she decided to drop Beca’s hands, which flailed immediately but she stayed up until the lack of decline let her come to a slow stop. At which point Chloe gave her a shove to send her to her butt again.

“God dammit, Beale,” Beca said, grumbling as she worked to get herself back to her feet.

“You’re going to spend a lot of time on your ass. Might as well get good at standing up.”

“Your confidence in me is reassuring.”

Chloe grinned at her as she bent down and unbuckled Beca’s right boot to free it, and then picked up her board and tucked it under her arm. “Come on, you’re going to do great. Kick yourself along, I’ll help you if I need to.”

“Where are we going?” Beca asked, giving an experimental and wobbly push with her free foot.

“To that chair lift.”

“What? Chloe, no.”
“I’m going to die.” Beca was peering down past their dangling snowboards to the trees and snow below. “I am not ready for this. I’m going to break my leg and spend our entire honeymoon in bed.”

“There are worst places to spend a honeymoon,” Chloe said as she wrapped her arm around Beca’s shoulders to pull her close. “But you aren’t going to break your leg. This is the easiest run in the place, and you’re going to be a natural, I can tell. Now...make out with me.”

Beca turned and craned her neck back, eyes surprised. “You want to make out up here?”

“Why not? It’s romantic. It’s quiet.”

It was almost silent, save for the whirring of the motors of the chairlift and the rattle as their chair passed over each pole. She didn’t wait for permission, beyond the look in Beca’s eye that gave it to her, and pulled Beca in with a gloved hand against her shoulder, meeting cool lips with her own. She heard Beca sigh into it and felt the swipe of a tongue along her lower lip. The people she knew were two empty chairs behind them whistled, and she giggled, lips parting just enough to allow it access, teasing Beca’s exploring tongue with her own. She peeked periodically at their location along their route, having to relinquish Beca’s lips when she saw the tower coming into view.

“Okay, that was nice,” she said, a little breathless as she smiled at Beca’s flushed face. “But we have to get off soon. I don’t mean it like that,” she said immediately when Beca started to laugh. “But yes, that way, too. Later,” she added, swatting Beca’s knee. “So, getting off this thing can be kind of scary, but you’ll be okay. You’re just going to point the nose of your board straight down the little hill that will be up there, and once it glides over it, just stand up and put your free foot on your board, right behind the empty binding. Remember to look where you want to go. If you fall, sit down if you have to stop. We’ll strap our other feet in then, and we’ll go.”

“Really boosting my confidence, here,” Beca said, looking nervous.

“I promise, you’ll be fine. It’s okay to fall. Just don’t try to grab me, you’ll take us both down and it will be worse. Get down the little hill, and sit down. That’s all you have to do. Sit down if you have to stop. We’ll strap our other feet in then, and we’ll go.”

“I’m gonna die. I’m gonna die,” Beca repeated as their chair swung up and over until she had no choice but to stand up.
Chloe watched her, and she might have screamed that she was going to die, but she actually slid right down the off-ramp without falling.

“Baby, you did so good! That was great!”

“I almost died,” Beca said, but she was smiling. Chloe leaned in and stole a quick kiss. “Okay, put your goggles on, and kick your boot on your board to knock the snow off and step into the binding. I’ll do it up for you.”

She got Beca situated on her board before doing the same for herself and wiggling her goggles into place. “Okay. We’re going to do this. Nice and slow. It’s okay if you fall. I’m sure I’ll wipe out today, too. Just keep remembering to sit down if you get nervous. You’ll only go where you point the nose of your board. You’re in control. And I’m going to be right next to you the whole time. Okay?”

Beca looked terrified, but she nodded, excitement peeking through the fear. “Okay.”

“Awes! We’re just going to make really big, slow, lazy S’s all the way down. If you fall, I will wait for you, or I can come back up to you if you need me to. Okay?”

Beca nodded again, wiggling a little on her board. “Yeah. Let’s do it before I lose my nerve.”

Chloe squealed and hopped herself around until she was almost riding backwards so she could keep Beca in her line of vision. She wished she had a chance to take a quick solo run to get her feet under her properly, but if she ate it once or twice, it would probably make Beca feel better.

“Okay, come on, you can do it!” she called uphill at Beca who was waving her arms wildly, struggling for balance as she tried to eek her way downhill, sliding a few feet before abruptly sitting. “Good job!” Chloe yelled, clapping her gloved hands mutely. She couldn’t hear Beca, but she was sure she was talking to herself, probably muttering about needing to get her shit together, and she watched her sit in the snow for a minute before swinging her board so she faced downhill to push herself up, wobbling a few seconds before leaning a little, easing forward a few more feet before flailing and sitting.

She waited from her spot, some twenty feet below the top of the run, until Beca had worked her way down to her, or at least, relatively close to her so Chloe could push herself sideways to get to
her. “You’re doing so good, baby,” she said, reaching over to high five Beca and quickly grabbing her hand as the impact threw Beca off balance, giggling.

“I’m exhausted,” Beca said, truly breathless as she stood, hands on her hips after regaining her balance.

“It’ll pass. You’re just getting warmed up. Come down to me again, yeah?” she asked, leaning back to curve away from Beca and coast down another twenty or so feet until she stopped and leaned into the hill with the edge of her board. She cupped her hands around her mouth and shouted, “Come on, Bec, you got this!” She clapped and waited, watching Beca inch her way down. It took a good ten minutes, but she made it down to Chloe, sitting fewer times than her first try. Beca was grinning when she made it to her.

“You’re totes a natural. You’ll have it down by the end of the day. I’m going to ride with you this time, okay? We’ll be facing each other but you need to remember to look where you’re going, not at me. I won’t run into you, even if I come close. Okay?”

Beca nodded. “Okay. Let’s go.”

Chloe smiled at her eagerness, feeling pride swell in her chest. She waited for Beca to ease forward and get a little ahead of her before following, taking wide curves to not get too far ahead of Beca, who had to stop and sit every few turns. But she was doing really well for a beginner; Chloe distinctly remembered spending the majority of *her* first day on her butt.

When they made it to the bottom of the run, she watched Beca jerkily get herself stopped, almost sitting but not quite, and then she cheered - *Beca* cheered, hopping a little like she forgot her feet were strapped to a board and almost falling when she landed and it slid in a direction she wasn’t expecting, but she caught herself.

“Feel good?” Chloe asked, smiling at her.

“Totally.” Beca squatted to unbuckle her front foot. “Let’s go again.”

“You’re totes going to make it all the way down this time without stopping. You almost made it last time.”
Beca nodded as she worked to get her own foot strapped back onto her board after hopping off the chairlift without too much trouble. “Yeah, I’m gonna do it.”

Chloe hopped over to her and grabbed her in a bear hug, pressing a kiss to her cold cheek. “I’m proud of you.” With that, she leaned backward and waved, letting herself glide downhill before turning her body to follow it. She looked back to watch Beca follow, shaky and slow but managing, and that’s when she gave in, knowing Beca was fine, and let herself cruise down the run, glancing back now and then to make sure Beca was still upright - she was - and had fun showing off a little, knowing Beca was watching, until she skidded to a stop at the bottom to wait for Beca to catch up, which she did a few minutes later.

“Show off,” Beca said, smiling.

“Yup. But look at you!” she said. “You’re killing it. Do you like it? We can take a break if you want. I know it’s really rough on the quads.”

“Maybe after a few more runs?”

Chloe grinned at her. “Deal.”

“I can't walk.”

Chloe laughed at Beca limping her way along a step or two behind her as they picked their way along the private access path to their cabin in the dusky light. “They're going to be even worse tomorrow. I'm sore, too. We’ll put that Jacuzzi tub in the bathroom to good use tonight.”

Chloe's quads were killing her, but she knew Beca was in worse shape, probably sore all over. She made a note to give her a massage later. She had to take Beca's board from her and get it propped on the rack on the rear of the cabin and return to help Beca up the steps, trying not to laugh at her very obvious pain.

“Down is going to be ten times worse. Don't go up to the bedroom unless you know you're up for the night,” she advised. “You went hard today, baby. I'm proud of you for trying something new.”
“Regretting it right about now,” Beca said with a grimace as they made it to the first level of the cabin.

“I'll take care of you tonight.” Chloe adjusted her hold on Beca to let her take her elbow and escort her. “It'll all be worth your while.”

Beca nodded. “Okay. But you've been spoiling me. I need to even things out with us.”

Chloe patted Beca's hand. “There's plenty of time for that.”

“Oh my Jesus,” Beca said as she struggled to lower herself into the tub Chloe had got going for her while she limped her way upstairs after dinner. “I can't,” she said, laughing bitterly as she straightened after trying to sit.

“Aww,” Chloe said with a smile. “Come on, I'll help you.” She slipped out of the clothes she'd been lounging in and stepped into the tub to stand behind Beca and wrap her arms around her. She pressed a kiss to her shoulder. “Okay, I'm going to sit and you're going to come with me. It's okay if your legs give out; I got you.”

They did give out, and it wasn't without pain of her own that Chloe caught her on the way down to save Beca from breaking her tailbone. But the water was warm and the bath oil she’d dribbled under the faucet smelled amazing and Beca was in her arms and that all made up for it.

“No, just stay,” she said when Beca started to move away, and made room for her to sit between her legs. It was a tighter fit than the hot tub, but certainly roomier than their bathtub at home, and she laid back and pulled Beca with her to recline against her chest. “Nice, hmm?” she asked, lifting a hand to drip water from her fingertips down Beca's front. The other rested against Beca's thigh, stroking it idly underwater.

“I've never been in so much pain.”

Chloe tutted appropriately and smoothed Beca's hair back. “Not even after I taught you how to twerk?”
Beca shook with quiet laughter against her and she settled further, letting her head back to rest against Chloe's shoulder. “Not even then.”

Chloe let her hand press into Beca's thigh a little, and Beca gasped, not from pleasure but pain and Chloe eased a bit. “You took the Motrin I put out for you?”

Beca nodded and Chloe could feel the tension in her frame caused by the pressure against her quad, and she hated to be causing Beca any kind of pain, but, “Your muscles are full of lactic acid. We have to work it out or you'll cramp.”

“You're a sadist,” Beca said, whimpering as Chloe pushed her fingers along the top of Beca's thigh again, trying to distract her by trailing her other hand along her chest to tease her breasts.

Chloe hummed in Beca's ear and then nipped the edge. “Only when you want me to be.” She smiled at the way Beca's breathing stopped for a moment and pressed her lips to the shell of her ear before leaning her own head back against the wall.

They were quiet, and though she eventually had both hands moving over Beca’s overworked legs, Beca was pliant beneath her, the occasional hiccup in her breath if it got to be too much, and Chloe would pause and give her a few seconds before resuming.

“How did this happen?”

Beca’s voice startled her a little, breaking the silence so abruptly, though it had been scarcely more than a whisper.

“You need to start coming to the gym with me.”

She felt Beca’s hand swat hers underwater in slow motion. “I didn’t mean my legs, which I’m pretty sure are going to fall off if I try to use them ever again.”

Chloe laughed and stilled her gentle massage. “Then what did you mean?”
Beca shrugged against her. “This. The fact that we are right here, doing this, together, right now.” She felt for Chloe’s left hand with her own and pulled it up, hand laid over Chloe’s. “The fact that we’re wearing these.”

Chloe tugged her thumb under her palm and wiggled the band around her ring finger, a new habit she noticed she was starting to develop. Her expensive engagement ring was tucked away in her jewelry box in Los Angeles for safekeeping. Beca curled their fingers and brought their arms back down to wrap around her waist.

“Are you having an I-can’t-believe-I’m-married moment?”

She saw Beca tilt her head a little in her periphery, where it still rested against her shoulder, and she knew Beca was looking up at her. “And an I-can’t-believe-we’re-married moment.”

“Why’s that?”

Beca shrugged again and, though blurry, Chloe could tell she’d closed her eyes. “I never, in a million years, would have thought I’d be married at twenty-two. Let alone to a woman. Let alone to a woman like you.”

Chloe smiled. “A woman like me? What’s that mean?”

“You’re…” Beca sighed, and Chloe felt her wrap her other hand around her middle, squeezing Chloe’s arm tighter against her. “You’re...so...not what I ever expected to happen to me.”

Chloe softened at that, having been ready to tease. Instead, she stayed quiet, listening to Beca think.

“Like...you’re the girl I would have stared at all night at the party and then left without so much as saying hi.” Chloe smiled again, because she definitely couldn’t keep her eyes off Beca when they first met, or any day thereafter. “You’re this...bright, loud but...but not loud, you’re this soft, but bright and loud...presence, and you irritated me in every way known to mankind…” Chloe had to squeeze her at that. “And I loved it. You drove me up every possible wall, and it’s like I wanted to thank you for it. ‘Thank you, ma’am, may I have another?’ And I just...God, all those years. Chlo, I was so, so in love with you for so long and I had no fucking clue what to do with that information. I remember…” Beca paused, and Chloe swore she could hear the gears in her head turning. “I remember, one day, my sophomore year, in your room. We were arguing because you wanted me
to work a Bieber song into our Regionals set list and I wouldn’t, and you were so, so mad. You got so angry at me because I wouldn’t give in and do it.”

“In my defense, Tom and I had fought that morning.”

“Shh, we don’t speak of him. But you were furious, and I was scared because I felt like I had to choose between giving you what you wanted, and doing what I thought was best for the Bellas as their captain. I couldn’t give in, though. And you threw your binder with all your vocal arrangements into your closet and told me the girls made a mistake voting me captain and stormed out. And I remember sitting there on your bed alone, and I just broke down crying.”

Chloe hadn’t been privy to what Beca had felt that day, let alone after she’d left, and she suddenly felt terrible. She had been hurting in a multitude of ways that day, and she let it out on Beca, the last person she intended to. She hugged Beca closer, getting her legs into the mix to tangle them up nicely. She wanted to apologize, but Beca was lost in her recollection.

“I kept thinking you’d come back and say something. That you’d run back in and apologize. But you didn’t. And when I finally stopped crying, I got your binder out of your closet, and fixed all the pages that had torn and fallen out and put it on your desk and left. And I remember going up to my room, and going to bed, and feeling this...absolutely...suffocating pain. And it was such a stupid argument, but you just...you were able to cut me so deeply. No one had ever made me feel that kind of pain before.”

Chloe’s heart was breaking, hearing Beca tell her how badly she’d hurt her. They’d barely talked about the incident afterwards, but she was now overwhelmed with the need to beg for forgiveness. She couldn’t imagine ever hurting Beca like that now, and she was ashamed she ever had.

“And I remember thinking, ‘Wow, I’m totally fucked! Because I’m completely in love with this girl. And she’s my friend. And she’s taken.’ And I guess I was, too, but not like...shit, not like I was taken by you. It actually made me sick. I spent half the night in the bathroom. And in the morning, when you saw me, you said, ‘Sorry about yesterday. Is the coffee fresh?’ and I just...I just wanted to scream at you, how could you just say sorry that way. ‘Sorry about yesterday. Is the coffee fresh?’ I wanted to throw things, and punch the wall, and then shove you up against it and kiss you and tell you how much you’d hurt me and so easily, over something so dumb, because I was so fucking in love with you. But instead, I said the coffee was fine, handed you the milk, and went to class.” There was a beat. “I’m sorry, that was really intense.”

“Beca…” Chloe was at a loss for words. “I...I am so sor-”
“No, don’t apologize. It was so long ago, it doesn’t matter now, and it was a dumb argument and I know you didn’t mean it. I just remember that being the day I knew I was done for. That I was ruined. Like, I totally had a crush on you my first year.” Chloe squeezed her. “- but I didn’t know...I had no idea it was going to turn into that. Into this. And there were so, so many times I almost told you. Like when you’d text me and ask me to come down because your insomnia was acting up and needed someone to play with your hair. Which, now looking back I’m pretty sure you never had insomnia and it was just a big ruse to get me into your bed...”

Chloe giggled. “You’re not wrong.”

“So...yeah. I just...I lived in this world that I thought I’d never escape from. That I was doomed to suffer. I never, ever thought you could possibly feel the same way. You could have literally anyone and yet you were everything to me and it was this blissful, slow death, knowing I would never have you.

“And that day, at the retreat, when I heard you talking to yourself in the bathroom - which is an adorable habit by the way - and you were so mad at yourself for like, propositioning me or whatever in the tent. You were so upset and I was sitting in the stall next to you and you had no idea I could hear you and...and I had no idea you felt that way. I hadn't known you were trying to hit on me or whatever, when you said that thing about experimenting. I remember, when you said that to me, my heart, like, stopped. Because I thought maybe you were hitting on me but I knew there's no way you would ever. And then, I heard you and that was what you were doing and I started crying - I swear, you've made me cry more in these five years than the rest of my life, good or bad - and yeah, I just sat there crying and I knew you were, too, and I didn't know how to process it. So I left before you so you wouldn't know I was there.”

“And then you burst into my shower.”

Beca laughed. “Wonder who I learned that trick from?”

“I was so scared when you did that,” Chloe admitted. “I didn't know what it meant. I'm pretty sure I died a little inside.”

“And yet you mustered the strength to kiss me when I couldn't.”

“Yeah, what was up with that?” Chloe freed her arms from Beca's embrace to trail her hands up and palm Beca's breasts. “You washed my hair and felt me up and then you tried to leave! What a tease.”
“Sorry,” Beca said, shifting a little under Chloe's hands’ ministrations. “I got overconfident and then, like, backtracked, because you started laughing.”

Chloe snickered and slowed her hands, opting to cradle instead of actively tease. She tilted her head to let it rest against Beca’s. “What you said about crying?”

“What about it?”

“I...I shed more tears over you than I care to admit,” Chloe confessed.

“Are we talking, like, weekly, or…” Beca teased.

“Daily. Usually.” Chloe sighed. “We were idiots for so long.”

“So fucking long,” Beca said, and Chloe could hear the smile in her tone.

They were quiet then, choosing comfortable silence wrapped in each other until the water grew tepid.

“Cheers,” Chloe said, handing Beca a chilled bottled water from her supply of drinks and snacks she’d rounded up from the kitchen to avoid having to take the stairs more than necessary. Her legs weren’t feeling all that great either, and with Beca totally out of commission, she needed to minimize her trips up and down.

“Water? Wow, we’re really getting crazy on this honeymoon.” Beca was sitting on the foot of the bed in the flannel pants and blue tee Chloe had helped her into after their bath. Chloe had opted to go pantless, clad only in a pair of red briefs and a white tank.

“We both need it after today. Now drink.” She worked on setting up their stash of sustenance on the dressing table and smiled to herself when she heard the crack of Beca opening the bottle. “Now, salty or sweet? I don’t know what half this stuff is, but...
“Sweet.”

Chloe plucked something out of the pile that purported to be some type of chocolate bar, and grabbed some granola-looking thing and took a long drink of her own water as she crossed the room to drop the selections on the bed up by the headboard. She stepped back in front of Beca, smiling down at the look of exhaustion on Beca’s face, but her eyes were bright. It seemed sacrilegious to not make love every single night of a honeymoon, but they were on a three-week trip, and they were both physically drained. But she never really could resist Beca…

“I have an idea.”

Beca took another bottle-crinkling drink and then capped her water, setting it aside. “And what is that?”

“Let’s play a game.”

“A game? Are there board games here? I refuse to play Life with you after you murdered me at it that Christmas we got iced in. What about Uno?”

Chloe shifted her smile to one not quite so innocent. “Not that kind of game.”

She saw the look on Beca’s face shift, too. “Oh. What...what kind of game?”

“Well...I’ve never played it, but...I know it will be fun.” Chloe lifted a knee onto the bed alongside Beca’s hip, and then the other, feeling the pull in her quads that she knew she’d forget about soon as she settled on Beca’s lap and dipped her head to capture her lips. She made it steamy from the get-go, wanting to get Beca riled up quickly. When she felt hands run down her back, she broke the kiss and leaned back a little.

“Well? What’s this game?” Beca asked, licking the excess moisture from her lips.

“It’s called Too Hot.”
“Too Hot?” Beca smiled. “Never heard of it.”

“Mmm. Well, the way it works…” She paused to lean in and kiss Beca again, tugging her lower lip a little. “Is that...we kiss.” She kissed her again, opting to more or less talk through the kiss than fully breaking it as she felt Beca drag her nails down her back, making her shiver.

“I like this game,” Beca mumbled against her lips, making her giggle.

“We kiss...and we can’t stop kissing.” She kissed her again, more soundly, letting her tongue glide over Beca’s for a moment until she felt hands move over and around her backside. She reached back and pulled them away, stopping them from returning. “And we can’t touch either...no hands.”

Beca whined a little and kissed Chloe harder, shutting her up for a few seconds.

“If you touch me,” Chloe said between kisses, “you lose. And I get to do whatever I want.”

A whimper slipped past Beca’s lips at that. “And if you lose?”

Chloe smiled and kissed her again. “You get to do whatever you want.”

Beca nodded her agreement to the terms and held her hands back and away, making Chloe giggle as she held her own up and brought their lips together again, once and for all, until Beca would inevitably break like Chloe knew she would.

She stole glances every minute or two, watching the way Beca’s fingers would splay and then fist, or start to reach and then yank themselves back, and Chloe changed the tilt of her head to curl her tongue around Beca’s until she caught it between her teeth and pulled, and closed her lips around it to suck, a move she knew always turned Beca into a desperate mess.

She wasn’t wrong, and she felt Beca’s hips rise underneath her and she saw her hands flail through one eye but then she watched those hands ball into fists and punch into the mattress and stay there, determined.

And Beca’s determination wasn’t only to keep her hands off Chloe. It was, as Chloe soon
discovered, to win. It was her turn to whine as Beca kissed her hard enough to force her to lean back, and it was out of instinct that she reached for Beca to catch herself, stopping at the last second and sending her hands up and into her own hair, using her abdominals to push herself upright again to regain the upper hand.

But then Beca’s tongue did something Chloe could only think of as magical, because it fluttered and flicked over hers in a way that pulled a moan out of Chloe, and her hands dropped out of her hair, reaching for Beca but stopping just before it was too late, close enough that she could feel the warmth from the bare arms she was about to grab.

It was like Beca knew, could sense that Chloe was breaking, and Chloe was seriously considering it; she needed her hands on Beca yesterday. Beca knew the rules, and she didn’t stop kissing Chloe even though Beca mumbled a sentence that made Chloe’s posture sink her further into Beca’s lap.

“My tongue should be between your legs.” Another hard kiss. “Not your lips.”

Beca was playing dirty, and though she was cognizant enough to recognize that, Chloe couldn’t do anything other than react to the statement as she wrapped her arms around Beca’s neck and leaned forward to push her onto her back with a groan.

Beca wrenched her mouth away, and Chloe knew what was coming next. She let her head hang.

“I won.” Hands immediately latched onto Chloe’s backside and squeezed, but she refused to lift her head and meet Beca’s eyes. She had lost at her own game. “So now I get to do anything I want.” Hands squeezed again, and reminded Chloe that there was no actual loser in this game.

She lifted her head, smiling at the proud, aroused look on Beca’s face. “Dammit.”

Beca grinned and sat up just enough to peck Chloe's lips. “Go lay down,” she said with a shove to Chloe's hips.

Chloe squeaked and crawled off Beca and up the bed, pushing the forgotten snacks out of the way to flop onto her back, head landing amidst the pillows. She stretched out and wiggled her feet excitedly as she watched Beca roll over and immediately fail at trying to get on her hands and knees.
“Fuck,” Beca said, laughing as she instead Army-crawled up the bed with her elbows until she’d slid right up into place to lie on her stomach between Chloe's legs. “This is so not sexy.”

“It's totally sexy,” Chloe corrected, sighing as fingers trailed up her thighs to her hips where they curled under the elastic of her briefs.

“I'm not sitting up, so you gotta help with these.”

Beca tugged and Chloe lifted so they could slip down, and she tucked her legs up to help work them down until Beca pulled them from her ankles with a huff.

“See? Sexy,” Chloe teased, laughing at how much effort everything Beca was doing seemed to require of her in her slightly incapacitated state.

“Totally. I feel ninety years old. This is what it's going to be like when we’re ninety.”

“Babe, if we’re still having sex like this when we’re ninety, I think that itself is a winner. Even if our bones are creaking. Now, stop making me think about old people having sex.”

Beca laughed and ran a hand up Chloe's leg again, lifting it to rest over her shoulder. “I'll see what I can do to take your mind off it.”

Chloe sighed at the soft, warm touch of Beca’s tongue clearing her mind of everything but the heat between her legs. She reached down and threaded her fingers through Beca's soft hair, doing scarcely more than holding her as she needed little guidance; she's had plenty of practice over the last thirteen months.

With that practice came the knowledge of what made Chloe tick, and their little game had worked up Chloe nicely. Her hips were pitching up for more but Beca pushed her down, holding her in place, and a thought passed through her mind as soft warmth slipped inside her for a moment that she might be about to get a taste of her own blissful medicine from the previous night.

She was right, and the warmth didn't disappear like it usually did, instead pushing and pulling slowly, driving her slowly crazy.
“Just like that…” she breathed, and Beca hummed in response, adjusting her hold and position a little until Chloe took a cue in her foggy brain to toss grab a pillow and lift her hips to push it under herself with Beca's help. “Better?” she asked when she felt arms loop under both legs, hands resting along her sides, just holding.

“Mhmm.”

And then the soft pressure was back, slipping back and forth with a torturously slow and steady pace that made her moan and gasp for air when she couldn’t catch her breath because it wasn’t stopping, it was only increasing in tempo, and then there was sweet, sweet friction where she needed it the most. It had been so intimate when their roles were reversed, but she didn’t know, then, what it would be like, to receive such attention. She did know, though, that Beca had set out to show her.

She broke with a cry, shoulders lifting off the bed, giving her the unexpected benefit of seeing the look of satisfaction on Beca’s face.

She relaxed after a moment, falling back into the pillows with a sigh as she gave Beca’s hair a tug. “Get up here.”

“Give me a minute. I’m still injured.”

Chloe laughed and scooted over, yanking the pillow out from under herself so Beca would have a straight shot up to lie next to her.

She crawled up on her stomach and settled on her side next to Chloe to rest an arm over her middle. “We should play that game more often.”

“You enjoyed that, hmm?”

“As if you didn’t?”

“Oh believe me, I did.”
“Good. Can I ask you something?”

Chloe turned onto her side to face Beca, pushing her fingers through Beca’s hair to play with it, liking how it made her eyelashes flutter. “Of course you can.”

“Can we just stay home tomorrow? I can’t do that again.”

Chloe laughed and leaned in to kiss Beca, giggling against her lips. “As you wish.”
If you weren't aware, I turned Chapters 50 and 51 into a "Fan Appreciation" thing and invited my followers on tumblr to submit some suggestions of things they'd like to see happen. A few of those suggestions are incorporated here. Let me know if you spot one of yours!

By Day Four, Beca had recovered enough to hit the slopes again. She still hurt, and their day was shorter than their first, but her exclamations of imminent death had disappeared for the most part.

By Day Six, Chloe talked her into trying a different run, still easy, but a little more interesting than the wide open one they’d spent their time on.

“You're totes going to be fine,” Chloe reassured her as they strapped their feet in at the top of the run. “This is still one of the easy ones. But there’s trees and it's curvier.”

“So I can get impaled. Sweet.”

“Maybe later if my legs are up for it,” Chloe said with a wink before getting her goggles into place and setting off down the slope.

“I'm holding you to that!” trailed behind her and she glanced back to watch Beca hop herself around and lean to get herself moving. Beca really was doing great, and Chloe didn't feel like she'd be surprised if, by the time they left the resort, Beca was the one teaching her a few things.

She turned back to watch where she was going, trusting Beca to be not far behind her as she slowed a little to let her catch up as she curved around a tight grove of evergreen trees. The run was smooth and well groomed, with little traffic as it was the middle of the week, and when she got passed on the straightaway she glanced back to make sure Beca was still with her, only to see no one but a few skiers behind her. She started to hit the brakes, worried Beca had wiped out, when she heard a sharp whistle ahead of her. She turned back to see Beca maybe twenty yards ahead, still coasting slowly as she waved at Chloe.
"That little sneak," she said to herself, crouching to pick up the speed she’d killed until she caught up. “Well come on then!” she called as she cruised past, holding her arms up in a silent challenge. If Beca wanted to lose a race, so be it. She was too green to be as cocky as she was trying to be.

What Chloe didn't count on was the nose of her board catching a bump she didn't notice just as she caught up to send her into a brief cartwheel and land on her back, staring up at the blue sky with snow down the neck of her coat. She sincerely hoped Beca had not played witness to her wipeout; she was certain it was fairly dramatic, though she came out unscathed save for her pride.

But then she heard a “Yes!!” from below and she sat up with a groan to see Beca stopped and facing uphill, hands raised in triumph. “I've been waiting to see that all week!”

Chloe laughed to herself and waved her hand at Beca, not so subtly telling her to fuck off, as she rearranged her limbs to get back on her feet. She hopped and let herself drift down slowly, gathering her druthers for whatever teasing Beca was preparing for her as she shook the back of her coat to get the snow out of it.

“Shut up,” she said with a smile as she coasted past Beca, who immediately moved to keep up with her.

“That was epic. You looked like a cartoon.”

“I'm fine, thanks,” Chloe said. She enjoyed the teasing, even if it did poke at her bruised ego. She enjoyed more the fact that Beca could easily kept pace with her now, so they could have an actual conversation as they worked their way down leisurely.

“Shit, sorry. Are you okay?”

“I'll probably feel it tomorrow, but I'm fine.”

“As long as you're okay tonight,” Beca said with a grin just before she bobbled a turn and took a rough face plant herself.
Beca made dinner that night, insisting Chloe rest up for their other festivities, which made Chloe giggle and blush and bite her lip as she was ushered out of the kitchen and ordered to lay on the couch until dinner was ready.

“You know,” Beca said as she handed Chloe a plate and settled next to her in the space made vacant when Chloe sat up. “The other night, I kind of confessed a, like, really embarrassing thing about how I felt about you. Feel free to get on the same level as me with that.”

“You want me to tell you about all the times I was grossly and painfully pining for your love?” Chloe asked with a laugh.

“Well, not all the times.” Beca grinned and popped a snow pea pod from the stir fry she had made. “One-to-three would be acceptable.”

Chloe thought for a minute. There really were innumerable times that she pined for Beca's love over the years. Everything from the time she threw darts at a picture of Jesse’s face (Yes, she really did that. In her defense, she was drunk and the omnipotent Stacie knew what was up and helped her let out some pent up aggression, because really she had no issue with Jesse. Other than the fact he was kissing Beca when it should have been Chloe doing the kissing.) to the time she actually said the words ‘I love you’ aloud to Beca when she was sound asleep in Chloe’s bed just to see how it would feel to say it to her and mean it that way, to the now-infamous experimentation suggestion; her pining ran the gamut.

She smiled when one memory slid into place.

“You're thinking about it right now. Tell me.” Beca settled on the couch more comfortably, ready for a story.

“Well, mine isn't going to involve throwing up all night.”

“Thank God.”

“Though that might have happened once or twice.” She saw Beca grimace sympathetically. “But, I'm thinking of when we were in New York to defend our title the first time and we all went out to some club in the Village. This guy wouldn't leave me alone; he was gross and sweaty and had a beard and kept trying to get me to dance with him. I guess you got tired of hearing me tell him, ‘No thanks,’ because you cut between us. I thought you were going to dance with me, play the lesbian
card to get him to buzz off.” Beca was grinning, clearly remembering. “But instead, you grabbed his hand and went off to dance with him.”

“He really was gross and sweaty,” Beca said, frowning. “You still owe me for that save, by the way.”

Chloe winked. “We’ll call it even after tonight. But really though, in that moment, watching you take that guy off my hands so he’d leave me alone - it sounds so silly now I guess...but you kind of sacrificed yourself for my comfort, and honestly, it was so romantic.”

“It is kind of silly,” Beca said, scrunching her nose a little in thought. “But I get it. Wait, is that why, after I ditched the guy, you spent the rest of the night dancing with me?”

She giggled. “Maybe.”

“And why you kept grabbing my ass and pretending it was a joke or that your hands slipped or someone bumped into you?”

She laughed fully that time. “Maybe.”

Beca rolled her eyes. “I had no idea. Legit, if I'd known, I would have kissed you that night instead of staring at the ceiling in the bed next to yours for an hour trying to forget what it felt like to have your hands on me like that.”

Chloe shook her head. “So many missed opportunities, I guess. We can't live in the past though, and regret things.”

“No, you're right.” Beca was quiet a moment as she chewed. “You know, I told you a really dramatic, kind of embarrassing story and all I get is how I cockblocked a hipster?”

“Oh my gosh,” Chloe said with a groan. “Never in a million years was that going to happen. But okay, I can be dramatic, too. You want to know about the night I was sick for hours over you?”

Beca smiled. “Yes, please.”
“Fine. After we finished our first Nationals performance and you ran down into the audience and kissed Jesse.”

“You're serious?”

“Yeah. I mean, we were on this huge high and instead of celebrating with us backstage you went off and...did that.”

Beca hissed a breath. “Sorry. I guess it was pretty shitty of me to do. I thought it was what I wanted.”

Chloe dismissed her unnecessary apology. “In the moment I thought I was mad because you'd ditched the Bellas. But when we were back at the hotel, I realized I wasn't so much mad about that as I was jealous that it had been Jesse’s arms you ran to when you were happy.”

“And...that's why you bailed early on our after party?”

Chloe nodded. “Spent most of the night on the bathroom floor. Bree gave me a pillow and blanket and water when she got back. She thought I was just super drunk.”

Beca tossed her fork down with a clang and set the plate aside, face stern. “Okay, I know we just said no regrets or whatever, but it's bullshit we both suffered so much and for so long.”

“There's nothing we can do about it now,” Chloe said with a shrug. “I'm grateful it worked out how we wanted it to, regardless.”

“Don't make it sound like I'm not grateful.” Beca poked the side of Chloe's thigh with her toe. “I'm just saying. What if we'd been able to be together all that time?”

“I mean, it would have been great. But...I don't know. I like to think everything happens for a reason. Maybe we’d have dated those four years, but between school and the Bellas and living together and dating, it might have been too much. We might have broken up, decided to go our separate ways after graduation. We were younger then. We might be single right now, or seeing their people. Instead of married.”
“I guess,” Beca said with a sigh. “I like to think we’d have been as great together then as we are now.”

“Maybe we would have been. We’ll never know.”

“Why do I keep making these conversations so heavy?” Beca asked, frowning down at her hands in her lap. “I just wanted to hear a story about you loving me.”

The pout in Beca's voice made Chloe melt and she leaned over, holding her plate out of the way, to kiss her cheek, hovering to speak softly. “Everything I ever did in the time we've known each other is a story about me loving you.”

“Fuck, that was cheesy,” Beca said with an airy laugh that told Chloe she’d got her right in the heart with that statement.

She smiled and set her plate with Beca's to slide over and pull her into a proper kiss, escaping it after a minute or two before things got carried away. “I know the rule is who cooked doesn't have to clean, but...I kind of want to get ready. For things.”

“Things?” Beca said with a laugh. “Is that what the kids are calling it these days?”

“I just want to get ready before I do something.”

“Am I ‘something’ in this scenario?” Beca asked, grinning.

“Mhmm.” Chloe leaned in and kissed Beca once more before popping off the couch and up the stairs to the lofted bedroom to dig through the dresser drawer that housed a ridiculous amount of lingerie - it was her honeymoon, okay? - to pull out from beneath everything what she bought specifically for the trip, thanks to Aubrey’s Christmas gift certificate.

“Any day now, lady.”
Chloe smiled at herself in the bathroom mirror, hearing Beca's impatience waiting for her in the bedroom.

“Good things come to those who wait,” she called back before blotting her lipstick on a tissue and touching up the eyeliner on her left eye. She gave her hair a good toss to get some bounce back into it and ran her fingers under the band of her bra to make sure it laid properly against her.

She hoped Beca would like it. She'd spent nearly two hours at Frederick’s with a salesgirl helping her find something that felt right. She didn't want to look like a cheap stripper, but she didn't want to look like a virgin either. They finally agreed on the ensemble she was wearing now, all black, all lace, all expensive, and flimsy enough that it could probably ripped right off her if need be. It made her feel sexy and even more confident.

“I hope so!” floated back to her, and she smiled to herself as she clipped the garters to her stockings and slipped into the heels Beca had given her to wear on New Year’s Eve; it felt appropriate to include them, as that night had very much changed their lives.

She gave herself a final once-over in the mirror and eased open the door, stepping out to lean casually against the wall. “Oh, I’ll definitely be making you...whoa.”

“What?” Beca was smirking, and not because of her appreciation of Chloe’s ensemble, but because of her own.

Chloe started toward her and stopped after a few steps, and it only made Beca smirk harder, and then lift and drop her hands in disappointment. “Ah damn, I thought I might bring you to your knees but instead I only stopped you in your tracks.”

“Yeah…” Chloe breathed, forgetting about her own efforts at dialing up the sexy because Beca...Beca had apparently gone shopping for something special to wear, too. It was going to take Chloe nine hundred years to get all those fucking hooks undone that ran vertically from Beca’s chest to her navel to get the white corset off her. But maybe...maybe the corset should stay on, because...wow it was really doing things to Beca. Or, more accurately, to Chloe.

She was unprepared for Beca to spring something on her, having focused on preparing her seduction. Instead, she got slapped across the face with her own seduction. She knew she was staring, but she also knew Beca wanted her to stare, from the way she’d apparently curled her hair to hang prettily over her shoulders while waiting for Chloe - she spotted a curling iron on the dresser that wasn’t there before, and Beca’s makeup bag’s contents were strewn about - to the way
the corset amped up the cleavage Beca didn’t really have to try that hard to have and the way it accentuated her waist and hips, to her confident position sitting on the foot of the bed, leaning back a little, arms supporting her, legs crossed, feet bare.

But then she stood, and Chloe had to forcibly restrain herself from biting her lip and ruining her lipstick before she had a chance to cover Beca’s skin with it, because there were tiny white lace panties that did almost nothing to maintain what little modesty of Beca’s remained.

“Come over here,” Beca said, tilting her head toward the bed to get Chloe’s feet working again.

“You look…” Chloe started, having to swallow, her throat painfully dry. “Wow.”

Beca smiled and ran her eyes up and down Chloe again. “You don’t look so bad yourself.”

Beca’s touch of humor helped Chloe out of her daze, and she crossed the room to be pulled into a loose embrace. She had several inches on Beca now, thanks to her heels and Beca’s bare feet, and she sighed when Beca easily pressed a kiss to the swell of her breast before looking up at her.

“Ready to get this show on the road?”

“We’ve been here a week. Is the show not already on the road?” Chloe rested her hands on Beca’s waist, fingers tracing the boning of the corset.

“Yes, well,” Beca said, eyes following the path of her hands over Chloe's upper body as they drifted up and down, over her stomach and up to follow her curves and back down again. “I think busting out the sexy underwear kind of makes it honeymoon-official.”

Chloe laughed, trailing a finger down the center of Beca's bustier, nail catching along each hook. She debated starting to undo it, but it was too soon; she needed to appreciate it a bit longer. “So what were all the other times this week?”

“Really hot sex,” Beca said with a shrug as her hands slid further down and around Chloe's hips to squeeze the full flesh there and pull her forward a little.
Chloe felt her pulse quicken at the possessive gesture and wrapped her arms around Beca's waist. “And what does that mean for tonight?”

“Mind-blowingly hot sex,” was Beca's simple answer before she lifted a hand to slide up the back of Chloe's neck into her hair and pull her down for a kiss.

It was slow, and deep, and tantalizingly sexy as Beca's tongue slid over hers with such confidence and determination that Chloe started to reconsider her intentions for the night. They had been to take control and be in charge, but the way Beca was kissing her, she kind of wanted to spin that.

But then she was pulling Chloe forward, but not toward the bed like Chloe was anticipating. Instead Beca backed herself into the dresser, and Chloe's eyes fluttered open to see Beca press her hands into its surface to lift herself onto it. Chloe felt legs wrap around her waist and reel her in, Beca’s hands threading through her hair and tugging enough to make her whimper and push her hips forward against Beca.

Beca’s hands were seemingly everywhere at once, from pulling Chloe’s hair to dragging nails down her back to tracing the swells of her breasts and down her stomach, stretching to reach lower to trace the garters and back up to press a hand between Chloe’s thighs.

Chloe broke their kiss unintentionally, having to take a proper breath so she could moan at the contact. Beca’s touch was persistent, pressing and stroking over the thin black lace that did nothing to hide her arousal, and Chloe had to take more than one breath to try to get her bearings, and then her hips rocked into the touch, urged on by the legs crossed around her waist. The pull threw her off balance and she dropped her hands to the dresser for support, rolling against Beca.

“Shit, Beca…” she breathed, honestly surprised at how quickly she’d become so turned on.

Beca ducked down to capture her lips in another hard kiss, and then broke away. “How are your legs feeling?”

Chloe nodded quickly. “Good.”

“It’s on the bed,” Beca mumbled against her mouth.

She glanced over, whining a little as a tongue dragged along the side of her neck. Sure enough, the
harness was there, fully assembled by the look of it; something else Beca had done while Chloe took her time getting dolled up. Her hips gave another roll and she groaned when fingers slipped the lace to the side. Beca seemed distracted though, wriggling a little, and then with a jerk Chloe felt the top drawer bump into her thighs. She looked down in time to see Beca’s otherwise unoccupied hand lifting, handcuffs dangling from her index finger.

“I believe I owe you one proper fantasy.”

Chloe felt adrenaline rush through her veins and she pulled Beca flush with her, looking at her, at the pretty color in her cheeks and the sparkle in her eye and the smirk on her lips. “You’re sure?”

Beca raised her hand higher, until level with their eyes, dropping the handcuffs into Chloe’s open palm the moment she reached for them. “Use them on me.” She punctuated her statement with a well-timed press of her fingers that had Chloe on her tiptoes from the pressure.

Chloe gasped, but if she’d have been asked if it was from Beca’s request or Beca’s touch, she wouldn’t have been able to decide. And then the touch was gone, and once Chloe could actually focus again, Beca was pulling her middle and index fingers from her mouth. Her mind was still spinning, though, lightheaded. She nodded and managed to take a step back, putting painful distance between them to give Beca space to get down off the dresser. Chloe helped her, a little shakily, and decided to lose the heels; they were more trouble than they were worth now.

“Come on…” Beca said with a laugh as she tugged Chloe’s hand, getting her feet moving. “I can’t do all the work in this scenario. Or, really, any of it. That’s kinda the point.”

Beca’s laugh helped Chloe snap-to, and she giggled, too. “Sorry, just...excited.” They were standing alongside the bed, Beca’s hands behind Chloe’s neck, scratching lightly up into her hair as she smiled.

“The headboard isn’t really conducive to getting chained to it.”

Chloe looked it over, trying to ignore the roar of her pulse in her ears at Beca using the phrase ‘getting chained to it.’ She was right, it really wasn’t, made of logs to match the rustic cabin, which were charming but far too thick for the three short links of the handcuffs she’d almost, almost forgotten were in her fist. “No...”

“But I’ll do whatever you tell me to.”
Chloe turned back to Beca, still smiling. “This is okay?”

“I’m the one suggesting it. And I know it’s what you want.”

“You want it, too?”

“Baby…” Beca purred, purred, and pulled Chloe down into a kiss that made her weak in the knees. “You can do whatever you want.”

Chloe forgot how to breathe, and then she got her hands to respond to her brain’s commands. She dropped the handcuffs on the bed and tucked her fingers into the top of Beca’s corset to push and twist to get the first two hooks undone, and then she stopped. “I don’t know if you’re sexier with or without this.”

“Like I said. Whatever you want.”

Chloe started to remove her hands, appreciating the sexiness of the garment.

“But, I will say that it’s kinda tight and I can’t really take a proper breath and I don’t want to pass out?” She gave a quiet laugh and shrugged. “And I have a feeling I might...you know...need to breathe. A lot.”

“Yeah, you will,” Chloe said with an excited nod. She wanted to add something about how Beca would be lucky if she even had a chance to catch her breath, or she was about to take her breath away, but instead she tugged Beca to her with her renewed grip on the corset to kiss her, stealing her breath that way as she kept working the hooks blindly until she felt it give completely. She let it fall to the floor behind Beca and replaced it with her hands, running them along her bare back to pull their bodies flush. Beca’s skin was warm against her and the gentle fingers in her hair were making Chloe shiver. She detoured from Beca’s lips to her neck so she could steal a glance at the bed and find where she’d dropped the handcuffs, retrieving them as she worked her tongue along Beca’s skin and over the area that could make Beca weak. Only, it didn’t seem to be lit up tonight. Damn. No matter; she had other methods.

The cuffs jangled in Chloe’s grip and a whimper escaped Beca, or perhaps it was from the teeth along her neck that drew the sound, but whatever the reason was, Chloe didn’t really care as long as the sounds didn’t stop. She found Beca’s left hand up in her hair and pulled it down, fumbling
with the handcuffs in her excitement and working blind, but eventually she got a cuff open and snapped around Beca’s wrist.

Beca still had a hold on Chloe’s hair with her free hand, and she pulled hard enough to detach Chloe’s mouth from her neck. “I want to give you exactly what you want. Tell me what you want.”

Chloe took a breath, admiring the lipstick smudges along Beca’s neck. “Give me your other hand.”

Beca detangled her hand from Chloe’s hair and held it between them, waiting.

Chloe seized it, starting to - well, she already was excited, but starting to - settle a little further into the roles they were playing and tugged it down with a little more force than was really necessary, but all Beca did was stare up at her, eyes dark, as Chloe pulled it toward her other hand and snapped the loose cuff around it. She looked down, past the bare breasts that were quite literally heaving with Beca’s accelerated breathing, to the handcuffs securing her hands together.

“Lie down,” she said suddenly, pushing Beca toward the bed with hands on her hips. She watched Beca turn and sit, swiveling to bring her legs up as well and lay back, hands resting on her stomach.

Beca looked up at her, face calm but her eyes betrayed her as she struggled to hold Chloe’s gaze, focus dropping every few seconds to rove over her body. Chloe let her look, and then interrupted her by leaning across her to grab the harness from where Beca had laid it out for her. Despite knowing Beca was into it, the actual act of putting the thing on didn’t feel particularly sexy or seductive.

“Close your eyes.”

Beca closed them immediately, a smile playing at her lips as she waited patiently. Chloe hurried her way into the harness, tugging the straps snug as she climbed onto the bed to swing her knee across Beca to settle over her thighs. “I didn't say open them,” she said quickly when Beca opened her eyes.

She snapped them closed again, grinning. “You're still dressed.”

“Would be a waste to only wear these for like ten minutes.”
“You look really pretty,” Beca said with a nod, eyes still closed. “And so fucking sexy.”

Chloe had to lean down at that, to press her lips to the curve of Beca's breast, drawing a gasp from Beca at the unexpected contact.

“I can keep complimenting you if that's how this is going to work,” Beca said after a moment. “You're the hottest woman I've ever met.”

Chloe laughed and tugged a little at soft flesh. “That’s not required, but I don't mind it.” She laughed again at the fingers that tickled her stomach and she sat back for a moment, just appreciating Beca below her until she saw her get fidgety. She leaned down again to take the tip of the breast she'd been teasing between her lips to pull on it and bathe it with her tongue.

Beca's mouth fell open at the contact, a quiet sound of satisfaction escaping her. “I didn't even say anything nice that time.”

“No one’s stopping you,” Chloe said after releasing her flesh, easing to the other side and being sure to drag her hair across Beca's chest for added sensation. She was teasing of course, not actually expecting or requesting a compliment, her lips already kissing their way toward the other peak straining for attention.

“No one’s ever made me come as hard as you can.”

Chloe heard herself growl at that, the words grabbing hold in her gut and squeezing. She hadn't really intended for things to be particularly dirty tonight, though what could she expect with lingerie and handcuffs and...well, everything?

She sat back and moved off Beca, seizing the elastic around Beca's waist to pull the white lace down and off. “I'm going to make sure of that tonight.” She caught Beca peeking in the flurry of motion and quirked a playful eyebrow at her, though she didn’t chastise her for it.

Beca took it as permission to look and kept her eyes open, watching Chloe slip the undergarment down her legs. “Mmm, can’t wait.”
“Oh, I think you can wait,” Chloe teased, trailing a hand back up Beca’s leg, slowing the higher she got, until her fingertip traced the soft skin just shy of where she knew Beca wanted her.

“This is how it’s going to be tonight? You’re going to slowly drive me crazy?”

Chloe smiled up at her. “You did say anything I want.” She had no intention of teasing Beca, not for more than a few minutes anyway. It was nice, though, to be wanted so desperately, and Beca’s hips lifted expectantly when her touch shifted a little closer, finding wetness that drew her in without thinking until her touch glided easily along Beca.

“Anything you want…” Beca repeated with a strained breath. “Please don’t make me regret that.”

Chloe was firm with her touch, the way she knew Beca liked it, the way that made Beca’s eyes close and mouth open. Until she pulled away and Beca looked up, annoyed at the loss of contact. “Turn over.”

Beca looked surprised for half a second, and then she smiled at Chloe before struggling to roll over with her hands cuffed in front of her. “Little help?”

“Sorry,” Chloe said with a giggle as she moved off Beca and helped her turn over. “Can you get your hands out from under you? Put them up by your head?”

It was a bit of a graceless event, but eventually Beca got her bound arms out from under her and up until her hands were on the pillow. She turned her head, blowing hair out of her face. “I know I said whatever you want, but can I make a request?”

Chloe laughed fully. “Of course!”

“Can I stop eating this pillow, and can you get the hair out of my face?”

“Oh my gosh! Yes, yes, get up, get comfortable.” Chloe tugged on Beca’s hips once to get her moving onto her knees so she could support her upper body, forearms against the mattress once Chloe yanked the pillow out of the way. She started to reach to smooth Beca’s hair, but stopped, deciding to play a little bit dirty before things really got going. She moved behind Beca, holding her hips, enjoying the thrill that came with the position.
She saw Beca toss her hair, struggling. “Babe?”

“I’m getting there,” she said quietly as she moved closer, letting the toy touch Beca.

Beca exhaled at the contact and tossed her hair again, trying to look back over her shoulder. “I’m ready. But also, really need this hair off my face.”

“I said, I’m getting there,” Chloe said, waving her hand toward Beca to make her turn her head back around. “I’m just...just give me a minute.” She wanted a moment to process, to recognize, to appreciate the trust they were sharing, the sexiness of it, the anticipation. She used her hand to guide it, easing forward until she was pressing into Beca.

“Shit…” Beca whispered, adjusting her stance a little.

“It’s okay?” Chloe rested her hands on Beca’s lower back, not moving, just holding inside her.

“Yeah,” came Beca’s strained reply. “Ah, fuck…” followed when Chloe pressed further, until she could reach to comb her fingers through Beca’s hair to pull it all back and out of her face. She kind of liked it, knowing she was so deep in Beca, and having a hold on her hair. She knew she liked it when Beca pulled her hair this way, so she tightened her grip and pulled hard enough to lift Beca’s head from where it had been hanging listlessly. “Jesus!”

“God, you sound so good,” Chloe said with an exhale as she tossed Beca’s hair over her shoulder so she could get both hands on her hips where they needed to be. She gripped them and withdrew slowly, watching what she was doing before pushing forward again. And again. And again.

Beca moaned properly after her fourth thrust, a clear signal that she was ready for...for whatever. Chloe started to find a rhythm, and at first she thought this position was not as comfortable as how she’d used it the first time, missionary, but then she tucked herself a little closer and Beca started rocking back into her, and it felt like all the pieces fell into place. She didn’t have to hold Beca’s hips, because Beca was actively participating, so she ran her hands up Beca’s back, dragging her nails down it as she retreated.

It was easier, though, she noted, to be a little more precise if she did keep herself anchored with Beca, so she wrapped her hands around Beca’s waist and pulled her back to meet her. She heard Beca, the way she whimpered with almost every thrust, the way her breathing was interrupted by
the need to moan when Chloe tilted her hips a little differently. She saw her, the way the muscles in her shoulders moved as she supported herself, the way her ribs expanded with her gasping breaths, the way her cuffed hands gripped a post on the headboard.

“God, baby…” she breathed, pushing harder, quicker, watching the way Beca’s fingers squeezed at the wood.

Beca lifted her head, doing her best to look over her shoulder again, her face flushed. She’s smiling like she wants to say something, but her smile got interrupted when Chloe yanked her back particularly hard. “Fuck, Chlo. Fuck me.”

Chloe loved those two words more than almost anything, especially when they’re uttered with the amount of desperation currently in Beca’s voice. She sped up a little, feeling the pleasant burn in her muscles. The harness was teasing her, not quite positioned well enough to be effective, but enough to make her moan.

Beca echoed her and pressed herself back, then held still, wordlessly begging for it, submitting herself, to let Chloe give it to her.

“Anything I want?” Chloe breathed, slowing her thrusts almost to a stop to lean forward and drag her tongue up Beca’s back until she hand her hands cradling Beca’s breasts, tilting her hips just enough to maintain what they’d built up together.

Beca nodded sharply. “Anything.”

She sat back and grabbed Beca’s hips again, picking up where she’d paused. “I want you to come for me.”

“Oh, fuck…” Beca groaned, pressing back closer to Chloe, using her grip on the headboard for leverage. “If you insist…”

Chloe laughed breathlessly and wrapped her arm around Beca’s waist, moving her hand between Beca’s legs and all the wetness there. She could feel the toy slipping in and out and it made her rhythm falter for a second, but Beca moaning at the touch of her fingers on the bundle of nerves pulled her back into it. She didn’t need grace, but she needed rhythm, and she pressed again and again into Beca, fingers messy but effective as she watched Beca’s climax build, her back arching, shoulders tensing, grip on the headboard turning white-knuckled until…
Until Beca came undone beneath her, bucking up and back and forward, some incomplete version of Chloe’s name spilling from her lips as her body shuddered and jerked in Chloe’s embrace. Chloe moved through it with her, slowing her hips and her fingers until Beca stilled, gasping and trembling with quiet aftershocks with every miniscule move Chloe made as she eased backwards, slipping out of Beca.

The moment she did, Beca collapsed against the bed, instantly turning onto her side and curling up. Chloe battled with the straps around her hips until she shed the harness so she could slide up behind Beca and spoon her properly. She pressed a kiss to the back of Beca’s neck, pulling away the damp hair there.

“I love you,” she said, slipping her arm around Beca’s waist to find her still-cuffed wrists there. The touch of metal sent a zing through her, reminding her how turned on she was, and how Beca was still, technically at her mercy.

“I love you, too,” Beca said with a deep sigh. “God, that was amazing.”

Chloe giggled and pulled Beca’s shoulder until she rolled onto her back to look down at her. “Still the defending champion?”

Beca nodded and stretched a little. “Yep. Best Orgasm Giver 2016.”

Chloe laughed again and leaned down to kiss Beca, slowly, deeply. When she pulled back, she smiled. “You know, I think I have a challenger.”


“You, silly,” Chloe said, grinning as she sat up, unhooking her garters from her stockings so she could wiggle out of her panties.

“In case you haven’t noticed,” Beca said, trying to sit up a little and failing. “I’m still handcuffed.”

Chloe sighed airily and moved onto her knees, walking her way sideways “I know. You said whatever I want, right?”
Beca looked up at her, realization replacing the initial confusion. “Whatever you want.”

“Then you know what I want,” Chloe said, moving to straddle Beca’s face. She felt hands on her back, the cold metal a stark contrast to the heat of the fingers digging in and pulling her down to Beca’s mouth. She jumped a little at the sudden, direct contact. Beca wasn’t teasing - not that Chloe needed it anyway. She let herself lean forward a little, grasping the headboard for support as she let her hips rock slowly, allowing Beca to set the pace. Her own motion was only because she physically couldn’t stay still. She glanced down at Beca, eyes closed as she focused on what she was doing, and Chloe reached down to part herself a little, helping Beca who normally would have two free hands to assist her precision.

And then Beca was sucking and Chloe had to throw her head back, moaning at the sudden pressure building within her as a tongue flicked against her. Beca hummed a little as she let Chloe slip from between her lips and then she recaptured her. “Oh my God, baby...just like that…” she breathed, both hands back on the headboard to brace herself, fighting to keep her hips still and let Beca get her there.

With a sharp tug, she did, and Chloe fell forward with a cry, jerking against Beca who moaned in answer to Chloe’s, tongue moving over her aimlessly until Chloe stilled and slid back out of reach, sitting on Beca’s chest for a second to breathe before pushing herself off her with a groan to sit alongside Beca. The only thing stopping her from flopping down into an exhausted heap was the need to feel Beca’s arms around her now.

“Where’s the key?” she asked, already leaning across Beca to reach for the drawer in the nightstand.

“Yeah, there,” Beca said, sounding a little winded. She held up her hands as Chloe popped the cuffs off her wrists, tossing them into the drawer with the key.

“Come here,” Chloe said, pulling Beca’s arm until they were both lying down, curled up together.

“That was really hot,” Beca said, hand moving over Chloe with its restored freedom. She pressed a kiss to Chloe’s shoulder and Chloe gasped a little as fingers delved between her legs.

“Sensitive,” Chloe said with a deep breath as Beca didn’t ease up so much as change her angle a little. “Baby, you don’t have to...oh God…” Chloe groaned as Beca’s fingers pressed against her just right, the hard kind of friction that she hadn’t had all night and would get her there in...yeah, in
seconds, she realized as her hips lifted into the touch. She came hard, thighs closing against Beca’s hand to keep her there as the pleasure ebbbed.

“I couldn’t let everything be on your terms, now could I?” Beca said with a grin as she pulled her hand away once she could.

Chloe sighed and tugged Beca’s arm safely around her waist. “Why am I not surprised?”

“Are you complaining?”

“Of course not.”

“I mean, I was challenging you for your title. What do you think - did I dethrone you?”

Chloe laughed. “Let’s call it a draw.”

Beca shook her head and pulled out of the embrace to sit up. “That won’t do. I don’t do ties. If there’s no clear winner, I think we need a rematch.”

“Deal. After halftime,” Chloe said, sitting up, too. She was thirsty, and there was chocolate somewhere calling her name. She hopped off the bed and headed downstairs to the kitchen. “Reconvene in fifteen.”
By Day Ten, Beca found herself actually looking forward to grabbing her board and hitting the slopes. Now that she knew what she was doing, it was actually fun.

Because, frankly, if Beca wasn’t able to be good at something, she pretty much hated it. But could you really blame her?

But she’d figured out that crazy snowboard, and discovered she was actually kind of good at it, and it annoyed Chloe in a way that was absurdly adorable, because it was kind of a rarity for the perpetually peppy Chloe Beale to get aggravated by things.

The unexpected turn of events had Chloe in a bit of a tailspin, and Beca laughed all the way to the finish line every time. Clearly, she had expected to be the champ on the ski slopes and Beca had happily thrown a wrench into her plan.

“Alright, Beale,” Chloe said the evening of Day Twelve.

Beca grinned at Chloe's ability to take ownership of Beca's long-used nickname for her. They were lounging on the couch, drinking wine and watching ‘foreign’ television, laughing at the accents and phrases they didn’t understand. “Alright what?”

She watched Chloe get off the couch and walk with purpose to the pool table they had yet to utilize during their stay and pull a cue off the rack on the wall to tap it on the floor like a scepter.

“I’m supposed to be the teacher. Get over here so I can school you.”
Beca laughed. “Seriously? You want to, quote, school me at pool?”

“Yes!” Chloe said confidently, cocking her hip in waiting. “I’m tired of you beating me at my own game. This is also my game. You will not beat me here.”

Beca shook her head and stood to join her. “I’ve known you for five years, and never once have I seen you at a pool table.” If Chloe thought she had a chance in Hell at beating her at billiards, she was sorely mistaken.

“Just because you’ve never seen it doesn’t mean it’s never happened.” Chloe plucked the cube of blue chalk off the rack and worked it over the tip of her cue. “And to make it extra fun - strip pool. For every shot I make, you have to take something off. And vice versa. Are you going to accept my challenge? Or are you chicken?”

Beca scoffed. “Never.” She grabbed the chalk out of Chloe’s hand and chose her weapon off the wall. “Rack ‘em.”

She allowed Chloe the break, wanting to size up her opponent.

Chloe wasn’t terrible, admittedly. She claimed stripes upon her decent break and managed to sink two immediately thereafter before Beca got her chance, but not before Beca pulled off both socks and her zippered hoodie.

“You see, babe, the thing is…” Beca said, bending over to line up her shot, knocking the four ball into a corner pocket. “Is that, if I haven’t seen you play…” She slammed the six into a side pocket easily and made her way around the table slowly, surveying it until she found an angle on the one ball. She banked it off a rail and into the opposite pocket. “Then you haven’t seen me play either.” She straightened and smiled at Chloe who was frowning at her from the other side of the table.

“That isn’t fair,” Chloe said with a pout.

“How is it not fair?” Beca grinned harder and made an attempt on the seven ball, but came up short. “Damn.” She eyed Chloe. “I’m waiting.”
“I thought I’d actually beat you at this.” Chloe sighed and set to discarding her slippers and cardigan, and wandered until she was next to Beca, where she promptly bent over and pushed her ass right into Beca to get her out of the way to take her shot on the twelve ball.

Beca waited until she missed before thrusting her pelvis into Chloe’s backside playfully, since she’d shoved it in her way, after all. “You’re really on a roll now.”

“Did you forget how to count?” Chloe asked, giggling from the bump. “We’re tied.”

Beca surveyed the table, happy with where Chloe had left the cue ball for her. “Not for long.” She tapped it to ride the rail and drop the blue two into the corner. Chloe stomped her foot, making Beca laugh as she missed her next shot. “Strip.”

And Chloe, her poor, sweet Chloe, pouted harder after every shot she missed and every shot Beca made until she was down to her bra and panties and Beca still managed to retain not just her bra and panties but also her sweatpants. Beca actually felt a little bad about whooping her so handily. But it was so fun watching her usually held-together and chipper wife - she still loved that word - start breaking down when faced with imminent demise, made all the more adorable by her increasing lack of clothing.

She jumped when Chloe loudly slammed her cue down to lie along the length of the table. “That’s it!”

“Whoa, babe, it’s just a game...” Beca took another step back from where she’d hopped to in shock. But then Chloe’s angry face seemed to shift, just a hair.

“I quit.” Chloe was smirking at her as she hopped up to sit on the edge of the table for a second before turning onto her hands and knees, shoving the remaining balls out of her way with her hand to send them bouncing around as she crawled across the table toward Beca.

“What is happening right now?” Beca asked, confused but enjoying whatever it was, because Chloe crawling across a pool table in her underwear was nothing to complain about.

“I’m having my Maureen Johnson moment,” Chloe said with a grin as she got to the near side of the table and stopped, still on her knees as she reached out and grabbed Beca with a finger hooked into the front of her bra.
“Your what?” Beca said, stumbling forward.

“You know. RENT. I made you watch it last year. The lesbian couple sings and breaks up and the one with the insane cheekbones crawls across the pool table.”

It was vaguely familiar, the only thing really ringing a bell is a sexy brunette in tight leather pants that couldn't keep it in her pants. “Sure,” she offered, not wanting Chloe to spend unnecessary time explaining the movie. Not when Chloe was on her hands and knees in yet another new set of lingerie that made Beca wonder just how much new underwear Chloe bought for this trip, and...well, on a pool table. She leaned forward, hands pressed into the wooden edge of the table, cue still between the fingers of her left hand.

“Liar,” Chloe said with a smirk she'd stolen from Beca's arsenal as she tugged Beca another inch closer to be able to kiss her.

Beca smiled against the kiss. “You don't know I'm lying.”

“Oh really?” Chloe pulled back and quirked an eyebrow at her. “A tiger in a cage can never see the sun. Finish the verse.”

Beca had no clue what came next, but she wasn't about to go down without a fight. Though I'd go down on her any time. She sniffed at her internal joke and shook her head. “I don't want to sing. I want to make out with my wife who, for some reason, is in her underwear on a pool table.”

“This diva needs her stage,” Chloe sang, finishing the lyric Beca couldn't.

But then she felt the lightbulb above her head blink on and she leaned forward, almost but not quite kissing Chloe. “So baby, let's have fun!”

Chloe's peal of laughter made Beca giddy, because literally nothing made her happier than making Chloe happy. Only assembling the perfect song rivaled it, and she thought they made some pretty damn good music together. The coordinated tattoos on their wrists reminded her of that.

“Believe me now?” she asked, grinning at Chloe's face, baby blue eyes alight with amusement.
“I believe you,” Chloe said with a nod as she swung herself around to sit on the edge of the table and tuck herself between Beca’s arms.

“Good. Can we get back to kissing now?” She didn’t wait for Chloe’s answer, leaning in and capturing her lips. She heard Chloe chuckle, and that was just not acceptable - laughing while kissing - so Beca stepped up her game, tossing her cue onto the table so she could take Chloe’s face with both hands, tilting her how she wanted her and holding her there to lick into her mouth and stake her claim.

She felt Chloe’s posture sag as she submitted to the kiss, and then she felt Chloe hook a foot behind her knee and pull her closer as hands appeared on her waist, drawing shivers from Beca at the tickling touch.

Beca relinquished her firm hold on Chloe’s face to run her hands down Chloe’s arms to cover the fingers that needed to stop tickling. She took the moment in for a second, pulling the confidence she always drew from Chloe like a sponge, before breaking the kiss to speak. “Do I get to fuck you on this pool table?”

Chloe’s eyelashes fluttered at the question and Beca found herself kissing again, but Chloe was in charge this time, taking Beca's hands away from her waist to guide them around her depositing them in the vicinity of her bra strap.

“Is that a yes?” Beca asked between kisses, deftly unhooking Chloe's bra to pull it off and toss it aside.

“That's a yes,” Chloe whispered, kissing Beca harder as she dragged her nails down and up Beca's back, making quick work of her bra.

Beca sucked in a breath at the hands that found their way to her breasts. She always marveled at Chloe's hands, their gentle, delicate beauty. She could watch Chloe work with her hands for hours and never get bored. And she certainly wasn't bored with them now as they held her and caressed her. She took a step back to catch her breath for the briefest of moments before stepping back in to connect her mouth with Chloe's neck, loving the way she threw her head back to accept it, to encourage it. Beca's hands fell to Chloe's thighs, easing them further apart as she did everything but leave a mark on Chloe's neck. The nails against her back and shoulders made her moan against Chloe, and Chloe echoed it as Beca pushed her hands up her thighs until thumbs brushed over the heat between them.

“Please, baby…” Chloe whispered in Beca's ear and her knees all but gave out, sending her down
to them in a semi-controlled collapse.

She watched Chloe scoot forward and then lean back, supporting herself with palms pressed into the red felt of the pool table. Like she was getting comfortable, settling in for a good time. Beca pressed a kiss to her inner thigh, hands still on them and the only thing that had slowed her quick descent. She glanced up at Chloe to find her gazing back down at her, eyes dark, face flushed, kissable lower lip pulled between her teeth as she watched Beca work her way higher.

Beca held her gaze, wanting to see the look on her eyes when she would pull the lavender lace aside and kiss her. She kept her mouth at bay, planting kisses along her thighs, letting her fingers tease. For once, Chloe was at rest, not lifting herself to Beca or reaching to pull her closer. Other than the twitch of a knee or the hitch of a breath, Chloe was peaceful, just watching Beca take her time. There was something so oddly intimate about it, about knowing Chloe was content to let Beca take her time, do what she wanted, how she wanted, literally kicking back to watch it happen and trust Beca to take care of her.

So when Beca finally pulled the lace aside to press a kiss directly to wet warmth and Chloe sighed and let her head fall back, instead of the more typical wanton groan, Beca sighed, too, and settled more comfortably into her position on the floor and eased Chloe’s left knee up and over her shoulder.

“That’s nice,” drifted down to her, and perhaps any other time, she’d have been offended by her ministrations being categorized as ‘nice’ - ‘fucking amazing’ or ‘so fucking good’ were phrases she was more accustomed to hearing in this position, but a little gentility was, well, nice. With Chloe content to be patient, Beca took her time, tracing lazy patterns with her tongue that sometimes made Chloe’s hips jerk in reflex, not in demand.

Chloe was mostly silent, though she was breathing hard, and sounds started escaping her as Beca upped her tempo bit by bit until she was pulling swollen flesh between her lips to suck and stroke it with her tongue and Chloe’s heavy breaths turned into moans with almost every exhale until her heel pressed hard into Beca’s back as her voice caught in her throat. Beca looked up to watch her, and truly, Chloe was always gorgeous, but there was something even more beautiful about her when she climaxed, all gasping breaths and pink cheeks and messy hair and the way her mouth fell open, sometimes silent, like now, sometimes spilling out X-Rated exclamations.

She watched Chloe right herself from her recline and her hands moved through Beca’s hair, fingers combing it back hand over hand as Beca eased until she was just resting her cheek against Chloe’s thigh and looking up at her. “I don’t think I’m ever going to get tired of this.”

“I hope not,” Chloe said with a giggle. She was lifting and lowering her leg a little, kind of stroking Beca’s back with her foot, and though maybe in a different context Beca would think it weird, it
was nice. The hands running through Beca’s hair slowed and fell to tuck under her arms and give a tug. “Come up here.”

Beca worked her way back to her feet, groaning a little as the blood rushed back into her legs, causing them to tingle with pins and needles. Her sleeping legs were quickly forgotten as Chloe guided her up and right into a kiss, a slow, sweet one with a few seconds in the middle where it was deep and passionate before returning to its quiet innocence.

“I love you, Beca Beale,” Chloe said with a smile before touching her lips to Beca’s again.

Beca returned the smile and the kiss. “I love you, too.”

“Help me down?” Chloe asked, rocking side to side to wiggle her way to the edge of the pool table. Beca took a half-step back to make room for her and lifted her a little, just enough so she wouldn’t hop blindly to the floor and land too hard. “Thanks, baby,” Chloe said with a giggle and another kiss. “And I’d love to stay naked for you, but it’s kind of chilly in here.”

Beca laughed and pulled her into a hug, noticing the chill on both of their nude torsos, and Beca had the added benefit of pants keeping her warm. Chloe had to be freezing now that the heat of their moment had passed. “We only have this place a couple more days. Come warm up in the hot tub with me.”

“Okay!” Chloe chirped and pecked Beca’s lips before twirling out of her embrace and heading straight for the rear deck. Beca let her go, trusting her to uncover the Jacuzzi and get it running while she grabbed their robes out of the bathroom, leaving her few items of clothing behind.

Chloe was already in and waiting when Beca returned, and she was far less hesitant to step into the cold air and into the hot water than she was the first time, sinking into the churning bubbles to her chest.

“Finally,” Chloe said, snagging Beca’s hand in the water to pull her across the width of the tub until Beca found herself getting arranged to sit astride Chloe’s lap.

Beca gasped, hands immediately grasping her backside to pull her closer until Chloe’s lips were on her neck. “You don’t have to,” she breathed, feeling heat rushing through her.
“Oh, but I want to,” Chloe mumbled against her neck, kissing and pulling until she had Beca swearing.

Beca jumped when a hand pressed between her legs from behind, teasing her, reaching further to roll over the bundle of nerves that had been throbbing with need since she fell to her knees in front of Chloe. “God, Chloe…” she breathed, slapping her hands onto the edge of the tub to give herself something to push against as she rolled her hips with the touch.

Teeth pulled at her earlobe and the wandering hand disappeared for a moment, just long enough to change angles and move between them instead of behind, fingers deftly slipping in and up in one quick motion. Chloe’s moan was loud in her ear and Beca rolled her neck, wanting those lips back on it, which they were in a heartbeat. “You’re so wet, baby,” Chloe breathed out, pressing hard enough to lift Beca off her lap.

Beca pressed back down, forcing Chloe deeper. “That’s what you do to me.”

Chloe hummed and flickered her tongue along Beca’s neck, making her shiver as it caught the edge of the hypersensitive spot to send her hips into motion.

She wasn’t slow or gentle about it; Beca needed Chloe - badly. Chloe was trying to keep up, set the pace, keep Beca’s pace, but Beca was rocking haphazardly, sometimes fast, sometimes slow, and Beca didn’t care if Chloe wasn’t perfect; she didn’t need her be. She just needed her to be there.

Everything was hot, even though Chloe’s shoulders were cold where Beca threw her arms around her to cling to her as she worked her hips, rolling them again and again against the hand between them, encouraged by the other hand that gripped her from behind.

“Jesus, baby, you’re so fucking sexy.”

Beca forced her eyes open at those words, not bothering to stop the moans she knew were coming fast and furious from her lips as she saw Chloe staring up at her.

“You’re going to come for me?”

Heat flooded her again at the words. Chloe saying dirty things was about the kinkiest possible thing for Beca. Sure, handcuffs and strap-ons and whipped cream were all hot and sexy, but Chloe
saying the word “come” in this context was enough to make Beca hit the roof. She nodded and let her eyes fall closed again, not thinking, just feeling - Chloe inside her, around her, against her, whispering erotic things in her ear until…

“Fuck…”

“Yes, baby, yes,” Chloe said, wrapping her arm around Beca’s waist.

The pleasure was overwhelming, white hot and everywhere, and Beca felt herself held close and tightly as it pulsed through her, and even after it ebbed she was held close, almost cradled despite their position, and as the haze of ecstasy faded, she felt lips and teeth along her shoulder, kissing and biting playfully as she relaxed.

“Fuck,” she said with a groan, leaning back to disengage their insanely tight embrace.

“I love when you just take what you want,” Chloe said, voice husky. “It’s so hot.”

Beca felt herself blush, but was pretty sure it was impossible to notice any difference. “Didn’t mean to make you feel like an object.”

Chloe’s eyes went wide. “What?? No! Beca, no that’s not what I meant at all.”

“I know you didn’t,” Beca said with a smile, letting her head fall forward to rest against Chloe’s. “Was joking.”

“Thank goodness,” Chloe said with a sigh.

Beca sat back again, feeling Chloe withdraw her hand. She missed the connection immediately, and she had a fleeting thought that if it was socially acceptable, her life would be so much better if she could just have Chloe’s hand between her legs, like, always. The thought made her fading arousal flare up again and she kissed Chloe, surprised at the fervor with which it was returned. She pulled back and watched Chloe’s eyes flutter open to reveal the fire in them.

Beca pushed herself backwards off Chloe, grabbing her hand to pull her with her toward the steps.
“Okay, fuck this hot tub. I’m taking you upstairs right now.”

Beca fully intended to be Chloe’s object. There was nothing wrong with it, with being the willing participant to allow her partner to be in complete control, to take what she wanted, how she wanted.

And the way Chloe looked at her once they got to the bedroom and Beca hesitated in front of the dresser they both knew contained their strap-on, Beca knew it’s what she would be. A willing object, a consenting assistant to a means to an end. She wanted it. She knew Chloe wanted it. And she knew it would be ridiculously sexy to see Chloe take what she wanted. So she retrieved the harness from the drawer and fixed the straps to fit her instead of Chloe as she watched Chloe climb onto the bed and wait, sitting on her knees to watch Beca.

The fact that Chloe wasn’t even bothering to lie down only spurred Beca’s desire to please. She worked hurriedly and joined Chloe on the bed, pulling her right into a kiss as they turned until Beca fell back to lie in the pillows. Chloe swung her knee across Beca’s hips, and Beca struggled to keep her eyes open; it was too hot to look at, but too hot to miss.

She watched Chloe flip the cap of the lube Beca had basically thrown at her while she dealt with the harness, squeezing it into her hand to toss it aside. Beca paid attention to where it landed in case they needed it later, and then her eyes were rolling, trying to focus on the way Chloe’s hand was working over the translucent purple appendage affixed to her hips. She could almost feel it, the push and tug, and then it was gone, Chloe’s hand dipping between her own legs for a moment.

“Oh my God…” Beca exhaled, watching Chloe touch herself, biting her lip as she looked down at Beca and moved higher until her hand grasped the base of the toy again.

“I’ve wanted you this way for so long,” Chloe said, voice a little shaken as she guided the toy between her legs.

Beca couldn’t respond; all she could do was watch, hands moving automatically to Chloe’s waist as she watched her sink down slowly, pausing halfway to retreat, and then taking it completely with a loud moan of contentment. Beca’s hips lifted in instinct, pushing into Chloe to make her gasp.

Chloe’s hands found hers, covering them on her waist for a minute before dropping to rest on her own thighs as she rolled her hips, eyes falling closed.
Beca watched, transfixed. “Jesus.”

“You like this?” Chloe asked, lifting herself a little.

“You could say that,” Beca said, pulling Chloe back down as she pushed her hips up.

Chloe whimpered at the reconnection, and started setting her pace.

Beca let her; she didn’t try to dictate one or guide her. She wanted to watch Chloe take what she needed, to see how she liked it.

She’d never seen anything like it; any time Beca was in a similar scenario, she was the one on top, or she couldn’t see what was happening between them. But this...she could see everything and she’d never...“Goddamn...” seen anything so hot in her life. Now she knew why Chloe had liked it so much when she’d taken control like this the first time they used it. Chloe Beale riding her, head thrown back, hands on her own breasts was about enough to make Beca combust on the spot. She couldn’t believe this gorgeous woman was hers, that she could make her feel this way, that they had this with each other. She’d never understand how she got so damn lucky. She slipped her left hand between Chloe’s legs, pressing her fingers against her, not rubbing, just being there to let her feel it and take it.

Chloe looked down at her again, but Beca couldn’t lift her eyes to meet hers. She was too focused on watching what was happening, because it was too hot to miss. “You feel so good, baby,” Chloe said, almost whining as she worked her hips faster.

It was starting to be too much for Beca. The visual alone was nearly enough, but Chloe was coming down hard enough to press the base of the toy just right against her. She moaned in response and pressed her fingers harder against Chloe. “You’re gonna make me come again,” Beca said, struggling to say it without it happening. She was on the brink, having to think about other things to cut it off, but it was there, yanking at every nerve in her body.

“Oh my God, baby, really?” Chloe panted, covering Beca’s hand with her own to guide her fingers just right.

Beca nodded, finally closing her eyes to stave it off as long as possible.
“Are you close?”

She nodded again, gasping when Chloe ground her hips down in a circle, hitting everything perfectly right.

“Yes, too, baby, me, too. I’m so close. Can you wait for me?”

Beca held her breath and nodded. It was all she could do to keep it at bay.

Chloe moved quicker then, bouncing on her, pressing Beca’s fingers hard against her. “Oh God, I’m going to come so hard,” Chloe whispered, that airy incredulous tone that drove Beca crazy.

And that was all; she couldn’t stop it - she could feel it and see it and hear it in Chloe’s voice and she couldn’t stop it. “I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m…” Her apology broke off into a gasp and a cry as she lost what little hold she had on her self-control.

She was lost in her own moment and jumped when Chloe suddenly collapsed against her, moaning in her ear as her body jerked and rolled against Beca, who had just enough presence of mind to throw her arms around Chloe and hold onto her as she slowed.

“Beca…” Lips pressed lazily against her temple and cheek and ear and neck. “God, Beca. That was amazing.”

Beca nodded, feeling like she couldn’t trust her voice to work quite yet. Instead she pulled Chloe in closer, pulling her knees up to keep Chloe from drifting lower. And she truly and honestly forgot what was between them at the moment and Chloe gasped so sharply, Beca thought she’d hurt her somehow. “What? What??”

“Bec-” Chloe’s voice cut off and Beca suddenly realized what had happened; she’d definitely just pushed her pseudo silicone self further into Chloe without any warning or grace.

“Oh my God, Chlo, I’m so sorr-”
“No...I mean...yes...ah…”

Beca was confused for a second, but then Chloe was moving against her again, short, quick movements. “Oh my God, Chloe, seriously?” she laughed, sliding her hands down Chloe’s back to hold the backs of her thighs, helping her rock.

“Shut up,” Chloe breathed, and then she moaned in Beca’s ear and Beca stopped laughing and instead lifted her hips a little, their motions so concise that it took almost no effort. “Yes yes yes yes yes,” Chloe said through a moan and then she was trembling in Beca’s arms again, a weak cry getting smothered where it landed against the edge of Beca’s ear where her lips had lingered.

“Are you finished now?” Beca teased once Chloe’s weight was heavy against her once again.

Chloe lifted her head, pushing her hair out of her face. “Weren’t you just telling me downstairs how you’ll never get tired of this?”

Beca smiled at her. “I didn’t say I was tired of it. I might be a little jealous though.”

Chloe rolled her eyes, laughing as she eased herself off Beca to flop onto her back alongside her. “If my count is correct, I’m only up by one, and that was an unexpected surprise. And was your fault.”

“Sometimes I’m an equal opportunist,” Beca said lightly as she worked to loosen the straps around her hips and toss the contraption aside. “I fully intended for this little rendezvous to be all about you, but…” She rolled onto Chloe, straddling her hips as she leaned down, elbows on the pillows beneath Chloe’s head to hover comfortably.

She felt fingers tickling along her thighs to her waist to her ribs to her breasts. “But?” Chloe asked innocently.

“But I’m pretty sure watching you just now was the hottest thing to ever exist in this world.”

Chloe burst out laughing and Beca grinned down at her, watching the joy she was able to stir up in this incredible woman below her with a few simple words or meaningful touches. She couldn’t believe how stupid in love with her she was. “Can we just stay here forever?” She bit her lip after asking, feeling silly and shy.
“Aww, Bec.” Chloe moved her hands to frame Beca’s face and stroke her thumbs over the apples of her cheeks. “Sounds like someone’s getting a little sentimental.”

“Fuck you,” she laughed, closing her eyes and turning her head to press a kiss to Chloe’s palm. “You can’t blame me for not wanting to leave. It’s like paradise here. I don’t want to go back and deal with real life bullshit.” She sighed and moved off Chloe, her moment of refueled lust having passed. She tucked herself into Chloe’s side and let her wife wrestle the blankets up and over them.

“You know,” Chloe said once they resettled, “when we go home, our new life really starts.”

“Do you think it’s going to be different?” Beca fished Chloe’s hand out from the covers and linked hers with it.

“Why would it be any different?”

Beca shrugged. “I don’t know. Do you feel different?”

“Like, now that we’re married?”

She nodded.

“I guess, in a way.” Chloe kind of tugged on Beca’s hand and then pressed it against her chest and held it there. “I feel anchored. I feel safe.”

Beca smiled, because Chloe very much felt like a safety net of sorts to her. And it was what she wanted to be for Chloe. But, she’d been dancing around a thought for weeks, something she couldn’t avoid forever. “Me, too. Can I tell you something? I don’t want you to get upset or whatever.”

She felt Chloe shift under her a little, and then nod. “Of course.”

Beca took a breath and focused on their intertwined hands. “I’m nervous what my PR team is going
to say. This...wasn’t in their plan for me, and I have a meeting with them as soon as we get home.”

“They don’t get to be in charge of your life, Bec.”

“No, no, I know,” she said, shaking her head a little. “But, they do have a plan. And me being married, at least so soon, wasn’t part of it.”

“Well they can fuck off.”

Beca smiled at Chloe’s swearing outside the bubble of passion. “I agree. But you know...it’s my career. And it’s our life. And my career might be a big part of our life. Oh God, I don’t mean that yours isn’t,” she said quickly, hearing how self-centered she sounded. “I just mean like, it’s going to be more high maintenance than yours. Travel and weird hours and crazy events. And the money doesn’t hurt, especially when we buy a house and have kids and -”

Chloe interrupted her. “Beca?” She wriggled out from under Beca, sitting up a little.

Confused, Beca sat up, too. “What?”

Chloe was grinning. “You’re talking about us having kids.”

She was still confused. “Well, I mean, not like, tomorrow, but I kind of thought that’s part of the package deal? Marriage, white picket fence, two-point-five kids, a dog, soccer games and scout meetings. But I’m not buying a fucking minivan so don’t you ever suggest it. SUV, yes. Minivan, no.” She looked at Chloe again, after having been talking with her hands and not really focused on her face, surprised to see Chloe’s eyes brimming with tears. “Oh God, what? What did I say?”

Chloe started shaking her head, covering her mouth for a second as though cutting off a sob, and then sat up enough to pull Beca back down on top of her in a tight embrace. “Everything. You said everything,” Chloe said, voice thick with emotion.

She still didn’t quite get it, but she let Chloe hold her, feeling her crying gently beneath her. “Hey, shh, it’s okay. It’s okay.”
“I know. I know it is. It’s perfect. You’re perfect.”

“Well I’m hardly perfect.” She heard Chloe laugh a little so she eased back out of the embrace so she could see her and take stock of whatever was happening. “What’s going on in that head of yours?”

Chloe sighed and sniffled and Beca propped herself up on one elbow to use her other hand and help brush away the tears from Chloe’s cheeks. “We just...we were so quick to get married. We didn’t stop and talk about that stuff. Not really, anyway. We haven’t talked about having kids since Thanksgiving, and that wasn’t even in the context of us having kids together.”

“Hey, I seem to remember declaring myself the parent that’s going to spoil them rotten and you’ll have to be the disciplinarian. What part of that isn’t in context of having kids together?”

“We just didn’t talk about it. Not really. Not seriously.”

“We’re talking about it now.” Beca smiled gently down at her, feeling a little guilty that they didn’t tick off some very important pre-marriage conversations in their haste. “Better late than never?”

Chloe laughed and nodded. “So we can talk about it?”

“Sure.” Beca moved off Chloe again and laid on her side, propping her head up on her fist.

Chloe squealed and flipped onto her side to mirror Beca. “Would you want to adopt or do in vitro?”

“I don’t want to be pregnant,” Beca answered quickly. “I was not born with that instinct. Zero desire.”

Chloe grinned. “I was. I want to be. But I’m not opposed to adopting. There are lots of babies that need loving families.”

“We could do both,” Beca offered, feeling warm and fuzzy inside. “Two-point-five and all.”
“What about the point-five?” Chloe asked, winking.

“I guess we’ll have to hope for one of them to have a vestigial twin.”

“Beca!” Chloe gasped, swatting Beca’s shoulder. “Don’t joke about that.”

“Sorry,” she offered, still chuckling to herself. “So, it’s settled. You’ll be the pregnant one. Man, what an unexpected perk of marrying a chick. I had resigned myself to having to be pregnant to have kids. This is great!”

Chloe was laughing heartily, hand over her eyes as she shook her head. “I’m glad I could take that off your plate, Mitchell.”

“Beale,” Beca corrected, poking Chloe in the stomach.

“What?”

“You called me Mitchell.”

Chloe gasped. “Oh my gosh, old habit! Sorry.”

“You’d think talking about starting a family would be the last time you’d forget we’re married.”

“I did not forget we’re married, Rebecca Ann Beale!” Chloe said, shoving Beca and making her laugh. “It was an accident.” Then Chloe softened quickly, gentle smile on her face. “We’re talking about starting a family.”

Beca smiled at her and brushed the stray lock of hair that had fallen out of place in the jostling play following the misnomer. “Yeah we are.”

“I want our baby to be as much us as it can be.”
“You sure that’s a good idea?” Beca said with a wink, but Chloe ignored it.

“I can talk to my brother. He could be a donor. And we can use your eggs. And I can carry it.”

Beca scrunched her nose. “I don’t like that we can’t just...not use birth control and wait for it to happen.”

Chloe giggled. “If it worked that way, we’d have gotten pregnant a long time ago.”

“Well maybe that’s for the best then. I wish it could really be ours though. Like, your brother’s cool and all. But he’s not you.”

“I know,” Chloe said with a sigh as she lifted her hand to rest it against Beca’s cheek for a moment. “Scientists are working on it; I’ve been keeping up with the research. They’re close, relatively speaking. But it might be years or decades away.”

“Well, I don’t think we’re ready to start this tomorrow.”

Chloe smiled. “No, but I don’t think we’re going to wait decades either.”

“No.” Her stomach suddenly dropped. “Oh God, I’m going to be a parent. I’m going to fuck them up so much.”

Her panic must have been visible, because Chloe’s hand was still petting her. “I already told you: you’re going to make a great mom.”

“I don’t know about that,” Beca said, swallowing the lump of nerves back down to her stomach. “But I guess we’ll find out.”
Los Angeles felt like the foreign country by the time they returned from their honeymoon, having spent the last week of it in Australia where, much to Beca’s excitement and Chloe’s amusement, Chloe had found a wildlife preserve that allowed Beca to hold not only a koala, but also a baby wallaby, thereby fulfilling Beca’s destination requirement. The photos of the events had replaced the photos of Chloe that had been Beca’s lock and home screens for months, and though she knew Chloe was a tiny bit miffed, Chloe seemed to be tickled pink about Beca having photos of herself holding fuzzy marsupials as her wallpapers made up for it.

But it made her happy, and she knew Chloe knew she’d replace her photos in a few days or a couple weeks, probably with pictures from their wedding or other honeymoon things. Chloe had spent forty-five minutes of their flight home sorting such photos on Beca’s phone into an album for future quick access - and then AirDropping them to herself to do the same.

“Hey, babe?”

Beca glanced up from the basket from which she was pulling their just-washed vacation laundry. “Hmm?” She snapped one of their dozen Barden Bellas/Athletics/Dance club tees and folded it, tossing it onto the growing stack on her desk by the closet. She didn’t even bother sorting them by original owner anymore.

Chloe was on her stomach on the bed, laptop in front of her. “The Elementary department’s doing a barbecue for the Fourth. Wanna go?”

“I think Capitol’s doing something,” she replied, folding yet another tee.

“Oh. Okay.”

She slowed her folding, noticing it wasn’t a Barden shirt but rather one from Chloe’s academy. She added it to the stack. “Yeah, let’s do your school thing,” she amended. “I’m always dragging you to my shit.” She looked over at Chloe, watching her light up.

“Yay! I’ll RSVP us.” Chloe was giddy and Beca smiled, going back to her task.

One of her basketball team shirts from high school had somehow made the trip to the southern
hemisphere - it was mandated to remain buried at the bottom of the drawer, but Chloe had a habit of digging it out and wearing it, and then teasing Beca mercilessly about being a jock, which was hilarious because Beca’s foray into athletics had been short-lived. She wanted to impress a guy on the Varsity basketball team, so she tried out for, and shockingly made, the JV team as a sophomore. Only she sprained her ankle at her fourth game, and when her teammate Jennifer brought her flowers and candy as a get-well gift, she forgot about the guy and became very good friends with Jennifer. And then quit the team. She had yet to share with Chloe that those were the details of the origin of Jennifer that Chloe knew existed. Beca smiled, thinking it probable that Chloe wouldn't insist on wearing that shirt if she knew the backstory. Maybe she should tell her...

“And I like going to your stuff,” Chloe continued as she clicked away on her keyboard. “It’s aca-awesome going to parties with celebrities. But I don’t mind showing you off to my work friends.”

Beca snagged the pile of underwear and socks out of the bottom of the basket and tossed them onto the desk to sort them and hopped up to sit next to them and work. “You’re telling me I’m just a trophy wife?”

“Not just a trophy wife,” Chloe said, smiling at her over the screen of her computer. “You’re a few other things, too.”

“Oh? Do tell.”

“You’re a great housekeeper.”

Beca scoffed and pitched the socks she’d just folded together across the room, missing Chloe but managing to at least get them onto the bed. “Fuck you.”

Chloe laughed and retrieved the socks, tossing them back and actually making it in the basket. She nodded proudly. “Which one of us played JV basketball again?”

“Fuck. You.” Beca smiled and resumed matching socks. “So what else am I?”

“A decent singer,” Chloe said, rocking her head back and forth in thought.

“Decent?”
“An okay lover.”

“Now I know you’re bullshitting me. There’s nothing ‘okay’ about my game.”

Chloe laughed again, and though she continued to list off things she apparently considered Beca to be (or not be), Beca was only half-listening, watching her ramble and gesture emphatically, the way her eyes were alight with joy and humor as she teased Beca about whatever. This whole deal wasn’t half bad, not that she was still in doubt. Chloe made her grossly happy, every day. And until they lived together, she never would have taken the time to match her socks; she threw them all in the drawer and called it a day. But Chloe made her want to keep house, or more accurately, keep a home. She hadn’t stopped thinking about their conversation one of the last nights in New Zealand, and the concept - no, it wasn’t a concept anymore - the fact that in the not too terribly distant future, she would be folding tiny socks and tiny T-shirts and tiny everythings.

She didn’t know how this was her life.

But she wasn’t complaining.

“What day is the barbecue?” She asked, noticing Chloe had stopped talking.

“Uh - July fourth?”

Beca rolled her eyes and set to sorting her underwear from Chloe’s, pretty much the only thing they did keep separate nowadays, but even that was up for debate from time to time. “What day, not date. This jet lag is killing me.”

“Oh! Monday night.”

“Today’s Thursday?”

“Friday,” Chloe said with a chuckle.
Beca sighed. “I’m a mess. I have my PR meeting on Monday.”

“On the Fourth of July?”

“I told you they wanted to see me as soon as we got back.” She huffed a laugh. “Come to think of it, maybe it’s for the best that we aren’t going to Capitol’s party.”

“So I guess congratulations are in order.”

Beca was sitting in one of the hundred conference rooms of Capitol Records’ iconic building; she’d been the first to arrive for this surely terrible meeting and chose to sit on the side of the table that let her see out the windows - and be the closest to the door. Her public relations team sat opposite her, or partially opposite - Chantel, whom she mostly liked, took the head of the table, and Andre sat across from her. She thought it ridiculous she had a PR person at all, let alone two. But at least she’d gotten to know Chantel over the past few months as she escorted Beca to and from press events.

“Yeah, thanks,” she answered Andre, who was smoothing his purple satin tie down his chest.

“I’m sure you understand why we’re meeting?”

She bit her tongue on the response she wanted to give. “Because I threw a wrench in your grand plan to make me a superstar by exercising my right to marry the person I love?” Close enough.

“Were you ever planning on informing us?”

“We only found out because I checked photos you’d been tagged in on Instagram. Chloe’s posted a few from your wedding and honeymoon,” Chantel said, sounding a lot more sympathetic than her counterpart. “You could have told us. We wouldn’t have stopped you - we just like to know what we’re working with.”

Sorry. Not sorry. “Sorry.”
Andre sighed and flipped through the bound print-out in front of him - a literal map to Beca’s intended career path with the label. She’d only seen it once, and was so skeeved out by it she refused to keep a copy in her possession. He crossed out entire pages, stopping after crossing out another half-page. “You already messed things up going on national television and announcing you were engaged. It’s getting around now that you got married. We need to put out a statement.” He drew a firm X over a paragraph of text. “Charlie’s camp won’t be happy. They were really banking on this.”

“Charlie who? Banking on what?”


“The two of you were going to start being seen together.”

“What?” she said, incredulous.

“Staged, of course,” Chantel rushed. “We’d never ask you to cheat on Chloe.”

She looked back and forth between them - Andre, stern and scribbling notes, and Chantel, looking a little sad. “You were going to ask me to - sorry, stage me cheating on Chloe? For publicity?”

“Yes,” Andre answered simply, still writing, and then picking up his phone to type something. “If you would have read this when it was provided to you, you would know that.”

She was incensed. “This is bullshit. You don’t get to fuck with my personal life.”

“Technically, we do. Or did you not read your contract either?”

Beca glared across the table at Andre. Technically he was on her team. It was his job to boost her popularity and thus, success. But right now, he felt like the devil incarnate. And she felt like her contract had become a deal with said devil. “I read it.”
“Then you read the section regarding public relations.”

Beca tried to run it back through her memory - the contract was huge, and yes, she’d had legal counsel help her decipher it. She remembered that public relations services would be provided, but couldn’t recall specific details. “I didn’t know it meant you’d stage shit like that. Make me look like a cheater. How is that good for me? That makes me look like an asshole. And it would make Chloe look like an idiot for staying with a cheater!”

“You wouldn’t actually be cheating -”

“Shut it, Chantel,” she bit, not even bothering to look at the girl.

Andre’s phone vibrated and he glanced at it. “We can get Zayn. Even better.”

“The One Direction douche?” Beca said, almost speechless. “I am not agreeing to this!”

“No? I can try to get Demi. I was talking to someone on her team last week and they’re ready to have her be seen as openly dating a woman, and you being attractive and out would be a perfect -”

“You can fuck off,” she said, pushing her chair away to leave, but stopping herself. “Can I fire you? Or do I not have that right either? Will you fire yourself? Since you think you can be in charge of me, I want you to fire yourself.”

“These are your options, Beca,” Andre said, rubbing his hand over his shaved head.

Beca had the extreme urge to smack him upside it. She bet it made a really satisfying sound. “No.” She pressed her index finger into the table between them to count off her responses. “My options are to make music people want to listen to. To live my life as openly or privately as I see fit. To show girls that they can make it in this gross, patriarchal society and industry. To be seen as a woman who is in control of her career and her life.” She paused, needing a fifth statement to drive it home. “To not be ashamed of who I am or who I choose to be with.” She slammed her palm on the table, wedding band clacking loudly to nail her points home, and sat back, fuming.

“I’m not implying you have to be ashamed of who you are. I literally just suggested you could date Demi -”
“Jesus Christ, I am not fake dating Demi Lovato!” She shoved herself backward and launched out of her chair, pacing. She wanted to run, but she had to stay in the ring. This was her fight to win. “So, what, we put out a statement that I got married and follow it with paparazzi photos of me cheating on my wife the next day? Wow, I’m really someone for girls to look up to, aren’t I? Come the fuck on.”

“Beca,” Chantel said hesitantly, and Beca stopped pacing, letting her speak. “We - we will come up with a different plan. Without staged relationships.”

Beca watched Chantel exchange looks with Andre, and while it seemed Andre was in charge of the grand plan, it definitely looked like he just caved with one pointed look from Chantel. “You fucking better.”

“Will you please rejoin us?” Chantel said, gesturing at Beca’s discarded chair.

She sighed and returned to the table. “Fine.”

“Thank you.” Chantel was smiling, obviously trying to get Beca to calm down. “Let’s move past that aspect of the plan, and instead put together a statement about your marriage, hmm?”

Beca sat forward. “Okay. And I'm done with dealing with this bullshit. I'm finding a manager.”

“Chlo? I’m home!” she called when she didn’t see Chloe in the living room or kitchen. There was no response, but she could hear music as she approached the stairs. “Chloe?” she called again, climbing to the second level.

“In here!”

Beca followed Chloe’s response and the music to the bathroom, where Chloe was reclining in the bathtub in a sea of bubbles, lights off, candles lit, a half-empty glass of wine on the edge of the tub, and an acoustic playlist Beca had made for her playing through their portable speaker.
“Pampering yourself, are we?”

Chloe smiled and opened her eyes. “I was just going to do it to shave, but then it became a whole thing,” she said with a shrug. “How’d it go?”

Beca sighed and ran her hand through her hair, taking a seat on the closed toilet lid.

“That well, huh?”

Beca half-smiled. “You know, I just wanted to make music. I didn’t…” She sighed again.

Chloe sat up, her playful air sobering. “What happened?”

“I’ll tell you, but don’t freak out, because it’s not happening.” She watched Chloe fidget a little, and then nod. “They were upset because our getting married got in the way of the affair I was apparently going to have with Charlie Puth. Though to be honest I don’t know why - I mean, cheating on my fianceé, cheating on my wife - who cares, what’s the difference, right?”

“What? Beca, that’s crazy.”

“You’re telling me! They literally wanted to stage me cheating on you, with another musician, to boost my image. Because being a slimeball cheater is good?? I don’t even know. I told them fuck no. And then, like it was their choice of scandal partner that I had a problem with, they offered up Zayn from OneD and Demi Lovato.”

“These people are trying to stage you cheating on me?” Chloe was working on standing up to get out of the tub, but Beca held out her hand, shaking her head.

“Stay. I told them to fuck off. I don’t care what the vague clause in my contract allows them to do. I am not agreeing to anything that’s designed to come between us like that. God, I hate this industry. Well, this side of it, anyway.”

Chloe stayed in her bath, but slid around so she could reach out and rest her hand on Beca’s knee, slowly soaking through the denim. “Baby, I’m so sorry. Is there anything I can do?”
Beca sighed, hating herself for what she was about to say. She’d argued with herself about it the whole drive home, because it wasn’t fair to Chloe.

“Can you make your Instagram private? And only give people we know access? If you tag me in things, people can find it on my profile. It’s how word’s out that we got married. And why I had to have that meeting today.”

Chloe recoiled a little. “Why is it a problem that people know we got married?” Beca knew social media was important to Chloe; it was how she kept in touch with her friends and family. “I can’t share photos of our life?”

“You can, just...God, Chloe, I’m sorry. You should be able to do what you want. I just...okay, if you don’t want to make it private, can you just ask me before you post something about us or with me in it? I feel like such a fucking diva right now. Chlo, I’m so sorry. This is new to me, I don’t know how to deal with it yet and I have people telling me what I should and shouldn’t be doing...”

“No, it’s...” Chloe shook her head, sinking back into the tub to tuck her knees up to her chest. “I understand.” She laughed, a little bitterly. “We were just talking about how cool it is to go to your parties with celebrities. Apparently you’re the celebrity now.”

“You're going to have to remind me of people's names. I'm so bad at names.” Beca followed a step or two behind Chloe through the school’s parking lot toward the football field. She was dragging a cooler on wheels behind her which slowed her down, being laden with ice, soda, and beer that had been Chloe's assigned contribution to the party.

“Of course!”

“I can't believe you guys are having a party on the football field. My friends tried that once; got caught, detention for a week.”

Chloe laughed. “Perks of being the faculty instead of the students.” She glanced over her shoulder. “You got that, babe?”
Beca gave an exaggerated grimace and yank of the cooler to make her laugh. “Not all of us can have the light and easy task of carrying our purses. But I guess if you have to haul yours that contains everything but the kitchen sink, that’s close enough. Also, it’s fucking hot out here.”

Chloe stuck her tongue out at her and smiled, leading the way toward the small crowd on the football field. “It won’t be so bad on the grass. And that’s why I made you wear that hat,” she said, pointing at the flat-brimmed, white Miami Heat snapback from own collection she’d forced Beca to wear. ‘Force’ wasn’t really the right word; Beca had no aversion to hats, but Chloe was so tickled by the “swagger” the cap gave Beca that she insisted upon it, and Beca still hadn’t really figure out how to tell Chloe ‘no’ in most situations.

Crossing the field at the fifty-yard line, Beca noticed they’d set up a white pop-up tent where several people congregated, blue smoke rolling out of it - the home of the grill, it would seem.

“I see Suzanne and her husband; let’s set up by them,” Chloe said, pointing toward a couple sitting in lawn chairs, the man with a thick streak of sunscreen down his nose to block what his visor couldn’t.

“Is she the Bella fangirl?” Beca asked, running through the names and stories Chloe had shared with her over the last school year.

“Yes, but she’s the sweetest. Suzanne!” she called, waving. “And it’s her husband that vetted our pre-nup, remember.”

Beca watched them embrace as she caught up, happy to stop dragging the cooler across the field that fought her every step of the way, wheels digging into the turf. She waited awkwardly behind Chloe as they exchanged their hellos, and then Suzanne noticed her and lit up.

“You brought Beca!”

“I did!” Chloe stepped aside to pull Beca to her side. “Beca, this is Suzanne Washington. She teaches Fourth Grade.”

“Nice to meet you.” Beca held out her hand to shake in greeting, but found herself enveloped in a hug instead.
“Congratulations! I couldn't be more excited for you both. I always knew, from your first performance at the ICCAs together, that you and Chloe had something special.”

Beca made a face at Chloe over her friend’s shoulder. “Um, yeah, thanks?”

“Chloe, I can’t believe you took an entire year before bringing her to a faculty event.” Thankfully, Suzanne released Beca to stare pointedly at Chloe.

“I know, she’s just been really busy,” she heard Chloe start, and decided it was a good time to take her moment’s leave.

“I’ve been to a couple things. I guess we just kept missing each other. I’m going to go put the drinks with the other stuff over there,” Beca said, pointing at the aluminum picnic tables she’d spotted that appeared to be the established home of refreshments.

It really was hot as balls, but that was to be expected in the middle of summer, in the early evening, in July, in California. She was grateful Chloe had talked her into shorts (after talking her out of her jeans, heyoooo), because she would be dying if she was in jeans for this. She’d also been talked into wearing a tank top that sported an American flag, “Because we’re proud to be an American, Beca!” To which Beca had rolled her eyes and commented on the state of the impending Presidential election.

But at least she wasn’t completely suffocating. “Hey, I got drinks. Okay to park it here?” she asked a man that appeared to be somewhat in charge. He was wielding a pair of tongs, anyway.

“Sure thing!” The man traded the tongs to his left hand and extended his right. “I’m Austin.”

“Beca.”

“I don’t think I’ve seen you around before. Your husband a teacher here?”

“Wife,” she said, jerking her thumb over her shoulder in Chloe’s general direction.

A look of recognition swept over his features, even beneath his sunglasses. “Ohh, you’re Beca
Mitchell.”

“Well, Beale. But yes.”

The man took a drink of his beer and shook his head. “My girlfriend used to talk my fucking ear off about your girl. Like she was the worst person in the world. Which is hilarious because I’m pretty sure she was a Care Bear in a former life.”

Beca pressed pause on her instant offense. “Your girlfriend is Anika Schmidt?”

He nodded. “I see we’ve both heard plenty.”

Beca shook out her hands. She knew Chloe and Anika had buried their hatchet by the end of the school year, and Austin seemed an innocent party, probably supportive of his girlfriend through the drama just as she had been of Chloe. “You could say that,” she said with a wry smile.

“If I’m remembering right, you got a few words in with Anika, too.”

Beca rubbed the back of her neck, glancing away. “She uh...said some pretty nasty things.”

“She...I’m not going to make excuses for her. What she did was really uncool. I’m sorry about it all.”

“Yeah. Me, too.” Beca was definitely sorry about it all - sorry that Chloe had gone through what she did.

“Beca!”

She turned, hearing Chloe calling her in the distance, waving her hand for her to come back.

“Looks like your little lady’s calling. We’ll come say hi later. Anika’s picking up Colton from her parents’ and then she’ll be here.”
“Colton?”

“Her son.”

Chloe was too invested in her conversation with Suzanne for Beca to interrupt with her astonishedness that the woman who was once the meanest person Beca had ever had the displeasure of encountering apparently had enough compassion to be a mother. So instead, she worked on getting comfortable on the blanket Chloe had laid out in her absence and nursed the bottle of Dos Equis she’d brought back with her from the cooler.

But sure enough, an hour later, give or take, she spotted the blonde crossing the field, a little dark-haired boy running ahead of her, jumping randomly until he took off in a full sprint toward Austin, who swept him up and onto his shoulders. She watched the couple say their hellos, and she was shocked it was the same Anika Schmidt she’d yelled at in the parking lot last year. Then she noticed Austin gesturing in their direction.

“Oh, Chlo?” she said, interrupting the conversation to nod at the approaching trio.

“What’s up?”

“Incoming.”

She watched Chloe trace her line of sight and then she actually lit up and waved at them as she set her beer aside. “Hey, you guys!” She moved to sit up on her knees and held out her arms. “‘C’mere, Colton!”

“Miss Beeoh!” Austin swung the boy down, legs kicking before he was even on the ground, so he could take off toward them, barreling into a laughing Chloe. Beca watched them, how Chloe exaggerated his impact to send her onto her back where he giggled in her arms as she wrestled him a little.

The thought dawned on her that she’d never really seen Chloe interact with kids in an affectionate way - sure, she saw her with her students and she wasn’t not affectionate, but she was every bit
their teacher. And the way Beca’s tween and teenage cousins had acted toward her at Thanksgiving certainly didn’t open any doors for affection.

Beca always saw girls talk longingly about their ovaries hurting, when they saw a baby or an attractive man; she never understood it, since carrying and birthing children was pretty much last on her list of earthly desires.

But right now, watching Chloe play with that little boy, her ovaries hurt.

Chloe sat up just in time for Anika and Austin’s arrival. “Hi!”

“Colton, you’re squishing her, come over here,” Anika said, only glancing at Beca so far.

“Oh he’s fine,” Chloe said, arranging the boy Beca wagered to be four-years-old in her lap. “Anika, you ah...remember Beca?”

“Yeah.” Anika did more than glance, looking at Beca with a measure of trepidation that Beca felt probably matched her own. “Glad you could make it. Congrats on the wedding.”

Hesitant as though she seemed, her tone didn’t seem false. “Thanks,” Beca hedged cautiously.

“This is my boyfriend, Austin.”

“We met,” Austin said, nodding at Beca.

“And this,” Chloe said, using a playful voice, “is Colton.” She tickled the little boy’s stomach, making him squeal. “Colton, can you say hi to Beca?” The boy curled into Chloe a little, instantly shy, making Chloe laugh. “It’s okay. She’s a nice lady. She’s my wife.”

He wriggled a little in her lap, eyeing Beca hard until he wriggled his way out of Chloe’s arms to stand, eye to eye with Beca as she sat on the ground. “Hi,” he said quietly and then ran to hide behind Anika.
“He’s shy around new people at first,” Anika explained. “Give him a bit and you won’t be able to get rid of him.”

Beca leaned to see the boy peeking at her from behind his mother, and she pulled her sunglasses down to wink at him, sending him into hiding again.

“You guys mind if we join you?” Anika asked, gesturing at the empty grass beside Chloe and Beca’s camp.

“No, totally,” Chloe said, popping up to take the blanket from under Anika’s arm and help her get set up.

Funny how much could change in a year.

Beca was a cheeseburger, a hot dog, a plate of chips and salsa, a cup of fruit salad, and three beers in as she used Chloe’s lap for a pillow, staring at the night sky to wait for the fireworks to start when she heard a quiet voice next to her.

“Miss Beeoh?”

Beca smiled at Colton’s version of Chloe’s name. L’s were hard for him, no doubt.

“Psst, Miss Beeoh.”

Chloe was chattering Anika’s ear off, and Beca reached to tap her shoulder since Colton was failing to get her attention when his little brown-haired head popped into view above her, eyes wide. “Miss Beeoh, I got my soccer ball.”

It took Beca another few seconds to realize she was the “Miss Beeoh” whose attention was being requested. “You do?”

He nodded. “Wanna play?”
She felt a hand on her shoulder, Chloe’s, she knew, squeezing a little. “You want me to play soccer with you?”

“Uh huh!” As quickly as he appeared, he was gone, and then she felt a sticky hand on hers, pulling.

“He wants to play soccer with you,” Chloe said, smiling down at Beca. “You better go.”

“I…” she started, and then decided to just go with it. “Okay, buddy.” She pushed herself to her feet, smiling at the boy grinning up at her, now holding a junior-sized soccer ball. “Lead the way.”

Playing soccer with Colton, it turned out, was less soccer and more kicking the ball his way and waiting a minute or two for him to chase it down, stop it, take careful aim, and then kick it wildly in what was surely intended to be her direction, but rarely on target. Thankfully, his little legs didn’t wield a lot power, especially at a distance, and she didn’t have to chase it much.

“Here, come closer,” she called, waving him in. “Stand on that line.” She pointed at the forty-yard line and watched him sprint to it to align his feet perfectly with the white line. She stood across from him on the forty-five. “I’m going to kick it to you. Try to stop it with your foot. Okay?”

She didn’t have the best aim herself, but the short five yard distance narrowed her room for error and she tapped the ball with the side of her foot his direction, watching him watch the ball intently until it rolled to him, where he more or less attempted to jump and land on the ball with both feet.

He stopped it, at least. She had to give him that.

“Good job!” she encouraged, clapping. “Now, watch my feet when you kick it back to me.”

She did her best to corral his crazy pass to make it look like she knew what she was doing, and he laughed but she figured he was laughing because he was having fun, not because she was being mocked for her skill. Given he was four-years-old. “Your turn,” she said, watching him hop to attention and do a little better at stopping the ball that time.

“Can I play?”
Beca jumped, startled by Chloe’s voice behind her. “Oh, hey.”

Chloe slipped her arm around Beca’s waist and hugged her into her side to press a kiss to her temple. “You guys are adorable.”

“Hush,” Beca said bashfully, wrenching out of Chloe’s hug in time to catch Colton’s wobbly pass.

“Miss Beeoh! You wanna play with us??”

“Can I?”

“Yeah!”

“Whose team should I be on?” she asked, lifting her hands in an exaggerated shrug.

Colton’s hand shot in the air, along with his body as he jumped. “Me! Me! Me! Me!”

“Sorry baby,” Chloe said, stepping to Colton’s side of the field.

“Traitor,” Beca whispered, making Chloe giggle.

“Go, Colton, go!” Chloe cheered as she jogged alongside him toward Chloe’s straw hat that had become a sort of makeshift goal at some point during their game.

Beca was walking backwards, ready to [loosely] defend her goal, and she let the ball roll right between her legs to cross the invisible line that the hat marked, scoring a goal. She groaned dramatically as Colton and Chloe cheered, and Beca swept him up in her arms, lifting him up and then swinging him down to settle on her hip. “You beat me!”
“I win!” he cheered, hands over his head.

Beca noticed Chloe had gone quiet, and she glanced over at her, finding her frozen in her spot a few feet away, fingers touching her lips as she watched them. Beca smiled at her, knowing Chloe’s ovaries were hurting, too.

“Let’s go get ready for the fireworks, okay?” she said to Colton, letting him down to run back to the rest of the group, leaving Beca and Chloe behind. “You coming?” Beca asked, holding her hand out for Chloe to take.

She was surprised when Chloe didn’t just take her hand, but pushed completely into her space to pull her into a kiss, one Chloe was not being conservative with.

“I wanna show you my classroom,” Chloe said between kisses.

“I’ve seen it,” Beca answered, confused and more than a little distracted.

“No,” Chloe said, pulling back. “I wanna show you my classroom.”

“Oh.” Beca stared at her. “Oh. Oh. Yeah. Yes. Yes show me your classroom.”

“It’s so empty,” Beca said when Chloe unlocked the door to Room 17.

“Summer.” Chloe closed the door behind them and Beca heard the telltale click of a lock just before she was whirled and pushed up against it, mouth promptly reclaimed by Chloe.

She sighed against it, clutching at Chloe’s waist to pull her closer. As soon as Beca needed a breath, Chloe moved to her neck. “What’s gotten into you?”

“So hot,” Chloe said, hands already under Beca’s tank top and pushing their way higher.
“Playing soccer?” Beca asked, still confused but caring less and less.

Chloe shook her head and Beca decided to stop asking questions, instead running her hands up Chloe’s back until they were tangled in her hair, holding on as Chloe’s lips and teeth pulled at her neck. A thigh found its way between hers and pressed up into Beca without hesitating and Beca moaned.

Last time they’d done this, a quickie in Chloe’s classroom, it was during the school’s Prom and Chloe had been on high alert the entire time, shushing Beca or keeping her hand over Beca’s mouth to keep her quiet.

That didn’t seem to be the case this time as hands grazed over Beca’s chest and then fell to her hips to tug Beca away from the door and turn her to walk them through the classroom until she felt Chloe’s desk pressing into the backs of her thighs. She was about to sit when she felt hands working on the button fly of her shorts and decided to give Chloe a few more seconds until her shorts fell to her ankles. Then she sat.

And she watched Chloe kneel.

“Shit, Chloe…” she breathed, running her hands through Chloe’s hair as hands ran up her legs to push her thighs apart, and Beca held on as Chloe leaned in, tongue pressing against the cotton of her underwear, but with a sharp tug she felt them pulled aside and then Chloe’s mouth was on her.

Beca didn’t know if it was the slight buzz she had going, or the thrill of this being one of her fantasies, or the ridiculous things Chloe was doing with her tongue, but a sledgehammer had been taken to her arousal, as if it was a carnival game, and sent it rocketing toward the sky.

“Oh my God, baby, what are you doing to me?” she breathed down at Chloe, who glanced up at her under heavy eyelashes and only did more of whatever it was.

She didn’t bother trying to drag it out; Beca let her climax take her when it wanted, and apparently it wanted to show up in what had to be no more than a few minutes.

She tugged at Chloe, pulling her back to her feet and down into a kiss, both breathing hard. “You gonna tell me what that was all about?” she said when they finally parted.
Chloe laughed airily and took a step back, bending to fish Beca’s shorts off the floor and slip them back up her legs. “I didn’t want to say it before, and ruin the moment.”

“Why would it ruin it?” Beca asked, hopping off the desk to finish pulling her shorts up and button them.

Chloe draped her arms over Beca’s shoulders, tucking her hair behind Beca’s ears. “Because watching you with Colton is what was so hot.”

Beca’s immediate reaction was shock, but then she remembered Chloe playing with the boy when he first got to their barbecue, and how it had made her insides twist in a pleasant way. It hadn’t sent her libido through the roof as it apparently did for Chloe, though. Which was totally, one hundred percent fine. “Yeah?” she responded with instead, settling her arms around Chloe’s waist.

Chloe nodded and dropped her head to nuzzle into Beca’s neck, and Beca had a moment of self-consciousness now that the fog of lust had cleared, knowing she probably smelled like sweat and sunscreen.

Chloe didn’t seem to mind, though. “I want to have a baby with you.”

Beca smiled and wiggled her shoulder so Chloe would lift her head. “You will. We’ll get started on it soon, okay?”

Chloe grinned. “How soon?”

“Whenever you want.”

“Tomorrow?”

It made Beca’s stomach flip flop, but she nodded. “Tomorrow, if you want.”
‘Tomorrow,’ Chloe discovered, wasn't as soon or as tomorrow-y as her onset of baby fever wanted it to be.

She did start researching their options the next day, spending a good hour setting up Excel spreadsheets to track everything from timeframes to costs.

But she fell into a spiral of fertility research and everything that came with a decision to do *in vitro* fertilization.

It wasn't just her that would be spending time in front of doctors, she realized. It wasn't that she was ignorant to how this had to work. She just didn't...think about it.

There had to be tests.

So many tests. On both of them.

Beca would have to undergo hormone treatments. And the whole...*harvesting* procedure wasn't going to be terribly pleasant for her.

She read blogs. She watched videos. She pulled Beca in to watch sometimes, and Beca barely made it through the birthing video Chloe pulled up on YouTube without passing out.

“Oh my God, Chlo. You seriously *want* to go through this?” she asked, watching with one eye open.

“I think it's beautiful,” she answered, pulling Beca in to let her hide in her arms.

“This is horrifying,” Beca said, blanching and looking away from the screen. “Is it over yet?”

The crying baby signaled that it was indeed over, and Chloe surreptitiously brushed a tear from the corner of her eye. “It's over.”
“Oh thank God,” Beca said, tension flooding out of her frame to lean heavily on Chloe. “You…are insane. Women are insane.”

Chloe gestured at her computer screen. “I think we’re pretty awesome, that we can do that.”

“Well before you can do that, we need to figure out how we’re going to make that happen. Have you talked to Chris yet?”

Chloe sighed, rubbing her hand over her eyes. She’d been procrastinating talking to her brother about being their sperm donor - not out of fear he’d say no, but just that it was kind of an awkward and intensely personal conversation to have, especially over the phone or even Skype. “No. I don’t know how to ask him. It’s a weird thing to ask.”

“What, you don’t want to ask your brother to masturbate into a cup for us?”

Chloe shoved a laughing Beca out of her arms. “Gross.”

“He has the easiest job of all of us in this situation! It’s actually enjoyable.”

“Please stop talking about it,” Chloe laughed, still grimacing from the mental images Beca had conjured. “I just…I think I should ask him in person. And I have no idea when I’m going home next.”

“You’re on summer vacation, Chlo. Just go.”

“Just go”? Beca, I’m not going to just go. And certainly not without you.”

“Okay, well, why don’t we go for your birthday?”

Chloe would have done a spit take if she’d been drinking something. “You wanna go visit my family??”
Beca shook her head at her. “Why wouldn’t I? They’re my family now, too. And besides - I dragged you to my insane family. I owe you.”

Chloe squealed and launched herself at Beca, hugging her tightly. “We can really go? You aren’t busy?”

“Sure we can go. And no, I won’t be busy. I mean, it’s your birthday. I always block that weekend off my calendar.”

Chloe let herself squeal again and pressed a wet, sloppy kiss to Beca’s neck before sitting back. “Thank you.”

The one thing that did happen ‘tomorrow’ was the release of Beca’s statement to the press on their recent marriage.

Chloe didn’t think much of it: such a to-do over, well, not over nothing of course, but over something that shouldn’t be of anyone’s concern but theirs and that of the people in their life.

But there it was, the lead story on People.com when she made her morning gossip rag rounds.

She was a headline. Kind of.

**MUSIC PRODUCER BECA MITCHELL MARRIES GIRLFRIEND (EXCLUSIVE PHOTOS)**

The thumbnail image was a press photo from Beca’s appearance on “Seth Meyers” when she flashed Chloe’s class ring and announced their engagement.

She wondered what exclusive photos they had, and how.

It was as exciting as it was icky. Because like...it’s her life. Their life. Why are the people browsing this site - the people just like her - entitled to the information? Suddenly she felt guilty
for ever thriving on celebrity gossip. The icky was outweighing the excitement.

Of course she had to click on it.

The lead photo was, at least, Chloe’s favorite from the courthouse-provided photographer, the picture they’d jointly chosen to share on Facebook when they announced it to their friends and families, and, she assumed, what Beca gave them to release.

*Multi-platinum selling record producer Beca Mitchell, the industry newcomer behind the reinvented sound of Katy Perry’s “Evolve” (Capitol Records), announced today that she wed her partner, Chloe Beale, in a private ceremony in Los Angeles on May 27, 2016. Mitchell previously announced the couple’s engagement during a promotional appearance on “Late Night with Seth Meyers.”*

*Confirmation of their recent marriage comes following weeks of speculation generated by social media.*

*Mitchell met Ms. Beale at Barden University where they performed together in the a cappella group, The Barden Bellas. The pair co-captained the team to three national titles and are the reigning a cappella world champions. Ms. Beale is an elementary school teacher in Los Angeles.*

*In a statement to the press, Mitchell said, “I’m thrilled to have married my best friend. Chloe makes me a better person. We are excited to embark on the next stage of our lives together.”*

Chloe paused, smiling at Beca’s comment. She felt like Beca made her a better person, too.

*Mitchell’s statement indicated she will continue to produce under her maiden name, but court records obtained by People reflect Mitchell legally changed her surname to Beale. The pair honeymooned ‘Down Under’ with a trip to New Zealand and Australia.*

*The newlyweds ask that in lieu of any gifts, donations be made to The Trevor Project.*

The article was followed by a gallery slideshow, most of them photos from their ceremony.
Apparently the photos were available to anyone who asked the court, and Chloe admonished herself for not reading the fine print. There might have been a way to keep them private. She kept clicking, through five photos from their wedding, through two she’d posted on her Instagram: one a selfie they took together at the top of a ski run.

The other she was truly upset they used. It was a photo she took of Beca in bed, still in New Zealand, when they’d been acting silly after a few glasses of wine and Chloe had Beca pinned as she sat across her hips forcing her to submit to a photo shoot. Chloe had caught a moment that made her heart flip when she saw it on her phone’s screen, of Beca’s hand over her eyes, mouth open in obvious laughter, gleaming wedding band creating a perfect and unintentional lens flare. She’d filtered it to Inkwell and shared it on Instagram, not thinking of anything other than wanting to share the glee of it with her friends.

And now that photo was ripped and stolen and in a slideshow she didn’t make for all the world to see.

She had decided not to privatize her Instagram last week, seeing as the “damage” had already been done and there was no taking back what was put out to the cyber world. She promised Beca she would be careful.

Now she understood why she needed to be.

At least they credited her Instagram account? She groaned and picked up her phone, opening the app to see more notifications pop up in the orange bubble than she’d ever seen in her life. Thousands of hearts. Thousands of comments. Thousands of new followers. She was tagged in hundreds of photos, all repostings of her own photos which really incensed her.

There was a time, almost exactly a year ago, when she was lost and quite literally spent her days and nights trying to win over the affections of strangers on the Internet - partly due to Beca's absence but mostly to do with her own battle with self-doubt and struggle with change, with her binge-watching and live-blogging of reality TV, when she would have flipped to see her Internet following explode like this.

That time was long gone, and she felt like she’d just opened the bedroom curtains and let the world in to see.

Which, she supposed, was pretty much what she did, sharing such private moments in such a public forum.
She thumbed to her settings and hovered over the option to privatize it, but the damage had been done and the photos - and every photo on her account - were already out there. And there was opportunity with a growing social following; she could use it to raise awareness about the things she cared about.

She arrowed back to her profile to scroll through the comments on the recent photos, notifications popping up continuously. She couldn't keep up with them, the comment thread resetting before she could read them all.

They were generally positive comments. Lots of girls squealing about levels of cuteness. Lots of guys talking about levels of hotness and bang-ability of Beca and her, whether separately or together. Chloe rolled her eyes at that. There were plenty of girls doing the same, which made her smile and then made her feel a little hypocritical. And of course there was a smattering of people commenting in all capitals how they were living a life of sin and posting verses from Leviticus. She swiped left, deleted their comments, and banned them when she came across one.

She would control it. While she still could, anyway.

And apparently people called them “Bechloe”? That was kinda fun. And better than Amy’s “Bloe.”

The Twitter situation was similar.

“Are you still watching baby videos?” Beca called from the bathroom.

Chloe looked up from her phone, shocked she'd been going through comments and tweets for nearly an hour. It was apparently long enough for Beca to shower and do her hair and makeup, as she stepped out of the bathroom wearing a towel to snag a bra and underwear out of the dresser. She tossed her towel on the bed next to Chloe, smiling a little, and Chloe realized she was staring.

She blinked, glancing away and then found it as ridiculous as Beca apparently did.

“Little late for bashful, babe,” Beca said, smirking as she worked her hands behind her back to hook her bra. “I don't mind,” she added with a wink before heading to the closet.

“Yeah, they said it’d go at 10 a.m.”

“They have pictures from our wedding.” She didn’t mean for it to sound as accusatory as it came out, but it didn’t seem to faze Beca.

“Yeah, I gave them one to use, that one we really liked,” Beca said, buttoning her green sleeveless blouse as she walked back and sat heavily on the bed, still pantsless, to look at Chloe’s computer screen. “They had to have something.”

“No,” she corrected, scrolling the gallery into view. “They have pictures,” she elongated the s, clarifying. “Plural.”

Beca leaned over and took control of the trackpad, clicking through. She scowled, and it grew stronger with every click and then disappeared when she got to the photo of her laughing in bed from Chloe’s Instagram.

Chloe held her breath, not knowing what Beca’s reaction meant. It was her fault that picture was out there. In front of thousands, maybe tens of thousands of people. And it was of Beca being walls-down vulnerable and she did not do walls-down vulnerable for the public.

Beca didn’t explode, or swear, or storm off. Instead, she sighed and cycled back to the first image in the slideshow and scrolled up to read the text.

“Well, at least the article is okay,” she said quietly. “Should have expected them to dig through public records.” She patted Chloe’s knee and stood up, returning to the closet. “I hope people donate. Bring some good out of this flea circus.”

Chloe felt like she should apologize for the photos, that she dropped the ball more than once and could have prevented the photos from ever being seen by the public. “Beca -”

“I should probably tweet about it, huh? That’s what people do. I hate this thing…shit I have like a fuck ton of followers now.” Beca wandered back to the bed, now clad in loose-fitting, ripped up jeans. “Seriously, Chloe, I have sixty-two thousand followers. Last time I paid attention it was like five thousand. What the fuck?”
Chloe started to provide the obvious answer but Beca thrust her phone into her face and cut her off.

“Is this okay? Do I need a hashtag or something? Do you want me to tag you in it?”

Chloe scanned the copy.

*Thx for the support guys. Luckiest girl. @chloemarieb is the best. Pls visit trevorproject.org*

“Yeah you can tag me, I mean, it is what it is. We’ll figure out how to leverage this stuff. Here, let me.” She took Beca’s phone without waiting for permission and tweaked it.

*Love you guys. But love @chloemarieb more. Pls give 2 @TrevorProject. #Bechloe*

She pulled Beca in for a selfie, attached it to the tweet, and handed the phone back without posting it.

“What the hell is hashtag Bec-clo?”

“Not Bec-clo; Bechloe, like our names mashed together. It’s all over the comments on my Instagram. That’s what people call us. Let’s embrace it; make it a thing.”

“People call us Bechloe?”

“Yeah, you know, like Brangelina and Bennifer.”

Beca frowned, but laughed.

“And I made your tweet sassier. You are sassy. Be sassy on Twitter to them; they’ll eat it up.”
“You’re telling me I should be a bitch to my fans? Ha, fans.”

“I said sassy, not bitchy. And yes, you obviously have fans.”

“Where’s the line between sassy and bitchy?” Beca said with a smile and Chloe heard the tell-tale chirping sound of Beca posting her tweet, her own phone chiming a few seconds later with the notification that Beca had tweeted.

“What?” Chloe asked when Beca quirked an eyebrow at her at the sound. “You, like, never tweet so when you do, I don’t want to miss it. And besides,” she continued, grabbing Beca around the waist to pull her down into her lap and kiss her. “I’m your number one fan.”

“Okay, Misery. Don’t hobble me in my sleep tonight,” Beca said with a smile when they parted.

“Wow, you took that dark quickly,” Chloe said, playfully nervous under Beca’s gaze. “I didn’t think you’d have seen the movie.”

“Didn’t. Read the book in high school.”

“Of course you did.”

“I have a meeting though, I need to get going.”

“About what?” Chloe asked, swatting Beca’s rear end after she stood and turned to leave.

“I put a request in for a manager. The label has a few on staff I can interview or whatever. If they suck I have to find my own.”

“A manager?”

“Yeah. This marriage drama made me realize I shouldn’t - can’t, really - manage my own career. It’s dumb of me to try. I don’t know this industry and I don’t want to keep fucking up.”
“I think that’s a really good idea, Bec.” She paused, letting a teasing smile settle into place. “You're all famous now with your headline news and sixty-two thousand fans.”

Beca flipped her off and then bent to kiss her. “Gotta run or I’ll be later than I already am.”

“I could get used to this,” Chloe said as she settled into her First Class seat.

Beca was next to her, fighting to untangle the cord on her headphones. “Used to what?”

“Traveling in style.”

“Oh.” Beca patted her knee and resumed working on the tangle. “Well, get used to it, baby. Mama’s done flying coach. Oh my God, I just packed these like two hours ago, how did they get tangled so badly?”

Chloe laughed and took the headphones away from Beca, detangling them with relative ease to hand them back with a wink. “You’re not going to wear those the whole flight and ignore me, are you?”

Beca rested the headphones around her neck, and Chloe smiled at it; Beca rarely worked at home, and it was a fuzzy nostalgic sight seeing them in their rightful place again. “No, but I figure you’ll talk me into watching a movie at some point.” She gestured at the screens mounted in the seats in front of them. “Since we have five hours to kill.”

“You’re right, I’m totes going to,” Chloe said with a smile. “Hey, don’t forget to text Luke about whatever.”

“Shit, thanks.”

On the way to the airport, Beca had asked Chloe to remind her to text her new manager before she had to turn off her phone. Chloe didn’t know about what, and she didn’t yet ask. She was still
amused that in what was arguably one of the most unlikely scenarios that could occur, Beca’s old boss from WBUJ not only moved to Los Angeles, but graduated from being a college radio station DJ to a music manager. It had been serendipitous, after Beca hated every manager the label offered her. They were all “old and boring” and had no clue what to do with her. In a rare moment, Beca had taken to her personal Facebook to complain about it, only to get a message from Luke the next day, and within a week, Beca had her first manager.

Now Beca had someone on her side of the court now when it came to work, and Chloe had noticed the change immediately in Beca that came with no longer having to worry about everything.

“What is it you guys are talking about?” she decided to ask, already bored and they were still parked at the gate in Los Angeles. “If you don’t mind my asking.”

Beca looked up from her phone, thumbs still typing blindly for a few strokes until she glanced down and tapped Send. “Oh, yeah, it’s cool. We’re starting to work out what my next project is going to be. It’s kind of weird, now, because before, they came looking for me, specifically. And now I’m tied to Capitol, so I have to work with the artists on the label with me, and then which of them is ready to start a record and when and am I even right for them.”

“So it’s slim pickings?” Chloe hadn’t considered that, that Beca’s opportunities were as narrow as they were huge with the position she was in.

“Yes and no. Capitol’s part of Universal Music Group which is fucking massive, so there are a lot of other labels and other artists I could work with; it just gets messy, contractually, to do that. Which is what I have Luke for.” She smiled and wiggled her phone at Chloe before checking it one more time and switching it to airplane mode.

“Oh, really? That’s good then, right? Any prospects yet? I mean, I know it’s only been like a week.”

“Yeah, no. A few. Sky Ferreira. Lorde, but she’s been working with the same guy for a while so I don’t know about that. Neon Trees. He actually brought up No Doubt, which made me question my decision to hire him.”

“What? Why? Baby, they’re legendary, why wouldn’t you want them?”

“That’s exactly why. They’re legendary. I don’t need to fuck up their sound.”
“Did you listen to their last album?”

“No.”

“No one else did either.”

“Ooh, burn, Beale,” Beca said, laughing.

“I love them, but they’re kind of lost, musically, in my opinion.”

Beca shrugged. “I don’t know. I mean, right now he’s just trying to sniff out who’s even in the market for a new producer. Long way to go between now and actually sitting down in a studio.”

“I know, but you gotta have faith in yourself babe. Don’t be afraid of catching the big fish. I mean, you came out of the gate with *Katy Perry*. She’s not some nobody.”

“No, I know.” Beca sighed and pushed her hand through her hair, sighing.

Chloe knew that move combination. She slipped her arm around Beca’s shoulders and squeezed her. “Don’t doubt yourself, baby. You’re amazing, and you’ll find the right artist, and we’re going to have to rearrange those gold and platinum records on our wall to make room.”

Beca sniffed a laugh. “Or find a bigger wall.”

“It’s the biggest wall in the place without windows.”

Beca laughed again. “God, Chloe. I was implying we should find a new place once I get my next advance.”

“Oh. Oh!” Chloe felt herself light up and she pulled Beca in for a better hug, awkward in their seatbelted positions. “Yes! I totally can’t wait to go house hunting with you.”
“I mean, I figured we might want to like, be able to have a nursery if we’re going to do this whole baby thing.”

“Ugh, Beca, stop,” Chloe teased, melting into a puddle. “I don’t want to cry this entire trip and if you keep talking like that, that’s what I’m going to do.”

Beca laughed and tilted her head to kiss her. “Understood. I shall now resume being an uncaring, sassy bitch for the duration of this flight.”

“Sassy bitch, okay,” Chloe kissed her back. “But no not caring allowed.”
A Bevy of Beales

“Beca?”

Beca blinked out of the daze she was in, noticing Chloe was several steps ahead of her on their journey from the Miami Airport restroom to the baggage claim area.

“Baby, what’s wrong?”

“Sorry.” She hurried to catch up and grabbed Chloe’s free hand as they resumed walking. “I’m weirdly nervous.”

“You’ve met my parents, like, so many times. Why are you nervous?”

She shrugged. “I don’t know. I’ve never been to your house before. And now they’re my in-laws. And I didn’t ask your father for your hand in marriage so he’s probably going to take me aside and sit me down and give me a talking to and -”

“He’s not going to do that, and you didn’t have to ask him. I’m his daughter, not his property.”

“You say that, but you didn’t elope with his daughter.”

“Honey, he wasn’t mad. It’s going to be fine. And I did elope with your father’s daughter, and he was okay with it.” Chloe squeezed her hand.

“Yeah, but you aren’t showing up at his house to start making plans to impregnate me either.”

“Beca!” Chloe said with a laugh. “Please, calm down. It’s going to be fine. Now, they said they would be down here by the...there they are!”

Beca followed Chloe’s point and enthusiastic wave to what was of course Chloe’s parents, holding a sign that read “Welcome Home Chloe and Beca!” in multicolored block letters along with a bunch of obnoxious balloons. She would have spotted them regardless, though. Chloe’s father was
tall, which was an understatement. He definitely surpassed six feet. Her mother, however, was barely as tall as her daughter, which made their height difference plenty amusing. Plus, Chloe had inherited her hair from her mother which made her stick out (at least to Beca whose eyes had learned to spot that color from a thousand yards) like a sore thumb.

She sensed Chloe pick up their pace and part of her wanted to start dragging her feet, but Chloe was right. This would be fine. Her parents were lovely, even if her mother could be a touch dramatic.

“There's my girls!” Chloe's mother stepped out to meet them, wrapping Chloe in a massive hug and leaving Beca to awkwardly smile and fidget by herself. Her father started toward them and she was instantly anxious, needing Chloe's hug to finish so she could have her turn and avoid Chloe’s father for a few more precious seconds. But Chloe took after her mother with the hugs, so it was an endurance contest for them and it was too late.

“Good to see you again, Beca.”

Beca shifted, trying to not appear as uncomfortable as she felt. His face was flat, hard to read. “Hey, Roger.” She stuck out her hand to shake.

A smile that was definitely Chloe's broke out on his face and he laughed, opening his arms. “All I get is a hey from my new daughter-in-law?”

Before she could reply, Beca was swept up into a bear hug that lifted her off her feet by an inch or two. She bit her tongue on her complaint - she really hated that people just picked her up because they could; she wasn't a child - and gave him a swift pat on the back to do her part and help bring the hug to a conclusion.

Chloe's embrace with her mother was just ending and the parents traded places and Beca had to go through it all over again, though thankfully Mrs. Beale didn't pick her up.

“So good to see you, Beca.”

“You, too, Marie.” Beca looked for her own Mrs. Beale, still tucked under her father’s arm, her suitcase in his hand. She lifted her eyebrows at Chloe and glanced at the sliding glass doors.
“Let's go guys,” Chloe said with a nod in return. “We’ve been traveling all day and I'm starving.”

“Of course! I have dinner waiting in the oven. Rog, do you remember where we parked? I told you to write it down.”

Roger let Chloe out from his hold and reached for Beca's suitcase, winking. “Yes, dear, I remember where we parked.”

Beca smiled a little, not getting a perfect read on what he was implying, but she guessed it was along the lines of, “Welcome to my life.” She was relieved when Chloe held back to let her parents lead the way to walk with her, hand in hand.

Chloe’s childhood home was...well, it wasn’t modest. But it wasn’t excessive either. Beca had seen photos of it, but only in segments, and usually of the interior from things like family dinners and high school sleepovers, or the backyard for pool parties and barbecues. In person, it was...impressive, she decided, with its palm tree-lined driveway and its Spanish-styled white stucco walls and tile shingles and arched doorways. The interior was very obviously professionally designed, yet charmingly lived-in and showed signs of still-recent empty-nesters. She had to pause in the foyer to admire Chloe’s senior portrait from high school hanging on the wall, as gorgeous as ever, but with a touch more softness to the angles of her face.

“We’ll be in the kitchen, just down the hall,” Chloe said as she let Beca hover in front of the wall of photographs.

Beca nodded, appreciating the fact that Chloe was giving her whatever time and space she herself didn’t even know was needed for her nerves. She watched Roger haul their suitcases up a staircase while Chloe and her mother chattered until they disappeared around a corner, leaving Beca alone with her thoughts and Chloe’s family’s memories.

It was weird, she thought, though it felt as weird to think it as she thought it weird: that Chloe had a whole separate life that didn’t include her; that in every one of the dozen or so photos mounted on the walls of the foyer and placed around the surfaces adjacent family room there existed a Chloe who didn’t know she existed. Who loved someone else. Who didn’t know who she would marry, or was certain she knew who it would be. A Chloe who had apparently brought Tom home for a Christmas - in 2010, based on the print in the corner of the photo. She glared at it for a moment, picking up the frame to look at it more closely, but her wedding ring caught her eye and she smiled. “Who gets the last laugh, Tommy boy?” she jokingly said to herself under her breath as she set it back in its place.
Of course, she had her own pre-Chloe life. She wondered if Chloe had ever thought about it, had felt how weird it seemed to know a period of time existed where they weren’t part of one another’s lives. Her life was very much split into B.C. (Before Chloe) and A.D. (After David Guetta), and her B.C. life felt less and less like her the more time passed. It wasn’t that she was losing her identity, no, but that she was establishing a new one, or another one. One that already had photos of Chloe and her on the walls.

She existed in this home, too, she discovered as she circled the room slowly, finding a photo taken by, if she recalled correctly, Chloe’s mother after winning the 2013 Southern Regionals competition. It was of Chloe and Beca, posed with their arms around one another in the halls of Vanderbilt University, their trophy firmly in Chloe’s grip.

There was a similar photo or two in her own father’s home.

And, she thought it was weird. Weird that the people in that photo had no idea what their future would be, that they would fall in love - oh, Beca loved Chloe dearly in that photo, was in love maybe - or, confess their love. Move across the country together. Get married. Start figuring out how to have kids.

Kids.

Beca shook her head and smiled, brushing her finger along the edge of the frame of their photo before turning to walk to the kitchen.

“Chloe honey, I set your old room up for you, but you’re welcome to stay in the guest room if you girls would like more privacy.”

Beca felt the back of her neck flare with heat as she sat sipping a glass of ice water at the small table in the Beale Family kitchen. That offer was a far cry from the experience they had over Thanksgiving when Beca brought Chloe to meet her own family as something more than a friend.

“Cool, thanks, Mom,” Chloe said, flashing a smirk at Beca as she flitted around the kitchen helping her mother finish getting dinner ready. “Chris is coming tonight, right?”
“He's working, but he said he's off at 6:00 and should be here around 7:00.”

“Great!”

Beca's grip slipped on the glass in her hand and she almost dropped it, getting it back on the table with a hard *clunk* just in time. She knew they were only visiting for three days, and Chloe’s older brother wasn’t going to be there every minute of every day, so the window of opportunity for The Discussion to happen was extremely narrow.

Like, *tonight* narrow.

She couldn’t just sit there and wait in silence.

So she stood. “Marie, can I help you with dinner?”

“Oh, no honey, please. You’re our guest.”

Just as she was about to protest, Chloe pushed a stack of plates into her hands. “Set the table?”

She exhaled, smiling at Chloe for giving her something to do. “It’s five of us?” she asked after tallying up everyone in her head.

“Yep!” Chloe chirped. “Silverware is in the drawer below the microwave. Glasses are next to the fridge.”

“Thanks,” Beca said with a sigh, turning to disappear around the corner into the dining room.

“Rog, bring the girls’ bags back down to the guest room, would you?” echoed through the house, and Beca smiled.
“So, Beca,” Marie started, startling Beca out of her relatively quiet zone of listening to Chloe’s family talk endlessly about various cousins’ shenanigans. “Chloe tells me you’re doing well with your music? We’ve seen you on a few programs. She always tells us when to watch for you.”

Beca cleared her throat, glancing at Chloe who was smiling at her. “Yeah. I mean, it’s going okay.”

“‘Okay’? Honey, the record you made sold like two-and-a-half million copies and it’s still selling. Don’t be modest.”

Beca felt herself blush under Chloe’s praise and she laughed nervously. “I’m kind of in between projects now though.” She was grateful when Chloe picked up where she left off, talking about the artists she may or may not work with in the future. It wasn’t until Chloe’s brother asked her a question that she realized she’d barely spoken to the man yet, his arrival having been hurried and promptly moved to the dining table lest the lasagna get cold.

“How’s married life treating you, Beca?”

She swallowed hard and felt a hand on her knee under the table, squeezing gently. “It’s good. I mean, Chloe’s...amazing, but you guys already know that.” The hand squeezed again and she could see Chloe smiling in her peripheral vision.

“She’s treating you okay? Do I need to have a conversation with my sister?”

Beca laughed, hoping and correctly assuming he was joking when he started laughing, too. “Ha, no, no. But you’ll be the first to know if she starts forgetting to put the seat down.”

The table fell silent, and Beca froze; her attempt at a twist of gay-straight humor was all, so very wrong and she’d just put her foot so far into her mouth she could taste leather and...and then everyone burst out laughing, including Chloe, and Beca breathed a sigh of relief.

“Oh honey, tell me about it,” Marie said, poking her fork at Beca, then at her husband. “I’ve been fighting that battle for thirty years. Now that you’ve pointed that out to me, I bet it’s kind of nice living with another woman, hm?”

Beca wasn’t sure how to respond, and she was relieved when Chloe jumped in. “Oh, it’s great. We don’t fight over the thermostat and, like Beca said, no one leaves the toilet seat up. And our
wardrobes doubled because we can share basically everything except what, Bec? Shoes and jeans?"

“Depends on the shoes; depends on the jeans.”

“Maybe I should have given it the ol’ college try before I married your father,” Marie said, winking at her daughter, and there was again no doubt from where Chloe picked up so many of her traits.

“Ew, Mom, no!” Chloe said, wincing and shaking her head, and Beca and Chris did much the same.

“Marie, I’m sitting right here,” Roger said, amused but a little exasperated.

“Don’t worry, sweetheart. I still love you.”

Beca smiled at them, and then glanced at Chloe next to her. She hoped that in thirty years, they would still be as obviously in love as Chloe’s parents were. Her own parents hadn't provided much for an example; it was almost intimidating to know that it could be possible to stay with the same person for the rest of her life.

“Speaking of married life,” Marie continued. “Don't think for a second you're off the hook for your little wedding stunt young lady.”

Chloe groaned and Beca saw her shoulders sag. “Mom, seriously? It’s been two months, can’t you let it go?”

“You expect me to just forget that my only little girl went and got married without the decency to invite her mother? Or the rest of the family?” Her tone wasn't bitter; it was more calm than anything which unnerved Beca more than bitter would have.

“Mom, it's her life,” Chris said, coming to their defense. “She's an adult. She finally finished college. She's happy. Why can't you be happy for her? For them? It’s just a wedding.”
“I’m thrilled for them. But when you have children of your own, if you ever give me grandchildren, Chris, you’ll understand how I feel. Chloe, honey I’m not angry about it. I’m just so disappointed that I wasn't there for your big day.”

“Why can't you respect our decision?” Chloe asked, sitting up straight as though she'd found her resolve again. “This is our life, together. Beca and I didn't want the stress and drama that comes with a big wedding, and this is a perfect example of why. You didn't get what you wanted so you’re upset. What part of my marriage is about you? And why?”

Beca was honestly shocked by Chloe's firm response. And she kept her own mouth firmly closed.

“I only want you to be happy, sweetie.”

“I am happy!” Chloe said, voice raised along with her hands. And then as though noticing the irony, she calmed down and smiled, resting her hand on Beca's shoulder. “I am happy, Mom. We are happy. And I'm going to need you to respect that, and our decision. It's not like we can undo it to make you happy anyway. What's done is done.”

Marie was silent for a moment, and Beca tried to keep the mix of shock, embarrassment, and amusement off her face as Chloe's mother looked back and forth between the two of them. She finally sighed. “I respect your decision and I know you are happy. But I can't help feeling sad that I wasn't there.”

“I understand, but you cannot guilt me about this forever. Okay?”

“How about another month?” Marie said with a small smile, and Beca felt the mood in the room shift back to normal.

“Two weeks,” Chloe countered, holding up her fingers after giving Beca's shoulder a squeeze. “Though I might have something that will make you get over it faster.”

“And what is that?”

Beca felt the panic rise up in her like she'd just dropped off a roller coaster. This was not a conversation she was expecting to have over dinner, with everyone. She expected a private conversation with Chris, parents to be informed at the appropriate time.
“I'll tell you before we leave on Sunday.”

Beca exhaled, relieved.

“Okay kids, I think it's time for me to turn in for the night,” Roger announced after draining the last of the wine from his glass. “I'll see you all in the morning. I'm sure your mother has something planned…”

“Of course I do. I'm taking the girls shopping since we didn't get to have a proper bridal shower or wedding reception.”

“Mom…” Chloe started but Beca put her hand on her knee, shaking her head when Chloe looked at her. It was already late, and she really couldn't handle sitting through this conversation again tonight. And if they didn't get The conversation out of the way tonight, Beca was sure she'd lose her mind to anxiety. “That sounds fun,” Chloe finished, standing to give her mother a hug goodnight.

“It can be for your birthday instead. As long as you let me spoil you both.”

“Sure, Mom,” Chloe said, laughing a little.

Beca relaxed at Chloe’s lowered tension and followed suit with offering her mother a hug goodnight; for all the guilt trips about missing their elopement, Marie held not an ounce of negativity about her or their relationship, which Beca was eternally grateful for.

“Don't stay up too late, kids,” Marie said as she took her leave.

“We won't,” Chris said with a wave of his hand. “Night, Mom.”

Beca watched Marie and Roger disappear upstairs, and then Chris was up and in the kitchen, head in the fridge.
“You guys want a beer?”

“Yes,” Beca answered quickly enough to make Chloe laugh.

“Me, too, please!” Chloe called toward the kitchen, and then turned to face Beca. She took up her hand in her own. “Are you ready? I can do all the talking.”

Beca didn’t like the concept of sitting out an important conversation. She was technically, technically maybe going to technically and only technically make a baby with this guy. On the other hand, it was kind of a weird conversation to have with a guy she’d only met maybe a dozen times in five years. But on the other hand, they were family now. But on the other hand, he was Chloe’s brother. But on the -

“Bec?”

She jumped, startled out of her thoughts as Chloe nudged her, Chris hovering in front of them with her beer awaiting claim. “Sorry. Thanks.” She grasped the cold bottle and took a long drink. She needed to calm her nerves.

“Now that Mom and Dad are gone - we wanted to talk to you about something.”

Beca took a breath and held it.

“Sure. What's up?” Chris settled into the recliner next to their spot on the couch and kicked it back.

“Well, they don't know this yet. But Beca and I...we’re talking about starting a family.”

“Shit, really? That's awesome, Chloe! But it's kinda soon, isn't it? I mean it's cool. It's just fast.”

Chloe shook her head. “No. I mean, I know it seems that way. But it takes a long time. For us. I can't just like...accidentally get knocked up tonight.”
“You're gonna bang in Mom and Dad’s house?!” he asked, grinning before taking another drink.

Beca considered crawling away and dying of embarrassment.

“Oh my god, Chris. That's not what I meant.” She hesitated. “But that doesn't mean we won't.”

Beca inhaled loudly enough to be heard and Chloe turned to her and burst out laughing, Chris following suit. “Chloe!”

“Oh my gosh, baby. Your face! Oh, wow. Okay I'm sorry. Oh, but that was worth it.” Chloe cleared her throat and leaned over, brushing her lips over Beca's cheek. “But we totally are,” she whispered before pulling back. “What I meant was, was that it takes a lot of time and planning for two women.”

“Are you going to adopt or what?”

“Funny you should ask,” Chloe said lightly, masking her nerves behind a drink of her beer, Beca noticed. “We want to try to get pregnant. I mean, me. We’re going to try to get me pregnant.”

“That's great! So you're going to find an anonymous donor and do the ol’ whoop-dee-do?”

Beca coughed, squirming. There was really no turning back now.

“Well, we were thinking,” Chloe said, reaching for Beca's hand and pulling. Beca scooted closer and locked their fingers together. “Since Beca doesn't want to be pregnant and I do, and since she doesn't have a brother and I do…” She gestured toward Chris with her beer. “And we would like our child to be from us, as much as possible really. So it makes the most sense, we figured, if we take Beca's eggs.” Beca slapped a grin on her face, bracing herself for it. “- and have them fertilized and then implant them in me for one to hopefully take...”

Chris reached for the handle on the recliner and pushed it, sitting up. “And you'd fertilize them...how?”

Chloe laughed nervously and Beca squeezed her hand. It was kind of relieving to know Chloe was
anxious about this, too, despite her initial confidence. “Well, Chris, my one and only brother and the only other person on this planet that has the same genetic combo as me…”

He let out a low whistle and then took a swig of his beer, draining it, Beca noticed. “You want me to…”

“Oh, you’re comfortable with it,” Beca rushed, needing to participate in this. “It doesn’t obligate you to anything. You’d be their uncle just like any other scenario. We’d have legal paperwork drawn up to handle all that.”

“What would I have to…do?”

“Not a lot, really,” Beca continued, finally feeling confident enough to talk about it, since he hadn’t immediately shut them down. “We’ll find a clinic here, eventually, and you’d need to go in a couple times. First for tests, nothing major, like blood tests and tests on your…stuff.”

“Motility tests,” Chloe clarified.

“Yeah. And then, if it’s all good, you’d go again to make your, uh…donation. And the clinic would send it to ours in LA. And that’s basically it.”

She was quiet then, watching Chris as he stared at the empty bottle in his hand, swirling it around in thought. She glanced at Chloe, who was watching her brother pensively. She gave Chloe’s hand another squeeze, reminding her to breathe.

After what felt like an eternity, Chris looked up. “Think it’d get Mom off my back for giving her grandkids? She’d kind of be getting two-in-one.”

Chloe exhaled. “If you’re lucky. But, I really need you to keep in mind you won’t be the father. You will be, only in the most basic sense. If we do this, it’s our child. Your niece or nephew.”

“No, I get it, I get it. Bad joke, sorry,” he said, rubbing his hand through his close-cropped strawberry blonde hair. His color wasn’t nearly as vibrant as Chloe’s, and Beca found herself apprehensive that their child wouldn’t have her signature vibrant red hair. It’s kind of how she’d pictured it from the moment she let herself imagine it some years ago.
“It might get her off your back anyway, if one of us gives her a grandkid,” Chloe said, cracking a smile. “And whatever you decide to do,” she continued, “I’m pretty sure I'll beat you to it.”

“And this is all super, super preliminary,” Beca rushed to add. “We haven’t even had a consultation with a doctor yet or anything. We just needed to know where we were starting, because it’s probably going to be one of the first questions they ask.”

“And for my sanity,” Chloe joked, but the touch of crazy to her laugh made Beca think she wasn't completely joking. “I just needed to ask the question. Take as much time as you want to think about it; you don't have to decide -”

“Let's do it.”

Beca's head snapped up from where it had drooped to pick at a rough spot on a fingernail. “Dude.”

“What?” Chloe breathed.

“Yeah, let's do it. You guys wanna have a baby and you can't make one on your own, so - why wouldn't I help out my kid sister?”

Chloe forgot to drop Beca's hand when she launched herself at her brother so she was dragged along into the massive hug Chloe gave him. Beca was elated, too, but she would much rather give the guy a firm handshake. Maybe a playful punch to the shoulder and a finger gun. She improvised best she could, directing most of her hug at Chloe and kind of grabbing Chris’s shoulder. She didn't have to look at Chloe to know she was crying, and she felt something warm and wet on her own face and she pressed her face into Chloe's back to absorb those pesky tears.

Confident her face was dry, she eased back, letting Chloe hug it out with her brother until she suddenly turned and yanked Beca into a fierce embrace, squeezing the air right out of her lungs before grabbing her face to kiss her. It all happened so fast Beca barely had a chance to react, and she laughed when it was done, Chloe grinning at her, holding her hands. Neither of them said anything; they just smiled and held hands.

“Well, I think that’s my cue to head home,” Chris announced, a touch of awkwardness to his voice as he interrupted the silence.
Chloe broke from their reverie and turned, hugging her brother tightly again once he was on his feet. He laughed a little, smiling at Beca over his sister’s shoulder. “We fly out on Sunday. I’ll see you again before we go?”

“Yeah, I’ll swing by again. Text me so I know your schedule.”

“I will,” Chloe nodded, releasing him. “We’ll talk about...all this soon. I don’t even know what to say, Chris. Thank you.”

“Of course. And I’m pretty sure doing this means this and every birthday for, umm, yeah, I think forever? Is covered, gift wise.”

“Oh you...” Chloe started, pointing at her brother with a squinted eye and a smile, “...are completely right.”

“Beca?” He said, turning to her after playfully roughhousing a little with Chloe, all shoves and pokes. And Beca didn’t care about checking her emotions anymore. She stepped up and hugged him for a few seconds.

“Thanks,” she said, feeling like the word was impossibly weak for the sentiment behind it. “You’re a good brother.”

“And you’re a good sister,” he said, and it took Beca a second to realize what he meant. She had meant he was a good brother to Chloe, but...he was a good brother to her, too. And she would try to be a good sister. She’d never had a sibling before. “I’ll see you guys Sunday,” he continued. “And don’t wake up the parentals tonight.”

Beca blushed hard and spun away to busy herself with collecting their half-empty beer bottles to avoid the teasing.

“We’re staying down here. Won’t be a problem.”

“You forget we lived under this same roof together for eighteen years. What was his name again? Ryan?”
“Oh my God,” Beca said under her breath. She couldn’t imagine having such an open and teasing relationship with a family member, Chloe being the lone exception. She also had zero desire to think about any noise Chloe might have made as the result of her ex-boyfriend.

“You hush,” Chloe said, laughing as she followed Chris out of the room and out of sight.

“No, you hush,” came his laughing response.

Beca was glad they weren’t in the same room together anymore, because she was pretty sure she wanted to die. She heard the door close and Chloe reappeared a moment later. “I cannot believe you guys can tease each other about -”

Her statement drifted off at the way Chloe was stalking forward toward her, and her brain caught up at the last possible second, prompting her to take a quick breath before lips crashed into her own, backing her right up until she was against...well, Beca had no idea what she was pressed up against, but it didn’t feel like a wall. The China hutch, she noticed when she chanced a glance, and despite returning Chloe’s kiss with equal fervor, she knew it was a very, very bad position to be in for something like this and she pressed forward to get away from the cabinet filled with expensive and extremely fragile dinnerware.

“Wait, wait, wait,” she said when she finally managed to convince herself to break away from what was arguably one of the most ridiculously intense kisses Chloe had ever given her. They were both breathing hard, and she hadn’t noticed Chloe’s hands roaming, but one of them was definitely up the front of her shirt right now.

“What? What’s wrong?” Chloe said, smiling, cheeks flushed.

“Nothing. Just...not here. Bedroom?”

She watched her statement wash over Chloe’s features as the redhead sucked her bottom lip between her teeth, and then pulled her hand out from Beca’s shirt to flit through the room, turning off lights as she went until she caught Beca by the elbow to steer her down a different hallway to what Beca assumed would be their room for the weekend.

She didn’t get a good look at it, because she was pushed through the doorway and immediately pressed up against the wood the moment it was closed, lips and teeth and tongue attacking her neck. The room was dark, but she could make out the outline of a bed and what looked like a pair
of suitcases standing along the wall. Chloe bit a bit too hard and Beca gasped, nudging her back with a touch to a shoulder.

“I’m not going shopping with your mother covered in hickeys.”

“Sorry,” Chloe said through a giggle. “I’ll be more gentle.”

And she was, easing her assault into something more slow and sensual but no less pleasurable and Beca let her hands wander up and down Chloe’s back, easing beneath the edge of her shirt to feel the warmth of her beneath her fingertips. “Not that I’m complaining - I’m really not - but what’s gotten into you?”

“Did you forget already?” Chloe teased before drawing a line of kisses down Beca’s neck to her shoulder.

Beca was glad Chloe couldn’t see her face as she grimaced at her forgetfulness. “Refresh my memory?”

“Thinking about having a baby,” Chloe said, continuing her line of kisses along the hollow of Beca’s throat. “With you. Of you…” She ran her tongue lightly up the other side of her neck to her ear. “Being a mother. With me.”

Beca tilted her head and sighed, letting her fingernails scratch at Chloe’s lower back. “Should I be concerned that you get so turned on by the thought of kids?”

Chloe jerked back at that, and Beca’s eyes had adjusted enough to make out the features on her very shocked face. “Beca! That’s not...I’m not…”

“Sorry, sorry. It was a joke. Bad joke,” she said when Chloe didn’t seem to realize it right away. “I know you’re not...okay just forget I said anything like that, come here.” She pulled Chloe back to her and into a kiss, pushing off the door to walk Chloe backwards toward what she knew now was definitely a bed. She pressed until Chloe sat down with a bounce and a giggle, and she remained standing, looking down at Chloe as she ran her fingers through the red curls that were so synonymous with her wife. She felt hands on her thighs, moving up and down slowly, and she smiled, reaching for the top button of her own shirt. “You’re going to have to be quiet.”
“Trust me, they can’t hear us down here,” Chloe said with a smile that nearly lit up the room. She reached for the lower buttons of Beca’s shirt, undoing them to meet her in the middle until it was hanging open. She immediately wrapped her arms around Beca’s waist and leaned in to press a kiss to her stomach.

Beca shivered under the touch and shimmied out of her shirt as she reached to unbutton her jeans. She felt more than heard Chloe’s reaction to the move, a quiet almost-growl against her abdomen as hands ran up her back and with a quick tug the tension around her ribcage disappeared as her bra was unhooked, those same hands running around to push it up and out of the way to replace its cups. Beca cut back the moan that tried to escape as she pulled the bra off her arms to drop it to the floor.

She paused, absorbing the moment and the sensations as Chloe’s hands cupped and caressed until the same warmth that was against her neck minutes ago covered the tip of her breast, and that time she didn’t cut off her moan.

Chloe seemed to like that, echoing the moan a little as her hands dropped to the waistband of Beca’s jeans to wiggle them down over her hips until they got to her knees and Beca had to work them down the rest of her way until she could kick them aside.

She made to reach for Chloe’s shirt next, just as Chloe shifted to give equal treatment to her other breast, and she faltered for a moment, catching herself with a hand on Chloe’s shoulder before she fell forward. “Shit,” she breathed, tangling her fingers in Chloe’s hair with her other hand to press her closer and hold her there.

Chloe’s hands were roaming, up and down Beca’s thighs to her hips and stomach and chest to drag her nails down her back, squeeze her backside, and repeat it all over again.

Beca finally wrenched herself away, wanting to give to Chloe instead of take. She tried again for Chloe’s shirt, succeeding this time at catching the hem to lift it up and off in one quick motion. She watched Chloe remove her own bra and reach for Beca again, but she leaned back.

“Wait, wait a second,” she said quietly. “Stand up.”

Chloe looked confused but did as she was told.

“I don’t want to do it on this...like...your parents’ guest room quilt. That’s...weird and kind of
“gross,” she explained as she moved to pull back the bedding to expose the sheets instead.

Chloe giggled. “Good idea. Wanna know why?”

When Beca turned around from her quick task, Chloe had divested herself of the rest of her clothes. “Why?” she asked, taking Chloe’s hand to pull her around to sit back down.

“Because,” Chloe said, guiding Beca’s hand lower and lower until it was met with wetness. Beca’s breath caught at the feeling as she let her fingers glide. “That’s why.”

Beca nodded and bent to kiss her, using the angle to her advantage to control the pace of the kiss, keeping it steady and slow when Chloe tried to speed things up. She pulled her hand away, too, making Chloe whine. She grazed her fingers along her knee, nudging her a little. “Lie down.”

Chloe was quick to move and Beca smiled at her eagerness, but she was having fun controlling the speed of everything. She watched Chloe turn and work her way toward the middle of the bed, arms immediately reaching out toward Beca expectantly.

“Baby, c’mere,” she said with a pout.

“How are you so fucking cute?” Beca answered, climbing in to stretch out on her side next to her.

Chloe was on her in a heartbeat, trying to wrap herself around Beca, and she let her for a few minutes. As much as she wanted it to be about Chloe tonight, she had needs, too, and the thigh between her own was making her toes curl. Finding her resolve underneath her arousal, she pressed Chloe away with a hand to her hip until she was on her back again.

Chloe pouted and opened her mouth to protest but Beca cut her off, dragging her hand straight down from her hip to her center. She didn’t bother teasing; Chloe didn’t need it. She set a slow, steady rhythm and Chloe’s intended protest instead came out as a groan of relief.

“Baby…” she sighed, shifting her legs a little further apart.

Beca got comfortable, too, propping herself up on her elbow to be able to look down at her, foot
resting lightly over Chloe’s, a bit of an anchor for both of them. “Hmm?”

“That feels so nice.”

“Good,” she said simply as she leaned down to touch her lips to Chloe’s. She didn’t linger, leaning back to let Chloe focus on one feeling.

Chloe’s body rolled next to hers, not demandingly or desperately, but slowly and gently to complement Beca’s pace. Chloe sighed and Beca felt a hand at her back, touching without much thought until it settled at the back of her neck. Beca watched her other hand settle against her stomach, twitching a little whenever Beca hit a nerve just right.

Despite Beca’s slow pace, Chloe was breathing hard, hips starting to lift a little more urgently, but Beca didn’t indulge her - not more than she she already was, anyway. She did press her fingers a touch more firmly, enough to set that hand twitching a tad more. Chloe moaned at the slight change and Beca shushed her a little, just enough to remind her to keep her voice in check.

She leaned down, grazing her lips along Chloe’s ear. “You like when I touch you?”

Chloe nodded quickly, the hand on Beca’s neck tightening.

“You feel so good.”

Chloe whimpered, brow furrowing a little as her hips lifted.

Beca hesitated; it felt a little weird to her, but she knew Chloe would like it. “Wanna make a baby with me?” She marked her question by dipping her fingers lower for a moment, slipping her fingertips inside before dragging them back up to work them a little more quickly.

Chloe’s eyes popped open at the question, her answer coming by way of a groan and a tug hard enough at Beca’s neck to force her down into a kiss.

Beca abandoned her rhythm, wanting to pull Chloe over the edge in that moment. She pressed down hard, moving quickly.
Every exhale from Chloe came as a muffled moan as they kissed, her hips shifting higher and faster until she broke from the kiss she initiated, her broken cry filling the room enough to make Beca worry about it, but not enough to shush her. It sounded too good and Chloe was feeling too good to interrupt it.

Chloe muted herself after a few seconds, biting her lip to stifle her moaning as she came down.

Beca kept herself close, peppering Chloe’s face and neck with kisses as her hand slowed, dragging it out for her until Chloe stilled and sank into the bed.

“Mmm, wow,” Chloe murmured, hand at Beca’s neck starting to trail around her back again, drawing shivers from her.

Beca dropped another gentle kiss to her lips. “Yeah?”

“Yeah.” Chloe’s free hand moved to fit over Beca’s where it rested between her legs, just touching.

Beca glanced at the electronic clock that glowed red on a nightstand on Chloe’s side of the bed, smiling at the time. She redirected her smile down at Chloe and kissed her again. “Happy birthday, baby.”

Chloe’s lazy smile split into a grin, followed by a squeal and a hug as she pulled Beca down into a wiggly, rolling hug until Beca found herself on her back, Chloe stretched out on top of her, hands suspiciously held above her head. “Thank you,” Chloe said sweetly, despite the naughty way her hips were slowly grinding against Beca. “Can I tell you a secret?”

Beca nodded, starting to lose focus.

“I’ve fantasized about being with you this way in this house for years.”

Beca gulped at that, feeling the way Chloe’s grip on her wrists tightened.
“What I really want,” Chloe continued, the hand not pinning Beca’s wrists trailing along her forearm and bicep, “is to have you in my bedroom upstairs. But...that might have to wait until tomorrow. I’m going to steal you away when they’re down here watching TV after dinner.”

“Okay,” Beca breathed, fairly confident she would agree to just about anything at the moment.

“Awes!” Chloe chirped, going from seductress to adorable dork in half a second as she was prone to do, and then the seductress was back, pressing Beca into the pillow with a kiss. “It’s your turn to be quiet. If you can.”
As I See It, Yes

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the uncharacteristically long delay in updating. Needed to recharge the batteries a little!

“Wake up, birthday girl.”

Chloe heard it, but it was far more fun to pretend to be asleep and let Beca keep trying to wake her. Fingers walked up her back and she had to fight not to shiver from the touch.

“Chloeeeeee,” was whispered in her ear and she almost flinched from the stream of air. She felt Beca climb over her to settle on top of her and she chanced a small smile. It reminded her of her attempts at waking Beca the morning after their wedding.

Four loud knocks on the door woke both of them this time, sending Beca rolling back under the covers with a curse and setting Chloe into giggles.

“Who is it?” she called. Unlike their wake up visit from Beca's father, Chloe wasn't afraid of getting caught in bed, this time, with her wife. She also knew her parents wouldn't walk in uninvited.

“Breakfast’s ready!” came the answer from her mother through the door, which remained firmly closed. “Take your time. It'll keep. But I made your favorite!”

“Chocolate chip pancakes?” Beca asked her with a glance

“Probably, unless she forgot,” she answered with a giggle.

Beca hummed and stretched and curled into Chloe, pressing kisses to her shoulder. “How's my birthday girl this morning?”
“Cozy,” she said, pulling Beca in closer with her foot.

Beca’s hand was wandering, up her side, down her back, over her hip. “Do you want your present now or later?”

“Depends.”

“On what?”

“Is it something you can give me in front of my parents?”

She felt Beca shake with quiet laughter. “Technically, I can. Whether or not I want to…”

“Beca Beale, you are dirty.”

Beca leaned back, eyes glinting. “Who said it’s dirty? Maybe it's just private. Sounds like you’re the dirty one.”

“Okay, just give it to me,” Chloe said, turning onto her back to offer herself up with a smile.

Only Beca rolled away and out of bed to rifle through her suitcase, which was a total mess after digging through it in the middle of the night in the dark for her toothbrush, and climbed back into bed to plop down next to Chloe again and dropped a pink envelope onto Chloe’s bare stomach.

She jumped at the cold contact and grabbed it, her name written across it in what was probably Beca’s best attempt at cursive. “What’s this?” she asked excitedly.

“What’s it look like?” Beca said with an eyeroll and a smile.

“A birthday card!” Chloe slipped her finger under the flap to pop the seal and wiggle out the card. She grinned at the teddy bears hugging on the front, For my wife on her birthday framing them,
“You know how hard it is to find a card for your wife that doesn't have what are obviously a guy
and girl on it?” Beca said as she retrieved her phone.

“Hush,” she admonished. “Let me read.” She flipped it open, initially ignoring the message that
came with the card in favor of reading what Beca had written on the left flap.

Chlo-

Happy Birthday! I'd pretend like I don't know what to write in here, but you know
that's bullshit and you'd call me out on it in a heartbeat. So instead, let me say how
happy I am that you were born, and how lucky I am to have you in my life and be able
to call you mine. I know we are celebrating with your family this weekend, but I
promise, we'll definitely celebrate properly when we get home. I love you, and hope
you have the best day today. You deserve it.

All my love,
Beca

She read Hallmark’s generic text on the other flap and noticed one more note written under the
printed message.

Why am I on my phone right now?

Chloe glanced over to see Beca’s focus on her phone, the corner of her mouth upturned just enough
that Chloe knew she was paying attention. “Why are you on your phone right now?”

“Come here,” Beca said, holding out her arm so Chloe could move over and be held. She handed
her phone to Chloe. “Open it and press play.”

“What's this?” Chloe asked excitedly as she tapped in Beca's code to reveal a freeze frame video on
the screen. It was blurry, but she could make out Stacie, Aubrey, and Amy’s faces easily, and there
were more behind them that she knew had to be her Bellas. “What is this!” she said with a giggle
and tapped the screen to play it.

A chorus of Happy Birthdays rang out and Chloe turned the volume down a click, which made
Beca laugh. She'd been right - they were all there: Aubrey, Stacie, Amy, Jessica, Ashley, Flo,
Emily, Lilly, and Cynthia Rose, all nine of them crammed around Stacie who had apparently been deemed the best one to capture the video, being the tallest.

“Where you at, bitch?” Amy said, holding up a blue Solo cup.

“How are they all together?” Chloe asked excitedly.

“Shh.”

“Amy,” Aubrey said sharply and then turned back to the camera. “Happy Birthday, Chloe!” Everyone screamed it again, making Aubrey wince through a smile. “We just wanted to tell you how much we miss you and wish you were here!”

“Yeah, stop boning each other and come home,” Stacie added with a smile.

Chloe felt herself blush a little and finished the video, only to notice…

“Baby?”

“Hmm?”

She dragged the slider backwards on the video to watch it again. “Are they...baby are they in our house?!”

Beca tilted her head to regard the screen. “Huh. Would you look at that.”

Chloe dropped the phone to the bed between them and pounced on Beca. She was smiling so wide her face hurt, which was saying something for Chloe. “Are they in our house right now?!”

“I don't know how those bitches got in there. I should call the police. Report them for breaking and entering. Trespassing.”
“Beca! Stop teasing!” she said, giving Beca's shoulders a shake, which was basically shoving her down into the mattress. “Tell me what's going on!”

“Well you were talking about wanting to see everyone or having like, a wedding reception do-over -”

“So you invited everyone to LA for my birthday?!” she finished.

“Technically I booked all their flights without asking them, and then told them I'd put a hit out on them if they didn't come.”

“Wait, you flew all our friends out for my birthday?”

Beca nodded, smiling, her tongue peeking through her teeth in the way that always made Chloe think she was the cutest thing ever, and Chloe dropped down to kiss her.

“But we’re here! And we aren't home ‘til tomorrow.”

“We land at 1:00 with the time difference, and most of the girls are in town through Thursday. I had to give in and move Lilly's flight up a day because she had to be back in Chicago for what she described in the email as a ‘special recognizance mission.’ And since we’re seeing your family this weekend, I figured the Bellas could just come for a summer vacation instead of dealing with friends and family together. Probably more fun, less stress?”

Chloe squealed and kissed her again, then fished for Beca’s phone where it’d ended up wedged under Beca’s thigh. “Are they actually there right now? I’m going to Facetime Bree.”

“She’s staying with her boyfriend. And if you think there’s room for us to house nine extra people at our place, I’m going to question your judgment of what acceptable living conditions are.”

Chloe pouted and lifted up to drop herself not gently back onto Beca’s lap. “Be nice, it’s my birthday.”

“Oof! Chloe I have to pee, don’t do that!”
“Then don’t be mean,” she said with a flip of her hair over her shoulder as she accessed Beca’s phone again. “I’m calling Bree.”

“Need I remind you, you’re naked right now.”

“Who’s naked? Happy birthday, Chloe!” Aubrey’s face appeared on the screen, smiling. Chloe couldn’t figure out where she was, but she wasn’t at their place.

“Bree! You’re in LA!” she said excitedly, being conscientious of the angle of the phone’s camera so she only was in frame from the neck up.

“I am! I guess Beca told you?”

“Yeah, I just saw the video you guys made! How’d you get into our place? Where is everyone staying?”

“But she didn’t tell you those details?”

Didn’t have a chance,” Beca said, loudly enough to be heard from her spot on the bed, under Chloe.

“Ah ha. Well she put everyone up at the Hilton. And she mailed me a key ahead of time. Already gave the girls the grand tour of your place. Hope you don’t mind!”

“Of course not!” Chloe said, still excited. So excited, in fact, she forgot she was naked, and that Beca was naked, and flopped down into bed to hold the phone above both of them to keep talking.

“Chloe! Oh my God.”

“Shit, Chloe, I’m naked here!”
Chloe noticed what the camera angle was showing and quickly fixed it as Beca scrambled to pull the sheet up to her neck and throw it over Chloe as well. “Sorry, baby.”

“‘Sorry, baby’? I’m the one whose eyes were just assaulted. I can accept seeing yours, but I really thought that if I made it through Senior Year without seeing them, I’d make it the rest of my life without seeing Beca’s.”

“You and me both,” Beca said, scowling up at the phone once she was covered.

Chloe laughed at her huffy wife and rolled to kiss her, laughing more at Aubrey’s equal huffing. “Sorry, Bree,” she said once she was on her back again, head to head with Beca. “So, Beca said you’re staying with Eric, hmm?” she said with a knowing wink. “I guess she really had to twist your arm to get you out here. Or, there, I mean.”

“You know I would have come regardless! I’m almost offended, but I know you know that.”

“I think she just wanted to get boned on my dime.”

“Beca!” Chloe said, swatting her with her hand, laughing. Aubrey was quiet, obviously playing along to get a reaction out of Beca.

“She's not denying it!” Beca said, gesturing at Aubrey's smug smile.

“You're right; I'm not.”

“See?”

“Whatever. She's here. There. Waiting for us to get home. What are you girls doing ‘til we get back?”

“Everyone voted for Universal Studios. I'm meeting them there at 9:30.”

“9:30?” Chloe glanced at the time on her phone, forgetting about the time difference. “Oh my
gosh, it's already 12:30 here! Bree, we need to get moving or my mom is going to guilt trip me all day for wasting our time together. Tell everyone I can't wait to see them tomorrow!"

“Yeah, me, too,” Beca added, offering a quick wave before rolling out of bedroom start pulling clothes out of her suitcase.

“Will do. See you ladies tomorrow!”

“Bye!” Chloe disconnected the call and handed Beca her phone whereupon she promptly plugged it back in to charge.

“You showering first or am I?” Beca asked, pulling on the pair of pajamas she never got around to wearing the previous night.

“Same time,” she answered, hopping out of bed to retrieve her toiletries and get similarly dressed to venture out of the privacy of their room.

“Babe...really?” Beca said, looking at her with half a smile. “I mean, I'm kinda down but like...I don't want to be disrespectful to your parents.”

“No, I know that, silly,” Chloe said with a grin. “You shower down here in the guest bath. I'll go upstairs.”

“Oh. Damn,” Beca said with a laugh. “Yeah, that's probably better.”

“Come find me when you're done if we don't cross paths here getting ready.”

The moment Chloe opened the door, her sonic-hearing mother heard it. “Girls, come eat before you shower!”

“Or I guess let’s go eat first?” Chloe said, dropping her stuff back onto the bed.

“Ugh, now I have to put on a bra,” Beca said with a huff as she dropped her own stuff and lifted her
shirt to hang around her neck as she hooked the bra that she retrieved from the floor.

“What a shame,” Chloe smirked, shaking her head as she watched her.

“What, you're not? Not that I'm complaining, but like...isn’t that weird?”

“Nope.” Instead, Chloe dug through Beca's suitcase to find the hoodie she knew would be packed; Beca never traveled without one. “And yes, it'd be weird. Better?” she asked, giving her shoulders a shimmy to make Beca laugh.

“All good.”

Breakfast with Chloe's mother was about as awkwardly funny as she expected, their first real one-on-two time together post-marriage. Her mother had always been pretty boundary-less when it came to people, and Chloe knew she'd inherited her own similar trait from her. She preferred to call it an ‘ease of engaging others’ rather than a lack of boundaries, however.

“So Beca, tell me,” she started, and Chloe bit back her smile. “What made you decide to pop the question? I want all the details.”

“I asked her, Mom.”

“I know you did, sweetheart, but she's the one who planned ahead and bought you that rock,” Marie countered, pointing at Chloe's ring. “She clearly had every intention of doing so.”

Beca cleared her throat, trying to find her way into the conversation and Chloe smiled in apology. “Well...first of all, she's my best friend. You know, this sounds an awful like me getting set up to rain compliments down on her because it's her birthday,” Beca said with a look toward Chloe.

Chloe shook her head and winked. “It's not, but by all means…”

“Uh huh,” Beca laughed. “Anyway. Yeah she's my best friend. And I'm kind of crazy in love with
her, and the thought of either of us being with someone else…” She exaggerated a shiver and then smiled. “Yeah, no. I couldn't picture it. I knew I needed to have this nerd in my life forever. And she might have beaten me to the punch - only because I was trying to set up the perfect proposal for her - but that doesn't really matter. All that matters is that we’re married now.” She finished with a grin and a particularly exuberant crunching bite into a strip of bacon.

Chloe felt her heart swell and she leaned around the corner of the table to kiss her. “There weren't nearly enough compliments on there, but I guess it'll do. Mom?”

Beca rolled her eyes and gave Chloe a shove to put her back in her seat.

“I expected a good deal more, too. Maybe a poem about the color of her eyes or the brightness of her smile.”

Chloe grinned at Beca, enjoying teaming up on her with her mother. “Yeah, where's my poem, honey?”

“I'll show you where your poem is,” Beca said with a look that told her exactly where she could find it.

Chloe stuck her tongue out at her and stole her plate away to finish Beca's last strip of bacon. “That's what you get for being a smartass on my birthday,” Chloe tutted when Beca protested.

“Okay enough teasing,” Marie said as she took up both girls’ plates. “The mall will be closed by the time we get there if you girls don't hurry up and get ready.”

“We’re going, we’re going,” Chloe said with a slight eye roll, ushering Beca out of the kitchen with a hand on her waist.

“This is the mall?” Beca asked from the back seat of Chloe’s mother’s white BMW.

“Totes!” Chloe almost clapped at the sign installed between the entrance and exit lanes of the parking lot. She’d spent much of her time as a teenager here, though she infrequently left with
much more than a new bangle or, if she’d pulled a few double shifts at the pizza joint that month, maybe a new tank or pair of shorts. Her family might have been affluent, and her parents rarely let her want for much, but she didn’t consider herself spoiled; at least, not in the materialistic way. They did put her through seven years of college and set her up with a trust fund so she would have a stable start to her independent life - but she was never the girl with the new designer purse every season and she ‘only’ had one pair of True Religion jeans compared to her best friend’s closet full of them.

So while Chloe walked pathways of the outdoor shopping center that housed designer boutiques almost exclusively every day after school with her friends fawning over Chanel blouses and Louis Vuitton bags, she was more of a window shopper than actual shopper.

She also thought it was cute how Beca was thrown by the fact that her mother was taking them shopping at such an upscale place. Chloe knew what was in Beca’s closet, and that over the last several months it was slowly but surely shifting from shirts that cost $20 to shirts that cost $200. She purported herself to be an anti-shopper, but Chloe knew Beca loved fashion as much, or maybe more, than she did herself. Fashion was how Beca expressed herself; it always had been. Chloe knew from the moment Beca walked into a room what her mood for the day was, based solely on what outfit she’d put together, and her new-found success was affording her endless new ways of expressing herself.

“So what do you girls need, hmm?” her mother asked as they left the car with the valet and walked through the stone-tiled passageway between buildings to the main shopping thoroughfare.

“We really don’t need anything,” Beca answered quickly.

Chloe caught her hand and squeezed it as she leaned over to whisper, “Just let her buy us some stuff. It’ll make her feel better about eloping and maybe stop guilting me.” She finished her comment with a kiss to Beca’s cheek. “Maybe kitchen things?” she answered. “What we have now is kind of a mix-and-match of Beca’s and my stuff.”

“Then to Williams-Sonoma we go,” her mother said with a nod, taking the next left turn.

An hour and a half and a total price Chloe didn’t even want to hear later and she and Beca had effectively acquired a new kitchen - everything from new dinnerware and flatware to wine glasses to cookware to cooking utensils to countertop appliances. Chloe and Beca had been choosy, despite her mother pressuring every considered purchase with, “If you like it, just zap it!” They were essentially creating a wedding registry, which Chloe’s parents would purchase the entirety of and
have it shipped directly to their home in L.A.

While they hadn’t yet disclosed the next stage of their relationship to her mother, specific to this moment the fact that they would be moving in the semi-near future, they were as subtle as they could be about choosing things that were generic enough to work in any kitchen. Marie’s suggestions of getting all red gadgets to “bring a pop of color into the room,” Chloe skillfully redirected her with, “What if we need something else later but it’s not the same shade of red because it’s a different brand? It will drive me crazy!”

It was fun, Chloe realized, to be out shopping for household things like this with Beca. Their living arrangements had been arranged so last-minute that Chloe hadn’t participated in setting up their current home - not beyond the actual setting up of it; she definitely remembered the frustration that came with assembling the IKEA furniture, but Beca had picked out everything. It was their home, but almost solely Beca's style.

She took Beca's hand and pulled her around the corner of a display of copper cookware. “I like doing domestic things with you.”

Beca looked at her funny but smiled. “I should hope so.”

“No, I mean it's just...nice to pick things out together. I'm excited for when we do it for real with our new place.”

“Ah,” Beca said with a nod. “Okay, yeah I get that. I like being domestic with you, too.”

Chloe nodded happily. “Good.”

“Okay girls, where to next?”

Chloe felt her mother hovering behind her. “I think you've done enough, Mom.”

“More than enough,” Beca added. “Really.”

“Nonsense. The least you can do is let me do this today.”
She saw Beca struggle not to roll her eyes, instead biting a smile at Chloe. “How about we just wander?”

“Sure, sweetheart,” Marie said with a pat to Beca’s back.

‘Just wandering’ eventually had them browsing at Rebecca Taylor with dressing rooms started for both of them. Beca insisted she wasn’t going to let Marie buy her any clothes, that it wasn’t necessary, but she went through the motions to make her happy, which Chloe appreciated.

“Hey, Chlo?”

Chloe looked up from the dressing room mirror where she was evaluating a pair of indigo comfy cotton pants, hearing Beca next door through the wall. “What’s up, baby?”

“Can I get your opinion?”

“I thought you weren't going to let Mom buy you anything?”

“I’m not. But I can buy it instead. Just come over here.”

“Then you can give me your opinion on mine, too.” She slipped the off-the-shoulder white blouse over her head and stepped out of her dressing room to tap on the door next to hers. It popped open and she stepped in, almost tripping when Beca pulled her further into the space and right into a kiss. She squeaked in surprise for a second and then relaxed to return it. But when she tried to pull back, Beca tugged her right back in again to kiss her harder.

“What’s happening?” she finally managed, opting to just speak through the kiss.

“I want you,” Beca whispered against her lips and kissed her again, tongue sliding over Chloe’s like it owned it (it did).
Chloe felt her body flush with heat at the words, and then again at their situation. She forced herself to take a step back. “What, here?”

Beca smiled and nodded and reached to bring her close again. “It's your birthday.”

“And?” She glanced around the dressing room - the four walls were floor to ceiling and it was spacious, furnished with more than your typical corner stool - it had a cushioned bench and an armchair. Beca's hands were wandering, slipping under the blouse Chloe didn't even own yet.

“And I want to make you come. I haven’t done that yet today.”

Chloe's breath caught in her throat and her hips rolled into Beca's. “What if we get caught?”

“You'll just have to be quiet.” Hands ran down Chloe’s backside and squeezed, pulling Chloe against her.

“These aren't mine,” Chloe said quickly, realizing she really shouldn't be engaging in foreplay wearing pants she might not actually purchase.

“Then I guess you should take them off,” Beca said with a smirk as her hands moved to slip under the waistband to push them over Chloe's hips; they easily fell to her ankles and Chloe shook her feet out of them and pushed them aside.

“What is it with you and public places?” Chloe remembered their conversation from New Year’s Day when, after pretty successfully fulfilling one of her own, she asked Beca for fantasies she could make come true. “This is one of your fantasies,” she said, answering her own question.

Beca’s mouth curved into a half-smile. “Technically this is a little too private for what I had in mind.” Her lips reconnected with Chloe's neck.

Chloe flipped up the collar of the light blue leather jacket Beca was wearing - definitely not something she owned. Yet. If Chloe had anything to say about it, it would be coming home with them. She looked hot in it. “My mother could literally be waiting on the other side of that door and this is too private?”
“Well, when you put it that way…” Beca said thoughtfully as her hands trailed up Chloe's bare thighs. “Maybe this is acceptable.”

“If you're doing this for my birthday,” she had to stop to bite her lip or something much louder than her hushed conversation would have escaped when a hand dipped between her legs. “If this is for my birthday,” she tried again, “then whether or not it's acceptable shouldn't matter.”

“Why are we having this conversation right now?” Beca asked with a quiet laugh as her other hand slipped up under Chloe's shirt to push a cup of her bra up and away to cover her breast with her hand.

Chloe shook her head. “I don't know.” She leaned in and kissed Beca to let her muffle the moan threatening to make itself known as fingers slipped beneath thin lace. She couldn't believe they were doing this in a dressing room, but it was thrilling and it was her birthday and God Beca's fingers could work magic. She took a step to the left. “Sit,” she whispered.

Beca nodded and they moved in tandem until Beca took a seat on the bench to let Chloe straddle her lap. Beca’s hands were busy and Chloe knew she was trying to be swift about it; they couldn’t be in there forever, especially with her own door being left open. Staff, or a hundred times worse, her mother, could come to check on them any minute. She wrapped her arms around Beca’s neck and kissed her hard, letting her hips fall into a rhythm.

“Take this off,” Beca mumbled against her kiss as she pushed unsuccessfully with one hand at the shirt Chloe didn’t even own.

She whipped it over her head to let it fall somewhere behind her and then her bra was pushed up on the other side and Beca’s lips were on her breast immediately. “Shit, Beca…” she breathed, tangling her fingers in brunette tresses to pull her closer, only half-conscientious of not making Beca look totally bedraggled. She shivered when the cold metal of the zippers adorning Beca’s jacket grazed her bare abdomen.

Beca hummed in response and the rotation of her fingers grew more focused, the pull of her lips on Chloe’s nipple less gentle. Chloe felt it building quickly, the risk of getting caught doing wonders to amp up her arousal. She didn’t even notice the sounds she was making until -

“Shh…”
Chloe covered her own mouth with the back of her hand and pressed the other into the wall behind Beca for more leverage as she rocked in Beca’s lap. It was in her shifting that she opened her eyes long enough and caught sight of their reflection in the full-length mirror to the right and it almost sent her over the edge immediately. “Baby,” she said, chancing taking her hand from her mouth for a second and fighting every moan that threatened.

“Hmm?” Beca looked up from where she was busy with Chloe’s chest.

“Look.” She nodded toward the mirror and moved her arm down so it wouldn’t block Beca’s view.

“Oh, fuck,” Beca said, a little too loudly.

“How are things, Beca?” filtered through the door and they both froze. It was Beca’s salesperson.

“Please don’t stop,” Chloe whispered, resuming her rocking and picking up the pace.

“Good!” Beca called, and Chloe smiled at the way her voice wavered a little. “Just finishing up.”

“Let me know if you need a different size or color for anything. I’m happy to bring it to you.”

“Okay, thanks!” Beca bit out, a little sharply.

Chloe kept her focus on them in the mirror and Beca met her eyes through it. It was as intimate as it was raunchy and Beca made a show of reaching back to grab onto Chloe’s backside to pull her closer.

“Fuck, this is hot,” Beca breathed, leaning forward to catch Chloe’s breast in her mouth again, still watching out the corner of her eye.

Chloe’s vision faltered, eyes trying to be closed, but she wanted to watch it, how she looked riding Beca like that, how Beca looked working so hard to please her. It was a different angle to witness it through, and while they’d played with it at the Malibu beach house over Labor Day, that was a window and didn’t offer the clarity that the mirror did. “Uh huh…” she finally responded in agreement to Beca’s statement. Beca turned her wrist just right and suddenly Chloe was on the
edge and she had to look away, shoving the side of her fist against her mouth as she dropped her head next to Beca’s and thrust her hips with abandon, trying to swallow the sounds that were accompanying her increasing pleasure.

“You’re going to come for me?” Beca whispered in her ear.

She nodded fast, the words spiking it even higher until it snapped and heat rushed through her. Fingers slipped up and in, palm pressed flat against her throbbing nerves to grind into it and she gasped at the sensation, biting into her hand as she felt Beca inside her while her body pulsed around her. Lips moved along her neck, licking and nipping until she sagged in Beca’s lap.

“Mmm, wow,” Chloe murmured, finally lifting her head to kiss Beca with as much passion as she could muster to convey her gratitude. When she sat back she surveyed the state of Beca’s hair and winced a little, immediately working on getting it to look less like it’s just had hands tangled in it.

“Happy birthday,” Beca said with a smile and another kiss.

A knock on the door made them both jump. “Sorry, Beca. Chloe, dear, are you in there?”

She flushed, hearing her mother’s voice with Beca’s hand still very much lodged between her legs. “Yeah, Mom! Just helping Beca decide on something!” She bit a grin at Beca, feeling supremely awkward, and wiggled on Beca. “Get out of me; it’s weird now,” she added with an extra quiet whisper.

“Oh, okay. I was wondering where you went. Your room was empty and I couldn’t find you in the store.”

Beca pointedly thrust her hand up, grinning wickedly, and Chloe gasped at the untimely but not unwelcome sensation. She let the momentum help her up and off Beca’s lap, forcing her hand away once and for all.

“Yeah I’m here. We’re almost finished.” Chloe shook her head at Beca and she knew she was blushing between the exertion and the orgasm and the adrenaline of almost getting caught *twice* and one of them being her mother. She tried to breathe slowly as she pulled her bra back into place and redressed in the clothes she felt obligated to purchase after all that. At least she liked them.
“Okay, honey. I’ll just wait for you out here.”

“Great,” Chloe muttered, knowing she wasn’t going to get herself looking non-frazzled in an acceptable amount of time.

Beca was up and moving, too, digging through her purse to return with a moist towelette from a barbecue joint they went to and work it over her hands; Beca had jokingly stolen a handful of them, implying it would be for this exact purpose but Chloe didn’t expect to ever see them resurface and it made her flush all over again. And then Beca held up a [dry] finger, telling Chloe to wait. “Hey, Marie?”

“Yes?”

“I saw an Apple Store a few doors down. My phone’s cable is starting to crack. If you’d rather not sit here waiting for us, you could pick one up for me? I’ll pay you back ASAP."

“Oh, of course! I’ll be back in a jiffy. And don’t you dare think about reimbursing me.”

Beca smiled at Chloe and tossed the crumpled cloth into her purse. “You’re welcome.”

“Thanks,” Chloe exhaled in relief. Beca bought her at least ten minutes to cool off, if not more depending on how packed the Apple Store was.

Beca winked. “I gotchu, girl.”

Chloe rolled her eyes at Beca’s cockiness but turned to her and laid her jacket collar back down. “Don’t let that leather jacket go to your head.” She tugged on the lapels a little. “You didn’t just magically become Johnny Castle.”

“Dirty Dancing, right?” Beca asked after rocking her head back and forth a few seconds in thought.

She nodded with a smile, happy Beca remembered that much of it from their group viewing of it in Copenhagen a lifetime ago.
“Then if I’m remembering it right, if I want to make you swoon…” Beca paused and tilted her head to crack her neck and then popped her shoulders back to square her serious gaze on Chloe. “Nobody puts Chloe in a corner.”

Chloe laughed at it but it did give her butterflies and she bit her lip, running her hands down the front of the jacket. “You’re buying this, right?”

“You like it?”

She nodded and leaned to kiss Beca, holding back from letting it slip from warm and romantic to hot and horny. “I’m going to do the walk of shame back to my dressing room and hope we haven’t had an audience out there the whole time.”

“There’s not going to be anyone out there,” Beca said with a shake of her head as she gave Chloe a playful swat on the rear when she turned to leave.

Chloe cracked the door open, half-expecting to see a dozen people staring at her disapprovingly. But there was no one, and she slipped out and back into her own room, closing the door behind her with a sigh of relief to lean back against it. She stared at herself in the opposite mirror - her hair was okay, and she was still flushed but it was fading, and would be less noticeable when she wasn’t wearing a blouse that showed so much skin. She slipped the shirt over her head and leaned against the door again, letting the cool wood absorb the heat from her skin. She heard Beca’s salesperson return and the conversation that followed sounded like Beca was leaving, voices disappearing after a few seconds.

On cue, a knock rapped on her door. “How are we doing, Chloe?”

“Oh, just fine! I’m so picky,” she answered her own salesgirl. She realized she’d only tried on two of the nine things she’d chosen. “Give me five and I’ll be finished.”

“Of course. Let me know if you need anything.”

She moved quickly through trying on the rest of her clothes, settling on the pants and shirt she’d just spent a fair amount of time in (and out of), and a navy silk sleeveless dress that fell mid-thigh and would be nice for a date night or one of Beca’s industry events. After redressing in her own clothes and giving herself a once-over in the mirror, she still felt like she had I JUST HAD SEX IN
THE DRESSING ROOM written across her forehead, but she knew it was just her hyper scrutiny - no one else would know.

She walked out with her three selections and was greeted with her peppy sales girl who immediately freed her of the burden of carrying them.

“Your mother asked us to take care of this for the two of you. Congratulations, by the way,” she added. “If you’re all set, follow me up front?”

Chloe laughed; of course her mother had told the staff she was shopping to celebrate her daughter’s recent marriage. “Thanks. Yeah, I’m ready.”

“I don’t know how many more times I can tell you that you don’t need to be doing this,” Beca said tiredly as her mother-in-law handed the ring Chloe had suggested she try to the clerk.

“Nonsense. And this is the last I want to hear of it,” Marie countered, her finger pointedly in Beca’s face. “Besides, how can I not get you something here. The store is named Chloe!”

“It’s Chloé, Mom,” Chloe corrected, pronouncing the designer’s name as it should be. She smiled at Beca who just shook her head and she moved to stand by her side and handed the sunglasses she chose for herself to her mother to add to the purchase. “Relax, honey,” she said quietly in Beca’s ear before ghosting her lips across her cheek. “I’ll make up for this hardship later.” She gave Beca’s chin a bump with her knuckle to turn her so Chloe could peck her lips.

“Is that a promise?”

Chloe winked. “Promise.”

Chris made it to the house in time for Chloe’s birthday dinner, and she felt warm and fuzzy as she looked around the dining room table, seeing her whole family - Mom, Dad, Chris, and Beca. She couldn’t help but think ahead a few years, that they could be right back where they were, but there would be a high chair or booster seat between Beca and her and they’d be battling with a little boy
or girl to eat instead of making a mess or throwing a fit.

“A toast,” Roger said, interrupting Chloe’s thoughts. He was holding up his wine glass and the other three lifted theirs, Chloe following last. “To my favorite daughter on her twenty-sixth birthday. Chloe, may you continue to find happiness in everything you do, and may this next year of your life bring you endless blessings. Happy birthday, sweetheart.”

Everyone echoed the toast and glasses clinked, Chloe touching hers to Beca’s last to hold her gaze a little longer than normal as they sipped and then dug into her father’s famous lasagna. She hoped Beca read what she was trying to convey through her look so she wouldn’t be completely caught off-guard, but they both knew this conversation had to happen tonight.

“Thanks, you guys,” Chloe said after swallowing. “Speaking of this next year of my life and endless blessings…” She looked up from her plate, seeing everyone’s eyes heavy on her. She felt Beca’s hand on her knee under the table. “Beca and I...well, and Chris, too, actually…” She glanced at her brother who smiled at her and took another drink of his wine. “We have some news.”

Her mother laughed, a clear, happy peal of laughter. “Oh honey - if I didn’t know better, you’re about to tell me you’re pregnant. But I know that’s not it! If only it was.”

Chloe laughed, too, feeling only a touch awkward. “Actually, Mom. We’re uh - we’re going to start working on family, Beca and me.”

Marie dropped her fork with a clatter to clasp her hands over her mouth with a gasp. “You are??”

Chloe glanced at Beca who seemed, thankfully, at ease - much less tense than she had been the night before when they were approaching Chris about being their donor. That had been the more stressful conversation after all. “Yeah. We’ve been talking about it, and we decided we’re going to try to get pregnant - get me pregnant.”

“Oh - oh my, honey, that’s so wonderful!” Marie was up out of her seat with her arms around Chloe in a heartbeat, both of them laughing.

“Really? That’s great, sweetheart!” her father said, smiling at her.
“What does this have to do with Chris? You mentioned him?”

Chris cleared his throat. “Yeah, Chlo - what does this have to do with me?” He was teasing and she knew it.

Chloe hugged her mother back best she could in their awkward positioning. “Okay. Okay, sit back down and I’ll tell you.” She waited until her mother was back in her seat, positively jumping in excitement, and she heard Beca whisper something that sounded a lot like, “Like mother, like daughter.”

“So, what we’ve decided to try, because we’d really like our child -” Chloe’s voice caught for a second. “We’d like it if our child could be as much ours biologically as possible. So...we’re going to try IVF with Beca and...and Chris. And I’m going to carry it. Them. The baby.”

Her mother had her hands clasped over her mouth, struggling not to cry. “My baby’s going to have a baby?”

“Eventually, yeah. That’s the plan if it all works.” Chloe smiled at everyone.

Beca slipped her arm around Chloe’s shoulders to hug her sideways. “And Chris is really doing us a solid. Thanks bro,” she said, reaching out to tap fists with him.

“No prob, sis.”

“And my baby’s baby is going to be my booboo’s baby, too?” Marie looked between Chloe and her brother, eyes big and watery.

“Chris is going to be the uncle, just like any other situation, Mom,” she stressed. “We really need you to understand that. Chris isn’t going to be a dad. We,” she gestured between Beca and herself, “are going to be the parents.”

Beca’s hand squeezed her shoulder and gave her a little shake and her voice caught up in her throat. “Yeah we are,” Beca said, more to Chloe than the rest of the table.
The rest of the dinner conversation centered largely around cute stories about Chloe and Chris as babies, horror stories about Marie’s pregnancies - which Chloe repeatedly asked her to keep to herself - and endless do’s and don’ts when it came to raising children. Chloe finally cut her mother off when she started talking about various ways to hold a baby while breastfeeding, insisting they had plenty of time to have those kinds of discussions.

After the birthday brownies (she actually preferred brownies to cake) and saying goodbye to her brother, she and Beca were curled up together on the couch, her dad in his recliner and her mom at the other end of the couch. They were watching “CSI” at the insistence of her father, despite her own insistence that as the Birthday Girl she should get to control the entertainment. But, he claimed domestic domain and birth right and won.

“Hey, Chlo?”

She shifted her head a little on Beca’s shoulder. “Hmm?”

“I still haven’t seen your old bedroom.” Fingernails grazed the sensitive underside of Chloe’s forearm. “I’m kinda dying to see what teenage Chloe was obsessed with. Assuming your parents haven’t turned your room into a gym or sewing room or something?”

She felt her heart thump in her chest at the possible activities in her near future. “It better be how I left it. Mom?”

“Oh it’s almost the same. We store a few things in there now but all your stuff is where you left it. For now.”

Beca bounced her leg a couple times to get Chloe to sit up. “Come on. Show me.”

“Yeah! Let’s go.”

Chloe pulled Beca off the couch and kept a hand on hers, leading her into the hall and up the stairs. “It’s the last room on the right,” she said, pointing as they passed what used to be her bathroom and now appeared to be her mother’s, followed by the linen closet, and then they were in the doorway to her old bedroom. She reached in on autopilot to turn on the light, and smiled. It was almost like she’d left just yesterday. “Ta da!” She said, throwing her arm out to present it to Beca.
“Not what I expected,” Beca said as she dropped Chloe’s hand to start wandering the room.

Chloe closed the door and leaned on it. “What did you expect?”

“Honestly? A teenage Chloe? I was kind of envisioning pink walls and unicorns.”

Chloe smiled, letting her eyes drift over the walls that held innumerable memories. They weren’t pink, they were white; her color scheme was white and green because it always felt bright and fresh. “They were pink until I was thirteen,” she confessed, earning a satisfied smile from Beca.

She watched her move, slow steps as she trailed her fingers along a shelf as she read the engravings on the trophies and plaques garnered through academics, athletics, music, and dance competitions, pausing in front of the collage of photos of Chloe and her high school friends, pictures tucked this way and that under a grid of ribbons mounted on a piece of fabric-covered plywood she’d made with friends at a sleepover (they’d all made one). Chloe could see some of the ribbons had loosened over the years. The photos that would have fallen were propped up along the edge and Beca plucked one of them, looking at it closely and then turning to wave it at Chloe.

“What are these? These are not my wife’s boobs.”

Chloe laughed, crossing the room to snatch the photo away to see which one she was looking at. She and her friends were in her pool, everyone in bikinis and sunglasses holding wine coolers that her mom never commented on when she saw the photo a few weeks later. “No, they’re not. They’re the boobs of a sixteen-year-old after puberty and before she lost her childhood...fluffiness.”

Beca laughed and grabbed the photo back, raking her eyes over it one more time before placing it back into its spot. “I won’t complain if you get those back when you start getting...fluffy.” She glanced over her shoulder at Chloe and smirked, continuing her examination of Chloe’s youth. “Not that I’m complaining about the current state of affairs,” she amended when Chloe poked her between the shoulder blades.

Chloe explained photos or knick knacks when Beca would point or ask about them. “Twelve. Disney World...Eighteen. My Biology class went to the Everglades….I got the pink Magic 8 Ball for my birthday...Oh my gosh, give me that,” she said, snapping a framed photo out of Beca’s hands in a panic when she realized what it was.
Beca turned, wearing another smirk. “Who’s the guy, babe?”

“It’s uh - Ryan.”

“Ryan? Like first real boyfriend, first time Ryan?” Beca grinned and reached. “Give it!”

“No!” Chloe held it over her head and out of reach. “Why do you want to see him?”

“Because! It’s like, fascinating or whatever to see who used to be in your life. I want to get a good look at this dude that had the honor of deflowering my wife.” She grimaced. “That sounded a lot worse than it did in my head.”

Chloe laughed and handed the picture back to her. “I’m flattered? I think?”

Beca looked it over with scrutiny, making a show of holding it unnecessarily close to her face. “Well, at least he’s hot,” she finally said as she set it back on the shelf.

“Do you really think I’d ever be with someone who isn’t hot?” She smiled, waiting for the blush to hit Beca.

It did a moment later, showing up in her cheeks and ears. “Shut up,” Beca mumbled with a glance over her shoulder.

Chloe chuckled and stepped up to wrap her arms around Beca’s waist from behind and rest her chin on her shoulder. “What? I think you’re super hot.”

“Oh?” Beca’s voice sounded a little off and Chloe smiled.

She moved her head to press her lips to the sensitive side of Beca’s neck. “Super duper hot.” She flicked her tongue and felt Beca inhale. “You didn’t bring me up here to see my room.”
“Sure I did.” Beca rested her arms over Chloe’s. “I wanted to see your stuff.”

She licked again, this time letting her tongue work Beca’s neck for a few seconds. “Maybe you remembered my little fantasy and want to make it come true for my birthday?”

Beca leaned back into her embrace. “Now why would you think I’d do something thoughtful like that?” She moaned a little at the lips that were starting to suckle at her skin. “It sounds awfully sentimental.”

Chloe chuckled and let go of her neck with a pop. “I guess in that case, I won’t return today’s favor.” She moved to drop her arms but Beca stopped her.

“Not so fast.”

“Oh, did someone have a change of heart?” She took a step backwards toward her bed, taking Beca with her.

“I’m considering it.”

Chloe brought her hands up to cup Beca’s chest over her shirt and heard her breath catch. “Tough decision?” She took another step back, and another.

“Yeah,” Beca said thickly as her now-empty arms hung limp. “Real tough call.”

“Maybe I can make it easier for you?” She bumped into the foot of her small double bed and stopped. She kissed Beca’s neck again and moved to rid her of her shirt.

“Ask again later,” Beca said with a sigh as she tilted her head to give Chloe better access.

Chloe brought her hands back to Beca’s waist and unbuttoned her jeans. “Maybe now?”

“Reply hazy. Try again.”
Chloe laughed and spun them, giving Beca a shove to send her onto the bed on her stomach. She followed, forcing Beca to crawl higher with an encouraging, “Up, up!” as she walked on her knees with Beca, straddling the backs of her thighs.

“Why am I upside down? Or whatever,” Beca asked, voice a little muffled as she fought with the pillow.

“Just cuz,” Chloe said simply. She dragged her nails down Beca’s back and watched her shiver and arch into the touch. “How about now?” She tucked her fingers under the waistband of Beca’s jeans and gave a playful tug.

“Concentrate and ask again.”

“I am concentrating,” she laughed and yanked. Beca’s hips lifted with her that time and the jeans came down. She worked them down Beca’s legs until she could shove them off her feet to the floor and immediately went back for her underwear. “How ‘bout now?”

“Outlook good,” Beca said, lifting her head to look over her shoulder at Chloe.

“Sounding more positive.” Chloe reached up and unhooked Beca’s bra to let her get rid of it herself. “I like it.”

“You have me pinned down and you’re stripping me. Both of my clothes and my resolve.”

“Yeah, your resolve.” Chloe let herself fall forward to hold herself up on her hands and knees, framing Beca. She pulled Beca’s hair to the side and dropped her lips to her neck, working that spot until Beca was squirming under her. “How ‘bout now?”

“Signs point to yes,” Beca said breathlessly as she smiled at Chloe with one eye open.

“That’s what I like to hear,” she whispered hotly before returning to her task, working her tongue, teeth, and lips over Beca’s neck. She whimpered and Chloe shushed her. “My door doesn’t have a lock.”
Beca stiffened a little at that and then blew out a long breath. “Why not?”

“Parents didn’t trust me when I had boys in my room.”

“What about girls?”

Chloe moved to the back of Beca’s neck, hair held up in a sloppy ponytail as she kissed along her hairline and started down her spine. “You know I didn’t start my experimentation until college.”

“Late bloomer.”

Chloe smiled against Beca’s back and dropped her hair to push her hands under Beca just below her arms to find and cover her breasts, squeezing as she inched her way lower, kissing between her shoulders.

Beca gasped a little and arched out and then in, like she was confused which sensation to move toward. The movement let Chloe get a better hold on her and she worked backwards, lower and lower until she was trailing kisses down and back up the dip in Beca’s back. Beca was already panting beneath her, but Chloe’s arms were only so long and she couldn’t go any further so she begrudgingly let go of the hold she had on Beca to drag her nails down her ribs as she moved to sit angled on her side next to Beca and propped herself up on an elbow. Chloe let her other hand wander - over her back and lower to trace Beca’s curves and tickle the back of her thigh, making her laugh and kick her foot into the bed.

Chloe reversed her path and slowed, letting her fingers slip down to tease along the soft skin of Beca’s inner thighs and she smiled as Beca shifted her legs further apart and turned to press her face into the pillow.

Chloe reveled in seeing Beca like this, so disarmed and vulnerable and trusting. She hoped - knew - she’d never tire of it. She reached farther, but not far enough, and squeezed Beca’s thigh, pulling at it a little to accept and encourage Beca opening herself to her.

And then she reached again, this time grazing her fingertips along wet heat and Beca groaned into the pillow before flipping her head to press her cheek into the pillow, eyes still closed, face flushed pink as she pulled her lower lip between her teeth. There was something so natural, so casual about it - Chloe lying comfortably in bed, just petting Beca. She indulged in it, moving up and down with
reverent slowness, easing within to make her take a particularly deep breath, and then withdrawing to do it all over again.

Beca pressed her hips down and whined. Chloe knew she wasn’t giving her enough, that she was essentially torturing her, and she leaned down to press a kiss to Beca’s shoulder as she slid her hand a little further down and Beca immediately ground her hips into it with a moan of relief. Chloe let her. Chloe watched her - the way she moved, seeking friction and rhythm. She let Beca control it until she was breathing hard, broken moans starting to slip out.

Chloe was struck with inspiration. She lifted with her hand, pulling Beca’s hips up off the bed and higher until it really got Beca’s attention and she opened her eyes in confusion as she worked herself up onto her knees.

“Stay,” Chloe said with a pat to Beca’s backside after withdrawing her hand. She rolled onto her back and scooted down and over until she had to lift Beca’s knee to slip under it to position herself between her legs, having to bend her own knees to get her feet onto the edge of the bed so they didn’t dangle off it uncomfortably.

“Okay, this is happening…” Beca said through a heavy exhale as she lowered herself.

Chloe guided her down eagerly to taste how worked up she’d made Beca and the muffled moan that followed told her Beca’s face was in the pillow again. Trusting her to keep herself quiet, Chloe quit her slow torture, licking through her quickly before closing her lips over swollen nerves and suckling. She kept her hands on Beca’s hips to support her and she felt her whole body tremble and heard another muffled groan, so she pulled harder and worked her tongue over it in her mouth.

If not for the pillow, the high-pitch sound Beca let out would have definitely been audible to those on the lower level, and Chloe was grateful for it. She felt Beca trying to rock and she let her, encouraged her even, with a nudging of her hands.

“Fuck…”

It was strangled but quiet and told Chloe she’d probably had to forego the pillow in favor of oxygen. She slid her hands around and up to squeeze her rear; she kept a hold on her, ready to pinch a reminder if she got too vocal.

But Beca kept herself in check, muttered curses and muffled groans telling Chloe she was close.
Painfully close, by the sound of it, and Chloe changed the pattern of her tongue just slightly and Beca jolted against her and Chloe knew she had her. She held steady, best she could with Beca’s writhing starting to lack coordination.

Suddenly Beca froze, and a long, loud but muffled moan reached Chloe’s ears and she held onto her as the freeze disappeared and her hips jerked as crystal clear whimpers filled the air and for a brief second Chloe hoped a surprise bolt of pleasure wouldn’t make Beca forget to stay quiet, but she didn’t despite the ecstasy that was rocking her body at the moment.

When she finally stilled, Chloe slid herself down and out from under Beca to climb back up onto the bed and lie down next to Beca, who was still working on getting her limbs back into working order until she flopped onto her side to face Chloe.

“Two for two on fantasies today,” Chloe said with a smile, still rubbing at spots of wetness on her face she felt lingering.

Beca laughed airily and gave her a thumbs up, and then reached over to wipe her hand over Chloe’s cheek, and then gave her another thumbs up. “All clean,” she said through a sigh.

Chloe laughed, too and leaned in to Beca to kiss her, taking pride in how weak the return kiss was. “Thanks for letting me have you in here.”

Beca laughed again, voice sounding more normal, and she cleared her throat. “Yeah. Was a real hardship. Owe me big time.”

Chloe smiled and kissed her again, and suddenly realized she had no idea how long they’d been upstairs or whether or not her parents had come up and gone to bed at some point during their activities. She ran her hand down Beca’s arm caught her fingers. “Come on. Let’s get you dressed and...then undressed and go to bed.”

Beca nodded and worked on crawling out of bed, lazily accepting the articles of clothing Chloe handed back to her.

“T’m going to use the bathroom real quick, and we can go say goodnight if they’re still up. I’m sure they are, since we won’t have much time in the morning; we have to be at the airport by 9:00.”
Beca nodded and yawned as she struggled to pull her jeans on without standing. Chloe waited until she had succeeded, watching with a soft smile on her face, and then opened the door, the lock on the doorknob audibly clicking when she turned it. Her parents’ bedroom door was still open, room dark, and she could hear the TV downstairs airing the late night news.

“I thought you said you didn’t have a lock?” Beca asked as she buttoned her jeans.

“I did say that.” Chloe smiled. “I also know how much you like thinking we might get caught.”

Beca grinned and shook her head. “God, I love you.”

Chloe winked. “I know. Be right back.”

She freshened up in the bathroom and by the time she returned to her room, Beca was more or less back to her normal self, fully dressed, up and moving about, messy hair now tied up, and she was back to examining the contents of Chloe’s room.

“Ready?”

“Hmm? Oh, yeah,” Beca said with a smile as she turned to follow Chloe downstairs to say goodnight.
Beca’s been glued to her phone since they touched down in Los Angeles. Chloe doesn’t really mind - Beca was admittedly really good about not working during her birthday trip. It might be a Sunday, but the music industry never slept, and Chloe knew Beca and Luke were onto something. The texts were constant.

“Will you put that on Do Not Disturb so I don’t have to listen to it buzz every two seconds?” she finally broke down and asked once they were in a hired car heading home. “Your text app is always open; you don’t need the notifications; you can see the messages pop up.”

“Sorry,” Beca said, giving Chloe’s knee a squeeze after changing the setting. “Didn’t mean to annoy you.”

“It’s okay. It didn’t bother me for the first half hour, but…” Her own phone chose that moment to vibrate in her lap and she offered a sheepish smile to Beca, who looked at her pointedly. “Hey, it’s not going off nearly as often as yours.”

Beca smiled and went back to her texts and Chloe opened up her notification from Aubrey.

It was a group photo, half the girls crammed into the frame to take a selfie, holding up wands in front of the Hogwarts Castle at Universal Studios, captioned, Wish you were here!

Chloe smiled at the photo and the fun they were clearly having; she wished she was there, too. Until she glanced over at Beca sitting next to her, who might have felt eyes on her because her foot snuck over and wedged its way between Chloe’s while she kept texting.

Looks like you’re having a blast!!
On our way home from LAX

“Girls are at Wizarding World. We need to go one of these days.”

“Yeah, we will,” Beca says, still texting. “I think I can get us in on one of their VIP overnights. We get invites sometimes. I’ll keep an eye out.”
“Really? That’s awesome!”

Beca hummed. Still texting. “Hey,” she said, finally lowering her phone. “When were they going to leave the park?”

Chloe swapped texts with Aubrey. “Around 6:00. And she says we’re not supposed to look in the guest bathroom?”

“What? No, first - does anyone there have a car?”

“Based on Instagram, they took a hotel shuttle there. I’m guessing Eric dropped Bree off at the hotel first. And I don’t know, that’s all she said - ‘don’t go in the guest bathroom.’”

“Well that’s disconcerting,” Beca said after a moment, and went back to her phone, though she exited her text conversation and dialed one of the numbers out of her Favorites list. “Yeah, hi. Beca Mitchell. Can I get a pick-up?...Today...6:00...Universal Studios - whatever the main gate is...Nine people; yeah, can you do an Escalade? With a stocked bar...Yeah, on my account...To my home address. Or wherever they ask to go; multiple stops are fine...have them wait, we’ll keep it for the night. Uh, put it under Aubrey Posen. Babe, what’s her number?”

Chloe grinned at Beca and pulled up Aubrey’s contact card in her phone to hold it up in front of Beca’s face to recite and finish her call. “You’re sending a limo to pick up the girls?”

Beca shrugged. “Sure, why not? Better than dealing with multiple Ubers or whatever they were going to do. Besides, I figure this week is just going to be like...non-stop birthday debauchery. Might as well get it started.”

Chloe just giggled happily and pulled Beca into a sideways hug, best she could with their seatbelts.

It was pushing 3:30 when they got home. Of course the first thing they both did was make a beeline for the guest bath to see what the issue was. The rest of the drive had consisted of conversation of possible things that had happened while the Bellas had unrestricted access to their home in their absence. Chloe had already forced Beca to accept the blame for whatever they had destroyed in the bathroom, or destroyed and hidden in the bathroom, since she orchestrated this little reunion.
Yellow tape that read CAUTION DO NOT ENTER was wrapped several times around the door.

“I can’t look,” Beca said, shying away the moment Chloe threw it open.

Chloe held her breath and reached for the light switch. She smiled. “Bec. Honey, it’s fine.”

“What? What is it?”

She looked at Beca, eyes squeezed shut. “Baby, open your eyes.” She watched Beca pry one eye open, and then relax, and then cover her mouth.

“Oh my God...they didn’t…”

“They did. Of course they did.” Chloe stepped into the bathroom, wading through the sea of gifts of all shapes and sizes wrapped in various pearlescent white wrapping paper adorned with bows and ribbons on the floor. One of them was particularly obvious as to its contents, as its giver took the time to wrap the item without placing it in a box first, and it probably would have been more fit for a gift bag given its phallic shape and flexibility. Chloe picked it up and waved it at Beca, laughing. “Guess who?”

“If that’s not from Amy or Stacie, I quit.”

“Amy,” Chloe said after checking the handwriting on the card awkwardly taped to it.

Beca made a sound of satisfaction and followed Chloe into the room to survey the dozen or so gifts. “They’re something else.”

“Oh, oh! Wait a minute!” Chloe said, spotting what appeared to be Amy’s gift’s twin. She grabbed it and held it up. “And from Stacie.”

“Ha!” Beca said and reached to high five Chloe. “I knew it. Alright, let’s get out of here before I - you break down and open something. Dibs on the shower.”
Chloe was fine with Beca calling dibs. She wanted to unpack anyway; she hated the inevitability that came with failing to do so promptly: you’d be getting dressed and realize your deodorant was still in your suitcase, your mousse, or your entire makeup bag, or your brush or your curling iron, and it was an endless annoyance of running to and from disheveled luggage instead of just taking five minutes to dump the clothes into the hamper and return the toiletries to their respective drawers in the bathroom.

Beca wasn’t even out of the shower yet when Chloe dropped their toothbrushes into the cup by the sink, the last step of her unpacking. She smiled at the platinum wedding band sitting in the never-used soap dish (because who uses bar soap nowadays anyway?), removed for safe-keeping from a bathtub drain tragedy. She added her two bands to it with a cling.

“Got room for one more in there?” she called, already undressing.

“Always,” was the response. “Hey,” Beca said with a smile when Chloe stepped into the shower. She was washing her face, wearing a mask of white bubbles.

“That’s a good look on you,” Chloe said with a laugh as she stepped close to Beca and held her waist as they carefully spun to trade places and let Chloe under the spray.

“Thanks, I thought so, too.” Beca leaned back in and Chloe twisted enough to let her rinse off her face so she could kiss Chloe.

They were good at this, showering together. They could be efficient about it, or they could take their time teasing one another, or make each moan.

Today they were somewhere between Options 1 and 2, Beca’s hands trailing up and down Chloe’s torso while Chloe washed her hair; Chloe being very thorough when running the soapy loofah over Beca. Neither of them getting carried away with things.

“We’re going to be surrounded by people all week,” Beca said as she leaned back to let Chloe hold her from behind, sharing the water. “Sure you don’t want to take advantage of this privacy?”
Chloe chuckled into her ear and tugged at it playfully. “I’m kind of tired after flying all day. Is that okay?”

“What? No, that’s not okay; how dare you turn me down?”

Chloe knew Beca was teasing and squeezed her around the middle. “Punish me for it later.” She pinched Beca’s rear playfully and reached back to turn off the water. “Besides, we’ll still have this place to ourselves.”

“I wonder whose great idea that was?” Beca asked with a grin as she squeezed the excess water out of her hair.

Chloe stepped out and threw a towel at Beca. “I’ve said thank you twenty different ways; isn’t that enough?”

“I’ll never say no to one more!”

Chloe was putting the finishing touches on her makeup - she didn’t know the night’s plan, but assumed it would involve leaving the house and prepared accordingly after she and Beca were thoroughly lazy and ate untoasted Pop Tarts on the couch and caught up on the weekend’s DVR - when she heard honking outside. She smiled and stepped out of the bathroom to peer through the bedroom window that overlooked the street. A black SUV limousine was rolling up, and there was Fat Amy, standing up through the sunroof, bottle of champagne in one hand, the other outstretched and waving at the building, and Chloe had a fleeting feeling that it was a scene out of *Pretty Woman*, only her knight in shining armor was inside already.

“The girls are here!”

“I’m naked, you go let them in. And don’t let them come charging up here.”

Chloe spun at that statement, and while not 100% accurate, Beca was only wearing a pair of underwear as she dug through the drawer that housed her bras. “I’ll try to hold ‘em off.” She tossed her lipstick back into the bathroom, making it into the sink, and grabbed a tissue from her nightstand to blot her lips as she strode past Beca, being sure to cop a feel before she got her bra pulled down into place.
She ran down the stairs, already grinning before jogging through the kitchen and living room to throw open the front door and bound down the steps toward the limo.

Aubrey was the first one to step out of it and Chloe ran straight into her arms with a squeal. “You’re here!”

“I’m here! You sent a limo for us?!”

“Beca did, yeah,” she said, squeezing her best friend tightly.

Aubrey shook her head and squeezed her back. “That girl.”

The rest of the girls piled out one by one like a clown car to glom onto their hug until they were a mass of giggling, jumping girls.

“Alright, I hate to break up this orgy,” Amy announced as she busted her way out of the middle of the group. “But my eyeballs are floating; I need that off-limits bathroom. Stat.”

Chloe let her go so she could finish hugging every one of her girls, getting a “Happy birthday!” with each embrace. She noticed they were all changed from what she’d seen them wearing in their theme park photos; they were definitely dressed up to go out. “I can’t believe you’re all here!”

“Big Red’s birthday in Hollyweird?” Stacie said as she broke out of the group to head toward the house. Chloe noticed she was taking a nearly full bottle of Jack Daniel’s with her. “As if we’d miss it!”

“Come on, guys, let’s go inside. It’s hot out here.” She thanked the driver, who patiently waited holding the stretch SUV’s door open throughout the reunion, and herded the group toward the wide open front door, bringing up the rear with her arm over Jessica’s shoulders.

Chloe didn’t know what to do, having her Bellas all together again under one roof. For once, she
was at a loss for words.

“Where’s Señora Beale?” Flo asked with a grin and Chloe’s eyes went to the staircase, aware that Beca hadn’t made it down yet, and that upstairs was off-limits until she was.

But Amy didn’t know that second part, and she’d followed Chloe’s attention and took off. “BB-8! We’re comin’ for ya BB-8!” She was barreling toward and up the stairs, eight girls behind her, and Chloe didn’t try to stop them. It would be fruitless, and they were making enough noise to give Beca a warning to at least dive for cover in the bathroom if she still wasn’t dressed. Lilly was the last one up, walking slowly backwards like she was a ninja slipping away from a crime scene.

Chloe hovered at the foot of the stairs for the inevitable whatever that would come - squealing, screaming, shouting, swearing, laughing. She just closed her eyes and waited.

It came a second later, a cacophony of versions of Beca’s name and nicknames followed by a shriek that was definitely Beca, followed by the amplified groan of their bed that told her that her wife just got dogpiled on. She just listened, remembering the years spent living in a house filled with those voices and that laughter and Beca’s constant protests that were usually followed by laughter of her own. She smiled, and opened her eyes, and walked upstairs.

“Please don’t suffocate my wife,” she said as her head popped up through the floor to the bedroom. “I’m kind of keen on her.”

“And it was only fair she got a turn, too, in this Bella reunion, so she took a few quick steps and hopped onto the bed with everyone else to cheers, and with some wiggling and laughing she worked her way down until it was she that was on top of Beca, who was red-faced and hair-mussed (and clothed in a nice white dress) and had tears streaming down her temples from either laughter or simple joy, Chloe didn’t know, but didn’t care. Either was good. She ducked down and kissed her, and it was met with a mix of cutesy noises and mock disgust that sent half the girls rolling off the bed to either sit on the floor or stand. Emily helped herself to the chair from Beca’s desk.

“We really dodged a bullet,” Ashley said.

Chloe sat back, straddling Beca’s hips in a way that was definitely not something others usually
saw, but they were both clothed and *that* wasn’t what was happening at the moment. “What do you mean?”

“You guys hooking up so late in the game,” Jessica clarified.

“Yeah, they weren’t constantly at risk of walking in on you two bumpin’ uglies,” Amy said before taking a swig from her champagne bottle. “I’m the sole bearer of that cross.”

“What’s wrong with that?” Cynthia Rose said with a *tsk* and a wink.

Emily laughed. “Please, it’s not like we didn’t all hear what was going on in their room the night before Worlds.”

Beca sat up at that, anchoring her arms around Chloe’s waist to stay upright. “Wow, someone’s gotten ballsy now that she's going to be a Junior.”

“I’m just saying, Amy’s not carrying that cross alone.”

“I didn’t hear anything,” Stacie said as she twirled in place for a place to sit and ended up in Emily’s lap.

“Yeah, we know, Stacie,” Amy said with an eyeroll. “How could you have?”

“Yeah, thanks again for letting me crash with you guys,” Jessica said to Lilly and Flo.

“Oh, riiiiight, Mr. and Mrs. Smith!” Stacie said, perking up. “I forgot about them.”

“You forgot the three-way you had in Copenhagen with Jessica in the room?” Aubrey said from her spot on the corner of the bed by Beca’s right foot.

“She left!” Stacie said with a wave of her whiskey.
“And if I’d stayed, you would have remembered?” Jessica laughed.

“Obviously! I mean, it might have become a foursome,” Stacie added with a wink that sent everyone into groans and giggles again.

There had never been so much conversation in Chloe’s bedroom that wasn’t comprised fifty percent her own voice, and she was content to just sit astride Beca’s lap and listen to their friends joke and jab and for once, be an observer instead of a constant participant. She was surprised when Beca brought the conversation back to them.

“Is anyone going to tell me why I was banished from my own guest bathroom?”

Chloe smiled down at her, appreciating that she didn’t let on to the fact that they knew exactly what was in the bathroom.

“We’ll get to that later,” Aubrey said with a pat and wiggle of Beca’s foot before standing and clapping her hands to get everyone’s attention. Apparently old habits die hard; she was out of captaining for four years but you’d think she’d never left and that there weren’t actually three other captains in the room; though Emily had never captained them so maybe she didn’t count. “Okay everyone, let Beca up. She was obviously not finished getting ready before we barged in.”

Chloe waited for everyone to peel off the bed and then swung herself off Beca; it was then she noticed the eyeshadow palette on the floor between the bathroom and bed, many of the colors cracked and in pieces across the carpet. She groaned, first at the dark colors that had already been smashed into the light-colored carpet, and again at the realization that that was Beca’s favorite palette and while not rendered completely useless, it was no longer in its neat and tidy condition.

“Yeah, thanks guys,” Beca said, stooping to start picking up the chunks of pressed powder and drop them back into the rectangular metal tin.

Aubrey stooped to help her. “Sorry about that, Beca. I’ll help you get this out of the carpet before I leave.”

“And we’ll buy you a new palette, right guys?” Emily offered.

Beca waved her pigmented fingers dismissively. “Nah, it’s fine.”
“So,” Chloe said, bouncing a little on the edge of the bed. “What are we gonna do tonight?”

Beca stood, catching herself as she was about to dust off her hand on her skirt and instead disappearing into the bathroom to wash her hands. “We have reservations at 8:00 at that place you’ve been wanting to go.”

Chloe gasped. “Norah?!”

“Is that the place you’ve been wanting to go to?”

“Yes!” She bounced excitedly and then jumped up, unable to continue sitting.

“Then that’s where we’re going.”

“How did you even know?"

“I do check Twitter sometimes, Chlo,” Beca said, peering at herself in the mirror to touch up and finish her makeup. “You tweeted about it enough so I followed them to see what the big deal was and I guess when you follow someone they can send you private messages? Anyway they sent me a private message saying the chef would love to host us. I mean, I don’t think they had a party of eleven in mind, but they didn’t say anything about it.”

“This bitch is a celebrity now,” Cynthia Rose said, clapping her hands. “That’s badass, Beca.”

“First you bring us all out here, and give us a limo, now invitations from the chef?” Ashley said from her spot on the floor next to Jessica. “What’s next - gonna fly us somewhere on a private jet?”

“Maybe next trip I can borrow a jet,” Beca said casually from the bathroom, making Chloe laugh and everyone else ooh. “I’ll be ready in a minute. Were you finished getting ready, babe?”

The girls equal parts groaned and giggled at Beca using a pet name; she ignored the teasing with a smile as she swiped her hand pointedly over the bathroom light switch.
“I’m ready if you are, schnookems!” Chloe said, purposely coming up with a super corny term of endearment just to get a rise out of the girls again.

“Then let’s hit the trail, honeybunch.” Beca was playing along, and Chloe loved it. The last time they were all together, Beca was still guarded about their then-budding relationship. She didn’t like to be teased and she didn’t like attention about it. Now, though, she grinned at Chloe and spanked her playfully as she walked past, only to turn back and grab Chloe to dip her for a particularly showy and sloppy kiss. The groans outweighed the giggles with it, though Stacie and Cynthia Rose both clapped and wolf-whistled. Chloe happily accepted their high fives once Beca righted her to walk off and lead the way back downstairs.

The kiss might have been for fun and show, but it still ruffled Chloe’s feathers, and she suddenly regretted passing on Beca’s shower proposition.

Beca spoke to the limousine driver as he held the door for the stream of girls to pile back into the vehicle. Chloe plopped into an empty spot next to Stacie, and when Beca climbed in, everyone automatically shifted down to make room to let her sit next to Chloe.

They’d have done the same thing four years ago, she realized. They always had done things like that – getting up and playing musical chairs at a restaurant or at the movies or at a concert to allow one of them to sit or stand next to the other. If Beca was M.I.A., Chloe was the first one to be asked where she was. When Chloe was upset, Beca was the one sent to go up and check on her; that is, when she wasn’t already doing so.

Chloe’s heart fluttered at the thoughts. If she was anyone but herself and an immediate party to the scenario, she would have gone insane over the two idiots who were so clearly in love and too dense to do anything about it. She knew their friends had known; they knew before Chloe herself had even come to terms that her feelings for Beca were more than that of some type of extra special friend.

For the most part, they never made a fuss over it. No one asked them to move, they just moved like it was some unspoken rule. Just like they did again, now, the moment Beca stepped in. No words other than a “Slide down” or “Move over” if someone who needed to move wasn’t paying attention. At Barden, now and then someone would crack a joke about them being conjoined twins or Amy with her “Bhloe” or Stacie with talking about how they were yin and yang. It wasn’t that Chloe didn’t notice what was happening; she just couldn’t assign it to a specific thing at the time. It just was.
Of course, now she recognized what it was: the undeniable inevitability of the magnetism between them, that anyone that entered into that field of attraction between them was pushed out of it by sheer physics.

She laughed at herself, at the dramatics of her thoughts and Beca slung an arm around her shoulders so her fingers could play with the ends of Chloe's hair. “What's so funny?”

Chloe shook her head and leaned into Beca. “Nothing. Just reminiscing a little. This is going to be a really fun week.”

“That's the plan.” Beca squeezed her and hooked one of her feet around Chloe's. “So what is this Norah place famous for? What should I get?”

“Wait, wait, wait!” Aubrey said, voice loud enough to be heard over a table of eleven talking women. A tag-team pair of waiters was working on delivering drinks when a second pair arrived, each with a tray of glasses of champagne. “No one drink yet.”

Chloe was beside herself with excitement - the restaurant she’d been dying to try but unable to get a reservation (never thinking to try to see if Beca’s name carried any celebrity merit), holding the love of her life’s hand, surrounded by her best friends, the sunset visible through the glass doors turning the sky shades of pink and orange. It was a perfect night.

The last glass of champagne was handed to Aubrey as she stood. The rest of the girls quieted down and Chloe turned a little in her seat to be able to look up at Aubrey right next to her; she leaned back into Beca, who rested her free right hand on Chloe’s bare shoulder.

“Now,” Aubrey started, “we didn’t have the opportunity to toast your marriage when it happened, so I’m taking the opportunity tonight.” Chloe grinned up at her and she felt lips briefly graze the shell of her ear. “I was in the unique position of knowing this was coming -”

“Please, we all knew this was coming,” Stacie interrupted with a laugh.

Aubrey shut her up with a pointed look and continued. “I was in the unique position of knowing
this was coming, because Beca came to me, to ask what I thought about her wanting to propose to
Chloe. And, to be honest, my first reaction was that she was crazy, because they had only been
dating a few months.” Beca’s low chuckle in her ear gave Chloe butterflies. The other girls
laughed, too. “But, like Stacie said - we all knew this was coming. It’s been clear for years that you
two were meant to be together. And what Beca didn’t know, when we were talking about how she
might propose, or when or where or what kind of ring she should get, was that Chloe was talking to
me about much the same.”

Beca’s hand squeezed her shoulder. The girls at the table tittered.

“And it was arguably the most difficult thing I’ve ever had to do, to do my best to casually nudge
these two toward the path they both wanted to be on but were both too nervous to set out for -
again. And I don’t mean to make this all about me, but I’m pretty proud of myself.”

“Sure, Aubrey,” Beca laughed.

“But truly. Beca, I know we had our initial differences, but you’ve become almost like a sister to
me.


Aubrey laughed. “I’m truly so happy for you both.” She lifted her champagne glass and the rest of
the table followed suit. “To Mrs. and Mrs. Beale.”

Chloe and Beca had to unlink their hands to reach for their glasses, but Beca kept her hold on
Chloe’s shoulder, and that was good enough. They sipped along with everyone else.

“And happy birthday, Chloe,” Aubrey added as she took her seat.

Chloe started to shift back to sit properly squared to the table when Stacie, who was seated to
Aubrey’s right, stood up, taking her glass with her. “Okay, my turn,” she said.

“Aw, yay!” Chloe said with a clap. She heard Beca groan playfully behind her and lifted her hand
to hold Beca’s on her shoulder.
“So, you two are crazy hot together. I mean, I’d tap both of you.”

Chloe felt Beca’s forehead land against her back with a groan and she giggled.

“But you’re so perfect together that I’m pretty sure it would break some kind of law if either of you boned someone else -”

“Stacie, really?” Aubrey chided.

“Sorry. I just mean that I’m really happy for you guys. And that the sexual tension we deal with now isn’t that of unrequited pining, but that of impatience to get home so you can bone each other senseless.”

Chloe had to clap a hand over her mouth to mute the bark of laughter that escaped, and though she felt Beca shaking her head behind her, she felt Beca’s fingers walking up her back until they brushed back and forth a few times along the bare skin above the back of her dress.

“She’s right,” Beca said. “Can we hurry this up?”

Chloe spun in her seat, blushing and laughing, to see Beca blushing, too, but grinning. Happy with herself. “Baby!”

“See? They can’t keep their hands off each other,” Stacie said with what sounded like a shrug, because Chloe was still facing Beca, who leaned forward and kissed her. Making a point.

“Okay, let’s drink before one of them throws the other on this table and spills everything. To Beca and Chloe.”

Chloe pulled away, still laughing, to reach for her glass and turn to acknowledge Stacie as she took a sip of her champagne.

And so it continued, from Aubrey to Stacie to Emily (who didn’t get carded!) to Flo to Ashley, at which point everyone ran out of champagne to toast with and switched to the other drinks they’d ordered upon arrival, to Jessica to Lilly to Cynthia Rose to finish with Amy, situated at the head of
the table around the corner from Beca, each of them standing to toast their recent marriage and Chloe’s birthday with speeches full of inside jokes and inappropriate comments and shared memories that made more than a few tears slip down Chloe’s cheeks.

She was still dabbing at them with her napkin after Amy made her laugh so hard she couldn’t breathe when Beca slid her chair back and stood. “Okay, okay, I can’t have you all show me up, talking about how awesome Chloe is. I need to say something.”

“Oh, Bec -” Chloe started, tugging at her hand, feeling unable to bear any more emotions at the moment.

“I’ll be quick,” Beca answered, flashing a smile down at her. “So, Chloe, you’re pretty much the greatest thing that’s ever happened to me. I know for a fact that I wouldn’t be where I am today if it wasn’t for you. And I celebrate you every day in here,” she said, pointing at her heart which made everyone groan and made Chloe get choked up again, “but getting to celebrate how incredible a person you are, with the best friends I could ever hope to have - it’s so fucking cliche but I’m going to say it: I’m the luckiest girl in the whole damn world. Happy birthday, babe.” She leaned down, and Chloe was ready, and kissed Chloe while everyone else aww’d.

Chloe stole one more kiss and then stood, making Amy groan as she was reaching for an appetizer plate that had arrived at some point during the numerous speeches. “I’ll be even quicker,” she said. “I promise, Amy.”

“Proceed,” Amy said with a wave of her hand.

“Okay. I can’t begin to say how thankful I am that you’re all here. It’s like a dream come true. I love you all so much. And since this is a birthday-wedding hybrid thingy, I’m also going to say to you, Beca,” she turned a little so she could look down at her, “that you might be the luckiest girl in the world, but I’m pretty sure I could fight you for that title and win.”

“In your dreams, babe.”

Chloe laughed and ran her hand through Beca’s hair and cupped her cheek. “You’re right. You’re the girl of my dreams. I love you.” She sat down and kissed Beca and the rest of the table clapped.

“Time to get this food truck on the road to Stomachville,” Amy said with a cracking of her knuckles. “Waiter!”
Dinner fell into old habits - stories and laughing and teasing, catching up with one another beyond what was shared in Facebook status updates. Stacie shared a story about hooking up with one of the scientists she was advising in regards to a physics research project in the research lab.

Amy announced that she and Bumper were engaged to be engaged.

Emily shared that the quiet success of “Flashlight” had opened some doors for her, and she was talking to a record label. That got Beca’s attention, who requested a sidebar conversation at some point during her visit.

Aubrey dropped the bomb that she was studying for her LSAT’s to apply to law school and UCLA was her top choice, which spurred all kinds of conversation and an eventual admission that her boyfriend had encouraged her and that things were “pretty serious” which is why Perfectionist Posen was looking at UCLA instead of the Ivy Leagues.

And between revelations and laughter, over oysters on the half-shell and cocktails, the periodic tinging of knives tapping against glasses rang out, surely annoying the rest of the patrons but tickling Chloe to no end, as she leaned over each time to kiss her wife at the wedding reception she never thought she would have.
It might have been a Sunday night, but that didn’t stop eleven twenty-somethings from staking a sizable territorial claim on the dance floor of a West Hollywood club. In fact, it was the same club they’d taken Aubrey to on Halloween. And thanks to Beca’s guerilla marketing stunt with spinning Katy Perry’s lead single there and it going viral to give a massive amount of free advertising for the establishment, her name earned them bottle service.

The Bellas, plus one, poured themselves into the luxury SUV after last call, and at the very loud request of Amy, someone figured out how to get the crazy party lights going to accompany the thumping music Lilly cued up on the sound system.

The fact that it was an underage and heavily under-the-influence Emily who’d added a member to their group to make it an even dozen was the talk of the town, and it became a competition to see who could embarrass her the most. She unnecessarily sat in the lap of a guy apparently named Theo (there was still plenty of room for everyone to have their own seat) and alternately made out with him and fought off the hoots, hollers, comments, and whistles of everyone else.

Chloe loved it; she and Beca had been the target for elevated levels of teasing for years when alcohol was added into the mix, and now it was finally someone else’s turn. No one said a thing about the fact that she was basically in Beca’s lap, kissing her between jokes and laughter.

The limo stopped at the girls’ hotel first and Beca followed Emily and Theo out of the vehicle, leaving Chloe and Aubrey behind. It sounded like Beca was saying something about “protection” and “respect” and shouting something at Flo about checking on her, which received some type of Spanglish response from Flo and repeated protests from Emily. Chloe and Aubrey exchanged amused giggles.

“Hey, I’m back,” Beca said as she climbed in, losing her balance as she stooped inside the vehicle and opting to crawl along the length of it until she could pull herself up and plop next to Chloe as the limo began to move.

“You giving that boy the what-for?” Chloe asked, giggling as she half-wrapped herself around Beca.

“She is a child, Chloe,” Beca said seriously.
Aubrey tutted, and then laughed. “Says the girl who made a concerted effort to get her hammered.”

“Hey!” Beca said, holding up her index finger. “She is twenty-years-old.”

“I thought she was a child?” Aubrey laughed.

Beca scoffed. “Whatever. Just looking out for her.”

“Cutie,” Chloe purred, snuggling up to her more closely.

“Hey, what happened to Benji?” Beca asked conversationally, despite the fact that Chloe’s hand was halfway up her skirt.

“They broke up over Spring Break. She posted about it on Facebook,” Chloe answered with a tug to Beca’s earlobe. “Distance got to be too hard.”

“Tell me about it,” she heard Aubrey mumble. And then louder, “As if Beca keeps up with what we post on Facebook.”

Chloe glanced at her friend, who was mostly keeping her eyes on her phone; she knew she was busy texting her boyfriend, letting him know she was en route home. She was quick about it, fueled by vodka and hormones, and slid her hand the rest of the way up Beca’s thigh to graze over the warm, thin fabric between her legs.

Thus far, Beca had somewhat disregarded Chloe’s teasing; she allowed it, returned it, but in a way that was politely dismissive in the tone of ‘not here, not now, not yet.’ But that contact got Beca’s attention and she gasped loud enough to get Aubrey’s attention, too, and Chloe jerked her hand back. She immediately fell into a fit of giggles, made worse by the look of surprise on Beca’s face and Aubrey repeatedly asking what happened and what was so funny?

“Nothing,” Chloe said as she struggled to get her laughter under control.

“Yeah right, nothing,” Beca scoffed, shoving at her playfully until she caught Chloe by surprise by pulling her in with a hand behind her neck to kiss her hard, and long.
“Okay, you two, keep it in your pants until I’m out of the car, please.”

Beca pulled back and smiled at Chloe; Chloe knew she had to look flustered from the proud smirk Beca was giving her; Beca always did love turning the tables on her, and Chloe certainly didn’t mind.

“I’d apologize for it,” Beca said as she turned to sit more properly next to Chloe. “But that would mean I was sorry.”

Aubrey snorted a laugh. “Just don't let me see it.”

“Where's the Aubrey Posen I used to know? The one who'd have wolves rip out my vocal cords if she didn't like who I was banging?”

“You're bang- you're married to Chloe now. And I love her. And you. And I have no desire to rip out your vocal cords, Beca. I just don't want to see what you two get up to when no one’s watching.”

Chloe glanced at Beca, half-expecting her to make a comment about wanting to try it with someone watching (because honestly she wouldn't be surprised, what with Beca’s exhibitionist streak). But instead, Beca just glanced at her and winked, and Chloe's pretty sure Beca was thinking exactly what she thought she was.

“Fair enough. We’ll wait ‘til we drop you off,” Chloe said more to Beca than Aubrey.

“Gross,” Aubrey said under her breath and then leaned over to try to see out the tinted windows. “I think we’re almost there. You can get down to it soon.”

Beca draped her arm around Chloe's shoulders, letting her fingers dangle just above her cleavage. They brushed gently. “Sweet.”

“Yeah, sweet. Hey, remember what we said: no peeking in your bathroom,” Aubrey said with a stern pointing of her finger. “We’re coming over tomorrow and then all will be revealed.”
“So mysterious,” Beca said with a laugh as her fingertips tickled Chloe’s chest.

“What time do you want to come over?” Chloe asked as she felt the vehicle slow to a stop.

Aubrey slid herself along the super-long seat toward the door. “I think everyone’s going to need to sleep off tonight. Should we aim for 4:00?”

“I’m in meetings all day tomorrow -” Beca started, and then reclaimed her arm to dig her phone out of her pocket. “Shit. Shit!”

“What? What’s wrong?” Chloe asked, heart racing at Beca’s sudden outburst.

“Nothing. Sorry.” Beca touched her forearm briefly and then went back to her phone. “I wanted to talk to Legacy tonight and forgot. And now she’s busy screwing that dude and my life is going to suck.” She dropped her phone onto the seat next to her with a groan, and Chloe couldn’t help but chuckle, now that her pulse had slowed, at Beca’s increased dramatics thanks to Mr. Grey Goose.

“I...okay. Chloe, good luck with...all that,” Aubrey said, waving her hand in their direction as she moved toward the door held open by the driver. “Let’s plan for 4:00. Someone text me if we need to change the time. And um...I feel bad asking and I’m happy to pay for it, but -”

“No more limo. But we can do a couple SUVs. I have it covered. It’s the best way for you all to get around. Just talk to the driver about it, and I’ll make sure to call it in in the morning to authorize it.”

“Thanks, Beca,” Aubrey said warmly. “I hope tomorrow goes okay, whatever it is. And if we need to like, not come over because you need peace and quiet or whatever, it’s really okay.”

“No, it’s fine.” Beca pushed her hair out of her face and relaxed back against the seat again. “I can’t be home by 4:00, but don’t let that stop you.”

“Well, you need to be there for what we’re doing. So we won’t start without you.”
“Babe? You coming?”

Chloe and Beca both sat up at the unexpected male voice.

“Yeah, just a second!” Aubrey replied, glancing out the door.

“Oh my gosh, I haven’t seen him since that night you met him!” Chloe said, scrambling across the interior of the vehicle until she was almost following Aubrey out the door. “Except on Instagram. Hi Eric!” She waved at the man, who’d clearly just rolled out of bed, wearing boxers and flip-flops.

“Chloe, hey,” he said with a nod.

“Oh wow, nice,” Beca said over her shoulder. “He’s hot, Aubrey. Like, not just facewise; I already knew that. But also bodywise. He looks like he’s packing-”

“Okay! Goodnight, Beca.” Aubrey had taken control of the door away from the driver and had it half-closed. “Chloe, I’ll text you tomorrow.”

The door closed firmly, just shy of slamming in Chloe’s face, sending Beca and her backwards onto the floor of the vehicle laughing.

They were still dragging their alcohol-heavy selves back onto the seat that ran the length of the limousine when it rolled back into motion. It jostled Chloe sideways with the acceleration and she let herself move with it, into Beca.

“Oh, she giggled, leaning harder until Beca gave in and fell sideways onto the seat so Chloe could rearrange herself to lay down over her. The custom leather seating was generous both in width and softness, and it was not unlike perching in the same position on a couch. They fit, though whoever was on top needed to be wary of the edge.

“What’s up, Chlo?” Beca asked with a smirk, her hands already resting on the backs of Chloe’s thighs.
Chloe lowered her mouth to Beca’s ear and whispered, “What’s up? What’s up is that I’ve been waiting to get you alone all night.” She nipped Beca’s earlobe and moved her lips to her neck.

“Don’t take this as a complaint…” Beca’s voice skipped up an octave and Chloe smiled. “But I thought you were tired, and it’s way later now.”

Beca was right; she’d been exhausted earlier in the day, but she was positively buzzing now thanks to the fun and energy stirred up over the course of the evening. She shrugged and lifted her head, smiling at the flush visible in Beca’s cheeks. “I was. And now I’m not,” she answered simply and returned to her spot on Beca’s neck.

Beca sighed. “Good enough for me.” And then she moaned. It was far too soon for Beca to moan that way, in their more typical scenarios. But, Chloe realized, there they were, in a mostly-but-not-completely private setting in the back of a limousine, and she had been teasing Beca much of the night, plus the alcohol and...and Beca moaned again when Chloe flicked her tongue against Beca’s neck, her whole body tensing under Chloe.

Chloe smiled to herself. She couldn’t tell Beca, because she didn’t want her to think about it or focus on it. So she kept it to herself, the goal to finally do it - to finally get her off just with that hyper-erogenous spot that was apparently on fire tonight. She flicked it again and felt Beca jolt.

This was going to be easier than she thought.

Flicks turned to flickering and she felt Beca’s hands roaming aimlessly, grabbing and squeezing and sometimes pressing between Chloe’s legs from behind, the only access she had with Chloe lying atop her, straddling her leg, thighs pressing into one another, skirts pushed up and out of the way.

Chloe thought maybe she was cheating a little as she rolled her hips and pressed harder against Beca, now able to feel how aroused she was, and she shifted, just enough to keep Beca’s leg right where it was, but to move her own back to break that contact.

“What? No...Chlo…” Beca protested, pushing her hips up desperately.

Chloe shushed her and leaned on one elbow to free up her hand to move down Beca's chest, drifting over her blouse as she changed to circles against Beca’s neck.
The hands on Chloe’s back turned into talons and a choked “Fuck” filled the air around her and Chloe couldn’t help but smirk. It was brief, though, because if she was smirking that meant her lips were smirking instead of kissing and sucking between swirls of her tongue, and that wouldn’t do.

Beca was already writhing under her, breathing hot and heavy against her ear. She clung to Chloe like gravity wasn’t enough to keep her in place. All her movement, with her thigh still between Chloe’s, was threatening to break Chloe’s focus. It made Chloe moan, the friction and incessant thrusting. She didn’t have the strength to pull herself away from the contact, so she hammered her focus into Beca, into the delicate and sometimes rough caressing of her breasts through the frustrating barriers of Beca’s shirt and bra.

She focused on the broken cadence of Beca’s breathing, how it would come in quick, short bursts, and then she’d seem to stop breathing altogether for so long it almost made Chloe worry, and then she’d exhale or inhale with fervor only to do it again.

She focused on how good Beca smelled, the combination of her shampoo and conditioner, the moisturizer she worked into her neck and shoulders and arms every day (the same one Chloe used that Beca eventually adopted as her own), the spritz of perfume she must have put on near the end of the evening because it had barely faded, the touch of her natural self that was Chloe’s favorite undertone.

With just enough force to claim dominance, she pushed Beca’s chin up and away, letting her hand drift down to rest against her throat. Not only did she hear the groan that followed, she felt it rumble beneath her palm. She lifted her head for the briefest moment, just to have a chance to see how utterly gone and surrendered Beca was, and to admire the mottled patchwork that Beca’s neck had become. She spared a thought to the memory that Beca had business meetings all day tomorrow, but she’d help her cover them up with makeup, plus if she kept her hair down and over that shoulder it would be fine.

Beca’s eyes started to flutter open and Chloe knew she had indulged in her observation too long. She tucked herself close again. Determined. Tongue light and quick. She felt Beca’s hand slide up the back of her neck and into her hair, gripping, holding her there. She couldn’t feel Beca’s other hand anymore - it used to be on her back, then it bumped its way down the back of her arm and disappeared. She could only assume it was in Beca’s own hair, or over her face, or scrabbling for purchase on the leather seat and Chloe was grateful. She successfully blocked her own arousal’s demands for attention, and Beca relinquishing any type of control, any attempts to purposely make Chloe feel good, was a relief.

“Shhhhhhit shit shit…” Beca hissed.

Chloe hummed in response and tightened her grip on Beca, keeping her in place. Beca was holding
her breath again and Chloe could feel her incessant writhing growing less steady, starting to break down.

“Ba...what are...fu....”

Pride rushed through her veins. She was going to do it! She was going to accomplish this so long as nothing terrible happened like the vehicle swerving or the driver opening the door or ringing the phone to communicate something since the partition was long ago rolled up. It was going to happen.

She shifted just a quarter of an inch higher and Beca gasped so loudly Chloe worried her grip on Beca’s throat actually had been choking her and not just applying a touch of teasing pressure. But no. That wasn’t it.

The sounds spilling from Beca were attempts at words, she guessed. Broken versions of her name. Of ‘fuck.’ Of ‘oh my God.’ Of ‘baby.’

And then it was silent save for the sound of Chloe’s own heavy breathing, Beca rigid beneath her until a properly formed moan finally escaped and the missing hand was suddenly digging into Chloe’s back as Beca shuddered.

Chloe backed off, just grazing her lips along Beca’s neck, smiling a little as Beca’s ability to speak started returning by way of a string of groaned curses and finally, “Jesus fucking Christ, Chloe.”

She lifted her head to smile down at Beca. “Hmm?”

“Don’t be so smug,” Beca said, weakly pushing at Chloe who only laid heavier on her as a result.

Chloe only grinned wider. “Oh, I am going to be so smug. I just got you off without even touching you.”

“Yeah, fine, you got me off,” Beca said with a groan as she pushed harder. “Now get off me.”

She shook her head and rolled her hips, finally able to let herself fully take in the pleasure. “Not
yet.”

“No?”

“No,” she sighed and brought their mouths together to kiss Beca properly for the first time in what felt like ages. But she broke after a second to whisper, “I’m already close, just…”

Beca nodded and cut her off with another kiss and she felt hands come down to grab her and pull her hard over Beca’s thigh.

The arousal she’d been ignoring came roaring back and she was on the brink in an instant. She kissed Beca hard and let her hips rock with abandon, not caring that this was going to happen quickly. She needed it to.

It did come quickly, hitting her hard, forcing her body to roll in waves over Beca as she broke away from their kiss to get enough air in her lungs to replace what her moans were stealing.

She let herself sink into Beca, whose hands were roaming from the backs of her thighs up to her hair and down again.

“All better?” Beca asked.

Chloe could hear the teasing tone of the comment and wiggled, giving a little grunt of protest before lifting her head again. “You trying to get rid of me?”

“Never,” Beca said with a smile. “But babe, my left leg is completely asleep so if you could maybe just…”

Chloe laughed an apology and shifted her weight until it was apparent there was just not enough room for proper cuddling and she pushed herself upright, smooth her skirt under her once again as the SUV slowed to a stop. “Ooh, just in time!”

“Shit,” Beca muttered, shaking her leg and wincing as she fixed her skirt and blouse that Chloe had displaced. “You are not allowed to laugh at me when I fall on my ass trying to walk.”
Chloe leaned over and kissed her. “I absolutely do not promise.” The door opened. “Now go. I can’t wait to watch you try to walk drunk in heels with a dead leg.” She pushed at Beca and got the giggles as soon as Beca started scooting her way down the length of seat. She followed and had to wait as Beca climbed out of the limo as steadily as she could, but her leg gave out immediately. The driver caught her and she cursed, and Chloe lost it, erupting into full-on hysterical laughter.

“Shut it, woman!” Beca barked over her shoulder as she got her feet back under herself to start wobble-limping up the driveway.

“Let me help you up the stairs, baby!” she called ahead, and paused to thank the driver for everything before hurrying, wobbling a little herself, to catch up. She caught Beca around the waist and felt a hand grip her shoulder for extra balance.

“I said no laughing.”

In the thirty seconds between Beca stumbling out of the car, talking to the driver, and getting to her, she’d already forgotten in her still-loopy brain and the reminder made her burst into giggles again.

“You are sleeping on the couch.”

It only made Chloe laugh harder as they climbed the stairs. “I am doing no such thing.”

She unlocked the door and Beca abandoned her with a scoff of annoyance, only to trip on a pair of her own shoes by the door, try to catch herself with her still-numb leg, and end up on her ass. It happened so quickly and with such a commotion Chloe was actually too surprised to laugh.

“Don’t!” Beca pointed at her, scowling. “Don’t you fucking dare!”

Chloe snapped her jaw closed after it had fallen open at the ruckus. “Are you okay?” she finally dared.

“Yeah. Just...yeah.” Beca sighed and dragged one of her feet up within reach to start working on the buckled strap around her ankle.
Chloe locked the door and turned on the nearby lamp to crouch and help with Beca’s other heel. “You know, for someone whose wife gave her a super hot orgasm like five minutes ago, you’re awfully grumpy.” She set the shoe aside and moved to help with the first one, which Beca was still struggling with. And then she ran her fingers along the bottom of Beca’s bare foot, drawing a shriek of laughter out of the grumpy girl.

“Now you are definitely sleeping on the couch,” Beca finally managed once she’d scrambled backwards out of Chloe’s reach.

Chloe shook her head with a laugh and stood to step out of her own heels and scooped them up along with Beca’s, and the pair of Converse that had caused this mess in the first place. She started walking, stepping over Beca to start climbing the stairs to their bedroom. “Looks like you’re the one sleeping on the couch. If you can’t even take off your own shoes, how are you going to make it upstairs?”

“No, no,” Beca started, rolling over to make it onto her knees and then to her feet, and then Chloe was around the curve of the staircase and into the bedroom, but she heard Beca talking what sounded like trash.

She tucked their shoes away and slipped out of her dress as she listened to the uncharacteristically heavy steps thumping one by one, Beca’s voice louder as she climbed.

“You get back down there you...you meanie,” was what she said when she finally made it into the bedroom.

But Chloe was already in the bathroom, toothbrush in her mouth, makeup removed, hair tied back. She stepped out to make sure Beca didn’t stumble backwards down the stairs, but she was already a safe distance away, wrestling with the zipper on the side of her skirt.

“Baby, just...just hang on,” Chloe said, trying not to laugh. She went to the bathroom to finish brushing and rushed back to find Beca exactly where she was, still fighting with her skirt.

“I can’t,” Beca said with a dramatic huff as Chloe nudged her hands out of the way.

Chloe undid the hook at the top of the zipper that was probably the cause of Beca’s frustration and unzipped it to let it fall to the floor. She kept a hand on Beca’s waist as she stepped out of it, just in
“You’re naked,” Beca said, as though she’d just noticed.

“I am,” Chloe answered with a smile. “Let’s finish getting you naked, too.”

Beca nodded and held up her hands to let Chloe lift off her shirt. “Yes, please.”

“Honey…” Chloe bit her lip to not laugh and eased Beca’s arms back down to unbutton the blouse. It was not an over-the-header.

“Oh. Oops.” Beca watched her closely and managed to remove her own shirt once it was unbuttoned and reached for the back of her bra but Chloe was quicker; trying to unhook your own bra drunk could be quite the battle.

“No, leave them on,” she interrupted when Beca reached to push off her underwear. “Wait until you’re sitting down.”

“Right. Good idea,” Beca nodded and started for the bathroom.

Chloe watched her, and she was mostly successful, weaving only once. By the time Beca returned, Chloe was nearly asleep, and she heard her still grumbling something about the couch.

"Hush," she said, turning to slip her arm around Beca's waist and pull her close. "You want me right here and you know it."

"You're right, I do," Beca said with a sigh.
Brides-To-Be

Chapter Notes

Hi folks! Sorry for the lengthy delay in updating. I really hit a block.

“So, what do you think?”

Beca was trying her hardest to stay engaged in the conversation despite her lingering hangover from their impromptu-ish, belated bachelorette party. After all, the meeting she was sitting in was for her. At least Luke had been handling most of it. That was his job, after all. And now he was looking at her expectantly for an answer to the question he posed in front of five label reps.

“I don’t know,” she said, pushing her hair out of her face before quickly pulling it back over her shoulder, remembering the impressive yet professionally embarrassing trail of hickeys Chloe had left on her last night. “I really want to work with someone new. Create a sound instead of reinventing one.”

“I don’t know if it’s the right time to make a shift,” one of the suits said over folded arms. “We need guaranteed sales.”

Beca felt herself start to bristle and leaned close to Luke to whisper, “Can I speak to you in the hall?”

“What’s going on, Becky? Take the deal.”

Beca shook out her hands. “I don’t know. I want someone new.”

“We’ll work on finding someone new but you need to strike while the iron is hot. Take Tori Kelly; she’s still new enough, is she not?”
Beca shook her head. “No.”

“You have to take on one of the big artists here, Beca. They made an investment in you and they need returns.” Luke’s use of her actual name made her take pause. He was serious. “If you agree to it, the paycheck will be bigger than your first, and you’ll start gaining more clout to negotiate for what you do want. If not Tori, then Selena or Demi -”

“I am not working with Demi.”


“Did you forget why I hired you? Those dicks wanted to stage me having an affair with her for the press. If I produce her next record, they’ll just -”

“I won’t let them do that,” Luke said with earnest. “At least be open to meet with them before you shut it all down.”

“Fine,” she said with a sigh. “But I want my discovery. I’ll work on the records simultaneously if I have to.”

Luke laughed. “And what, you have some hot new artist sitting at home who can sing, dance, and write their own music?”

“Maybe.”

Beca's phone buzzed in her pocket for the better part of the afternoon. The few moments she could glance at it showed they were all manner of notifications - text messages, missed phone calls, even Snapchat notifications and she wasn't really sure how to check those, all of them from Chloe and the rest of the Bellas wanting to know when she would be home, that she's missing all the fun, Chloe saying not to worry, that she isn't missing all the fun because they're saving that for when Beca gets home.
She was indeed finally on her way home, sometime around 8:00. She needed to talk to Chloe about her meetings today.

That conversation would have to wait though, at least for now, she told herself as she pulled into her usual spot at the curb in front of their condo. She could hear the music from the sidewalk and though it made her smile, she wondered if they would be getting a visit from the police tonight as the result of a noise complaint.

At least she had Aubrey there who would jump at the chance to argue a point such as, “This is my best friend’s belated bridal shower and we are just a bunch of girls having some fun! A citation really isn't necessary. We’ll keep it down.”

Not that Beca knew for sure that's what this was going to be, but the gifts she didn't technically know existed were a pretty obvious hint.

The fact that the moment she walked through the door, Stacie lassoed her with a pink pageant-esque sash that read BRIDE-TO-BE on it, with the last two words crossed out with a thick black marker, confirmed her suspicions. There were Bellas everywhere, every one of them dressed up and Beca in her ripped up skinny jeans and plain heather gray v-neck tee. There was food laid out in the kitchen, trays of what looked like finger foods - vegetables, fruits, deli meats, cheeses, something that she hoped was more akin to tiny peanut butter sandwiches or sliders and not fancy cucumber sandwiches, because ew.

She spotted Chloe in the kitchen with Ashley, Jessica, and Aubrey, Chloe wearing a matching pink sash. They were engaged in an animated conversation, but the hoopla surrounding Beca’s arrival got their attention and Chloe’s face lit up when she saw her.

Beca was pretty sure she’d never get tired of that face.

“Baby, you’re home!” Chloe half-squealed as she weaved her way quickly through the rest of the girls until she had Beca wrapped up in her arms.

Beca hugged her back, letting herself get pushed backwards a step or two with the force of the less than graceful kiss thrust upon her. Its diminished lack of precision told her Chloe was probably two drinks in; she didn’t start slurring or getting clumsy until number five - depending on the strength of the alcohol, anyway. It was wine this evening, based on the taste left on Beca’s lips, so she had a ways to go.
“I am home! What's happening?”

“It's the bridal shower we never had!” Chloe said, one arm lifting in a cheer while the other stayed tucked around Beca's waist.

“And now that both brides are here,” Amy said, appearing out of seemingly nowhere, “we can make this shower rain!”

She grabbed Beca's hand and dragged her away. They didn't go far, just around the couch until she was deposited into one of two chairs placed in front of their television. Chloe dropped into the chair next to her a second later. Flo fiddled with the music that had been playing, switching from the upbeat dance music to some quieter, mellow electronica.

As if on cue, Lily, Emily, and Cynthia Rose started making trips to and from the guest bath carrying the gifts that had been so “well hidden.”

“Oh, so that's why we couldn’t use our bathroom,” Beca said, playing dumb as gifts were piled onto the coffee table in front of them.

“We totally, one hundred percent did not peek, not once!” Chloe said with a way too embellished tone of honesty, her attempt at lying foiled by the wine in her system.

Aubrey looked at Beca pointedly from her spot on the center couch cushion, and Beca held up her hands in defense, “You hid them in a room in our own house. What did you expect? You could have at least shoved them in the back of a closet or in a cabinet or somewhere less...frequented.”

“We didn’t want to go through all your things when you weren’t here, out of respect for your privacy.”

“Speak for yourself, sir,” Amy said between gulps from her wine glass, the presence of which seemed extremely out of character to be in Amy’s possession. She tended to have Solo cups affixed to her hand. “I went through everything in this place.”

Chloe laughed.
Beca rolled her eyes at the teasing. “That’s great. Thanks, Amy.”

“Found the strap-on, by the way. Kinky.”

Chloe laughed again.

Beca blushed. “Oh my God, I didn’t think you were serious!”

“I wasn’t, but holy shit!” Amy guffawed, literally slapping her knee as she claimed the last cushion on the couch.

“See? I told you,” Stacie said with a shrug to seemingly no one in particular as she folded herself onto the floor.

“Fuck both of you,” Beca grumbled through an embarrassed laugh.

“Don’t you mean, ‘Fuck Chloe’? Or are you the one bending over and taking it?”

“Stacie, Jesus!” Beca barked, fully embarrassed now. Like, sure, talk about sex, but in such specific detail about herself and with so many people participating? Yikes. She saw Chloe nodding in her peripheral vision and she covered her face with a hand; she not nearly drunk enough for this, and not a single person had shoved a drink in her hand despite being one of the two guests of honor. She raised her free hand and snapped and made grabby gestures, hoping someone who was still up would get the point.

“Yep, she does!” Chloe finally broke with a fit of giggles, making Beca groan and most of the room laugh. “But so do I.”

Emily made some sort of squeaking noise. Cynthia Rose snorted a laugh.

Aubrey winced. “I don’t want to know about your sex lives.”

Amy pointed at her. “Then you are at the wrong event, my friend.”
“Open mine first.” Stacie said, ignoring literally everyone’s reactions and tossing one of the two wrapped phallic shaped objects into Chloe’s lap, who caught it with a whoop and a laugh.

“Mine, too.” Amy said, following suit and whipping her matching gift at Beca, who narrowly escaped getting beamed in the face with it, thanks to her hand only having to turn from covering her face to catching it.

“Dude.” Beca wiggled the item in her hand comically. “I am not opening this until someone puts a drink in my hand.”

“Here, baby,” Chloe said, passing her glass to Beca before standing up to fetch a new one for herself, Stacie’s gift still firmly in her grasp. “You’re all fired for failing to hand the bride a drink at her bridal shower.”

“Seriously,” Beca said as she took a long sip, grateful but a tad disheartened by the fact that the glass was half-empty before it even got to her.

A chorus of apologies and excuses rattled about the room which Chloe dramatically ignored as she made her way back to her seat with a sigh and a new glass of wine, which she sipped from with raised eyebrows after asking from whom the gift in her hand was from again? She carefully set her glass down on the floor beneath her chair and slipped her finger under the seam, Beca watching her, wondering just how grotesque the thing was going to be.

Stacie seemed smug. “Amy tried to tell me you guys were too vanilla for it, but she doesn’t know Chloe like I do.”

Chloe winked at Stacie.

Amy reeled backwards as though she’d been slapped. “Chloe, I love you, but gingers are off-limits to me.”

Beca glanced back and forth between Chloe and Stacie, feeling like she missed something. “Wait, what? What are you talking about, Stace?”
“It’s nothing, baby, I’ll tell you later,” Chloe said with a placating touch to Beca’s knee before she finished ripping at the heavily taped paper to reveal a much too realistic, in Beca’s opinion, dildo. It made everyone laugh, and a hint of a blush touched the apples of Chloe’s cheeks as she laughed, too, and turned and said, “Whatcha think, Bec?” as she held it out toward Beca.

“But Beca’s so tiny and that’s...really not. She can take that?”

Beca’s focus jerked from the phallus thrusting toward her person to the commenter - her innocent Emily had betrayed her. Emily was blushing at her own statement, obviously emboldened by drink and friends, but grinned as she received a high-five from Stacie.

“You’d be surprised,” Chloe said matter-of-factly as she decided where to place her gift and settled on empty space on the floor between Beca’s and her chairs.

Beca didn’t like this bit of role reversal going on. It felt like Freshman Year all over again, with Chloe and the girls making suggestive comments just to get a rise out of Beca, back when sex made Beca squirm in embarrassment. It wasn’t that she was embarrassed now, though - more like muscle memory of being thrust into the center of attention surrounded by these same girls, drinking and laughing and being crass. She half expected a game of spin the bottle or truth or dare to break out any minute so someone could force Chloe and her to kiss.

“Oh my God,” was all the reaction she gave them, but it was enough, and they howled with laughter until someone, Lilly probably, whistled loud enough to break the moment.

“Shawshank’s turn,” Amy said, sitting back confidently. “Open it.”

Beca looked at the obvious wrapped dildo in her hand and sighed as she leaned to set her glass on the floor. She was less tedious about the unwrapping than Chloe had been.

“Oh, I wonder what it is!” Chloe said, still giggling.

“I wonder.” Beca ripped the paper off. It was nearly identical to the one Chloe had opened, though it clearly was one size larger. She rolled her eyes but smiled and laughter erupted again.

Amy was proud, making a comment about how maybe she and Chloe should trade since she and Stacie had assumed Beca would be too small for anything bigger than average and apparently they
were incorrect. Chloe was crying from laughing and Beca’s face hurt from smiling and finally the dildos were set aside in favor of further gift opening.

The results were a mixed bag.

Raunchy lingerie that included both edible and crotchless panties from Jessica and Ashley.

Practical but sensual massage oils from what Beca recognized as an upscale spa in Los Angeles from Aubrey (who insisted they were wonderful and flushed scarlet when pressed how she knew).

An expensive-looking rope-like necklace inlaid with silver that Flo explained was a tradition in Guatemalan weddings - it was a rope, not a necklace - used to symbolize unceasing unity, which she’d brought back after her recent trip home to clear up some Visa issues. The explanation made Beca tear up and Chloe full-on cry until Cynthia Rose commented not-so-quietly about the rope’s other possible uses in the bedroom.

A riding crop and engraved Zippo lighter from Lilly; no explanation was offered, and neither of them asked for one.

Tacky but cozy matching white velour hoodies with Mrs. Beale bedazzled across the backs of them from Emily.

From Cynthia Rose, a set of books that included a global travel guide to every country in the world, a cookbook designed for couples and cooking for two, and a copy of the Kama Sutra.

There were games, too, much to Chloe’s elation and Beca’s mostly false chagrin. They played a version of “The Newlywed Game” that Beca was relieved they did pretty well at.

An impromptu roast happened, its instigator (Aubrey) excusing it with the explanation that no one had a chance to give speeches at their reception - which had also been her explanation to the speeches at last night’s dinner, though tonight’s privacy would afford for more fun.

It started with semi-embarrassing stories that sometimes neither of them knew about the other, like how Chloe would call Aubrey almost every time Beca was on a date with Jesse, never explaining the reason for her call, only that she “needed a distraction” but Aubrey knowing full well from what. And Amy sharing the time she walked in and caught Beca “diddling herself,” Chloe’s name
not so subtly spilling from her lips before Amy made her presence known.

There was reminiscing, too, like Stacie bringing up Beca’s first time playing Seven Minutes in Heaven and how she basically had to drag them out of the literal closet; reminders of how the two of them almost let the Bellas implode and the crazy shenanigans that happened their Senior Year. Chloe, now on her fifth glass of wine by Beca’s estimate, self-roasted and confessed to maybe, technically but not quite having sex with Beca for the first time in the tent at the retreat, earning a particularly exuberant round of groans and fake retching. Beca, only on her second glass, refused to confirm or deny anything.

And so the evening went until sometime around 2:00am the group collectively decided it was time to head back to the hotel.

“Hey, Legacy, wait,” Beca said, weaving a little as she walked quickly to catch the girl around the wrist on her way out the door. “I want to talk to you about something.”

“But Beca, everyone’s leaving.” Emily pointed out the open door at the girls climbing into the waiting pair of black SUVs.

“Oh, ‘s okay. You can crash here tonight.” Beca started to close the door but then realized - “Hey guys, Legacy’s staying with us tonight!” she shouted, closing the door again without waiting for a response.

“I don’t want to impose on you.”

Beca shook her head and nudged Emily toward the couch. “Hey, Chlo?” She didn’t know where Chloe had disappeared to with the chaos that came with eleven drunk women saying their farewells. She also didn’t know if this was a conversation to be had when they were all three or more sheets to the wind, but her inebriated brain made it seem perfectly rational.

“What’s up!” rang back to her from behind the closed door of the guest bathroom, once again fully functional now that the gifts had been exorcised from it.

“Come out here when you’re finished?”
“Well I’m not going to stay in the bathroom all night,” came back to her, Chloe’s voice slurred and riddled with giggles.

Beca claimed the armchair and waited, smiling at Emily who was a weird mix of nervous-tense and relaxed-drunk as she sat on the couch bolt upright but smiling kind of dopily.

“Oh, yeah no, sorry - you guys can relax, I didn’t mean to be all like… ’Can we talk?’ But I do. Need to talk. To both of you.”

“Okay, okay,” Beca said, taking a breath. “So I was working late because I was in meetings and stuff all day, right?”
Chloe nodded.

“We’ve been uh, talking about my next project. And who I should work with?”

Chloe nodded again.

“Well. Lega-...Emily, I know you’re starting to talk to some A&R reps. And you know, I think we worked really well together.”

“We did,” Emily rushed, grinning. “I loved it.”

“I think it’d be pretty rad if we got to do it again. And if you’re down, the reps at Capitol are willing to meet with you.”

Beca glanced at Chloe, looking for a reaction. So far, it was just curiosity.

“You mean you - you want to make a record? With me? Like I’m your next project?”

“Yeah! I mean, if you want to. If the label likes you. If Luke can negotiate a good deal for me. It’s a lot of like...red tape, and this is Step Two of like, forty.”

She watched Emily process it, going from instant excitement to barely contained glee to a poor attempt at stoic professionalism and back to grinning elation. “That would be so awesome!”

Chloe finally broke her silence. “Wow, that’s...really cool. That’d be great for you, Em.”

Mutual drunkenness aside, Beca knew an upset Chloe when she heard one. “Don’t freak out yet, Chlo.”

Chloe bit a grin at her. “I’m not freaking out. Why would I freak out? We were only planning on -”
“Wait, pause,” Beca said, standing up and holding her hands out as though they could physically stop the words from coming from Chloe’s mouth. “Let’s go upstairs, hm?”

“I can call a cab you guys, it’s fine, really…” Emily had gone from elated to uncomfortable with Chloe’s reaction.

“No. Legacy? Stay. There’s a spare toothbrush in one of the drawers in the bathroom, and I’ll toss down something for you to sleep in. Blankets are there if you need one,” Beca finished, pointing at an ottoman that had a lid that popped off for storage. Her pointing hand moved to extend down to take one of Chloe’s and help her up. “Come on, let’s go talk.”

“What the hell, Beca?”

“Whoa, whoa, hey - I said don’t freak out.” Beca tried to grasp Chloe’s hands once they were standing in their bedroom, but Chloe yanked them out of reach.

“You tell me not to freak out when you spring it on me that you want to work with Emily for your next project? Beca, I love her, and I love you, but you know we had plans for...we were going to buy a house. But -”

“I know, babe.” Beca fought to keep her voice steady and not give in to the frustration she was feeling. She knew both their emotions were all over the place right now, and she again wondered why she chose to bring this topic up tonight. “And we will. I was so late getting home because I spent the better part of three hours talking them into A) being open to meet with Legacy and B) to let me work on two projects at the same time if they decide to sign her and it overlaps with whatever bigger project I take.” She paused, staring at Chloe with her eyes wide, eyebrows lifted, waiting for Chloe to catch up with what she was saying.

“So you,” Chloe started with a breath, pointing at Beca, one hand perched on her hip. She tilted her head and took another breath. “You aren’t going to work with Emily instead of a major artist?”

Beca shook her head, smiling. “Nope.”
“You’re going to work with Emily and a major artist?”

“Well. That’s the plan. They have to sign her first. I just wanted to oof!” She got knocked backwards a good three steps at Chloe lunging into her arms, hugging the breath right out of her lungs.

“I’m sorry,” Chloe said, voice tight with emotion. Beca really didn’t want Chloe to start crying, because then she would start crying and she was a messy drunk crier. “I was getting mad before I let you tell me what was going on.”

Beca opted for humor to both keep her own tears at bay and hopefully stop Chloe’s before they got going. “Your sugar mama’s got you, don’t worry.”

It worked, and Chloe laughed, pressing a kiss to Beca’s shoulder before pulling back to look at her. “That’s not what you are to me, you know.”

Beca smiled sincerely. “I know.”

“But I did get scared. I’m so excited to buy a house that’s ours and I thought we were going to have to wait.”

“Have to wait to what?” Beca asked teasingly, taking a step to force Chloe backward.

“To buy a house!”

“To have a baby?”

Chloe seemed to melt in her arms with a whine. “Yes! Oh, I want to have a baby with you so much!” She kissed Beca, still wine-sloppy but steady.

Beca laughed through the kiss, still walking forward until Chloe hit the edge of the bed and fell back onto it, taking Beca down with her. “Wanna pretend to make one tonight?”
“Beca…” Chloe started, biting her lip and staring at Beca’s before flicking her eyes up. “Emily’s downstairs.”

“Shit! I almost forgot.” She scrambled backwards off Chloe and rummaged through the combined T-shirt drawer to pull one out, along with a pair of Chloe’s pajama shorts and hurried back downstairs, almost missing the bottom step in her drunken haste. “Here, sorry,” she said, tossing the clothes at Emily who was stretched out on the couch with her phone in front of her face.

“Thanks! I found the toothbrush.”

“Good.” Beca hesitated for a second, and then shrugged, bending to swipe the two semi-matching floppy phalluses off the floor to take them back upstairs with her.

“Oh my God. Please, no,” Emily said with a horrified groan as she curled into a ball and shoved her face into the back of the couch.

“We’ll be quiet,” Beca said, enjoying the rise the implication got out of her younger friend. She paused for effect. “But if we’re not, my headphones are noise-canceling; they’re in my bag by the door. You break them, I get new ones out of your first advance.”

“I’m calling a cab,” Emily whined, but she was already sitting up and starting to undress to change into the pajamas.

There was a time in Beca’s life, many years ago, that she would have spun away in horror at a friend stripping in front of her, but it had become commonplace with the Bellas.

She did take her leave then, though. “Promise, we’ll try to keep it down. But you know. Drunk. New toys.”

“Stop!” Emily was already changed and back on the couch, one of the throw pillows yanked over her head.

Beca laughed and climbed the stairs, still smiling when she got to the top, and smiled wider when she saw Chloe sitting up in bed, obviously already washed up for sleep though her hair was still down. She was scrolling through something on her phone and set it aside when she noticed Beca’s return.
“Hey baby - ooh, you brought them!”

Beca glanced at the toys in her hand, and oddly amusing picture - two dicks, both alike in dignity…
“Yeah, I figured maybe why not? I mean, we have them. Probably should have run them through
the dishwasher first though.”

“Wash them in the sink. The soap’s antibacterial. I probably have condoms around here
somewhere…” Chloe busied herself digging through her nightstand.

Beca nodded and took them with her to deal with while she brushed her teeth and washed her face,
thoroughly amused by the handjobs she was giving the things by way of washing them. By the
time she reemerged, she was undressed, amused, and horny. Chloe was, thankfully, still awake and
put her phone away again at Beca’s return, next to a stack of foil squares. She laughed as Beca
flopped onto the bed and then climbed up and over Chloe to kneel astride her lap.

“Hang on, I wanna try something,” she said leaning away before Chloe could kiss her. She grasped
one of the toys firmly in her hand and held it over the nightstand and then slammed the concave
end of it down, jarring the stack of condoms to topple. Exactly like she’d hoped, it stuck to it like a
suction cup, standing freely when she let it go. “Ha!”

Chloe laughed and pulled Beca back to her with a hand on her cheek to bring her right into a kiss.
Beca wrapped her arms around Chloe’s neck, the other toy humorously almost knocking Chloe in
the face.

“Give me that,” she said with a laugh, yanking it from Beca’s hand to stick it to the nightstand next
to the other.

“That’s handy.” Beca grinned and then let herself fall heavily into Chloe to get her to scoot and lay
back. She let her hand wander along Chloe's side until it found the curve of a breast. She traced it
idly until Chloe shivered, and she broke out of their kiss to run her lips down to join her hand,
making Chloe arch up into her with a moan.

Beca glanced up and watched Chloe try to quiet herself, biting her lip, eyes closed tightly. “I told
her to use my headphones,” Beca said, accentuating her statement wth a nip of teeth to sensitive
flesh.
Chloe shook with laughter and ran her nails up Beca's back. “You're terrible.”

“Am not.”

“She lifted her head to smile down at Chloe. “Am not!” She felt hands on her shoulders, followed by incessant pressure and she relented, sliding down.

“Prove it.”
60 chapters! I can't even believe it.

Let's move things along, shall we?

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**September**

Chloe didn’t know where her summer went.

No, that’s not right.

Chloe knew exactly where her summer went: she’d up and gotten married.

She smiled to herself as she jotted thoughts in her journal, which she, admittedly, had done a pretty poor job at keeping up with; it had a smattering of entries since she started it some eight months ago when Beca gave it to her for Christmas and she’d decided she would propose.

The life she’d planned for herself, the life that, five years ago, she was so sure she would lead, had been obliterated by a 5’2” bundle of dynamite. In fact, right around this time five years ago, that bundle of dynamite walked into her life for the first time, a sassy, smirking thing that thought she was too cool for school and that Chloe’s passion was “pretty lame.”

Then they’d become best friends; well, Aubrey was *technically* her best friend, but she could have more than one, right? They won championships. They traveled all over the nation to perform. Plus Europe. Somewhere along the way they fell in love. They moved across the country, Chloe doing so on little more than a whim. They got married, went on a honeymoon. Had a bachelorette party and bridal shower in the wrong order.

This wasn’t the life Chloe had planned for herself, but as she glanced at the new photo she’d slipped into the picture frame on her desk - one she’d asked a passerby to take for them in Australia in front of a waterfall during their honeymoon that they spent three hours hiking to see - she knew
it was exactly the life she was supposed to lead.

She wound the strings on her journal to close it and tucked it back into the drawer of her teacher’s desk. She decided to bring it with her as she moved back into her classroom for the new year. It would give her something to do when she needed to take a break from stapling and taping laminated shapes and letters onto the walls or re-organizing her lending library and the kid-sized percussion instruments.

Anika Schmidt was back for the new school year, too, but they were friends now, and instead of going out of her way to sabotage Chloe’s classroom, she went out of her way to visit Chloe’s classroom to gossip about the other teachers who’d not been at the first day of orientation. They shared stories they heard about why so-and-so didn’t come back, or why someone had changed grade levels, or what they thought about the new hires.

Chloe had gone out of her way to introduce herself to every new elementary teacher; she knew what it was like to be the first-year, and she didn’t want anyone to feel as lost or overwhelmed as she had when she first started. It was funny; some of them knew who she was before she actually said her name. It was easy for her to forget she had a low level of fame as a result of Beca’s quick success. That made her feel special.

A few of them mentioned remembering seeing her name on the Teacher of the Year plaque in the front office. That made her feel even more special.

She’d noticed that first week back on campus that the cliques which were so well-defined last year had largely dismantled, and she couldn’t stop herself from taking pleasure in her own *Mean Girls* situation coming full circle, from Regina George trying to ruin her life, to breaking down her Army of Skanks, to becoming friends with her, and with that, the other cliques started to dissolve and merge.

It was nice.

They’d sat next to one another at the health insurance and benefits meeting, playing games of Hangman in Anika’s notebook to pass the time. But when the speaker brought up maternity leave, Chloe set her pen down and sat up to listen. She noticed Anika eye her suspiciously, and she offered a quick smile in return.

She knew it wouldn’t be this school year. Unless she got pregnant, like, tomorrow, she would not be needing maternity leave this year. And that wasn’t going to happen.
But it was still good to know how it worked - and it was exciting to think about. As soon as the insurance speaker moved on, her mind drifted. It had been six weeks since her brother got on board with their plan, and they hadn’t taken any other steps toward making it happen.

Chloe tried to not be disappointed, though patience had never been her forte. It was admittedly at breakneck speed that Beca and she had been moving, from friends to lovers to wives and two brand new careers in the span of a year. It wasn’t necessarily a bad thing to wait - wait for the timing to feel right, wait to work through all the details, wait until they had their new house. They were still young. They had all the time in the world if they needed to take it.

October

“If you’re calling me, it means you’re going to be late,” Chloe said with a sigh when she answered Beca’s call Tuesday evening. “Again.”

“Baby, I’m sorry.” Beca sounded tired. “But I’m almost there with this track. I want to finish it so we can move on tomorrow.”

“And tomorrow you’ll be home late. Again.” Chloe frowned at her own reflection in the window above the kitchen sink where she was rinsing her plate before setting it in the dishwasher. She didn’t want to be that kind of wife.

“Chloe -”

“No, I know,” she said with a sigh. “I don’t mean to guilt you about it. I just feel like I never see you.”

“You saw me this morning!”

Chloe hummed a noise of slight disagreement. She’d seen Beca for approximately forty-five minutes while they danced around each other in the bathroom getting ready for work. They’d provided truncated summaries of what was on tap for them that day. Estimates of when they’d be home. What they felt like having for dinner. (Which Beca didn’t come home for.)
“Am I only allowed to miss you if I haven’t seen you for a specific length of time?” she asked, letting her tone slide back toward teasing. She didn’t want to bicker. It was hard enough as it was with Beca’s crazy schedule.

“Yeah. It has to be less than an hour or you don’t really miss me.”

“It was less than an hour this morning, and I miss you.”

“Well I guess I am pretty awesome. I don’t blame you.”

Chloe chuckled and turned to lean against the kitchen counter. “Did you have a chance to look at the houses I sent you?” She asked it not expecting an affirmative answer.

“I like the one on Valley Oak I think? The one with the bedroom that opens to the balcony over the pool. That one.”

Chloe masked a squeak of surprise with a clearing of her throat. “Yeah, that’s Valley Oak. What about the one on Marmont?”

She bit her lip; the 3100 square-foot house above the Chateau Marmont that was basically all floor-to-ceiling windows and hardwood floors and an huge outdoor space with a pool and spa and a built-in barbecue and she’d fallen in love with it based solely on the online listing, knowing full well it was nearly double what their agreed upon budget was.

The Valley Oak house was nearly a thousand square feet bigger at half the price. Location, location, location! Plus, it had four bedrooms and five bathrooms versus three and three, and she knew Beca was waiting to mention that she’d want to turn one of the bedrooms into a studio. If they started with three and cannibalized one for a studio, they’d be left with a $2 million house with a master bedroom and a kid’s room - certainly no room for guests or, dare she think it, more children who would eventually want their own rooms.

“It’s a sexy fucking house, Chlo, but $4 million for a three-three? I mean, I’d be a lot more open to it if we were paying for more than location...”
“No, I know. You’re right.” She sighed, and then laughed. “I can’t believe we’re seriously looking at houses that cost millions of dollars. What the heck? Who are we?”

Beca laughed, too, and Chloe heard voices in the background getting louder, which meant Beca’s break was about to be finished. “It’s crazy, right? I like the stupid expensive one, too, though. We can look at them both if you want.”

Chloe didn’t mask her excited squeal that time. “We can? Okay I’ll ask the realtor to arrange viewings. Sundays are still your safe day?”

“Yes, I’ll do my best to keep them open for the next few weeks. Let me know when they’re scheduled?”

“Of course.”

“Cool. Listen, I’m sorry, babe, but everyone’s back from the dinner break. I gotta let you go.”

“Will you be home before I go to bed?” Chloe asked hopefully.

“I promise I’ll try. I love you.”

“I love you, too.” Chloe heard a chorus of saccharine cat-calls from Beca’s end of the line before it disconnected, and she smiled knowing Beca was getting a round of teasing from the group.

There were a lot of new people on this team that had been assembled to record Demi Lovato’s new album, and they clearly didn’t yet know that Beca didn’t take shit from anyone when it came to her relationship. Chloe had witnessed it first time last summer when people at Katy Perry’s beach house party teased them about their “healthy” sex life.

She wagered this new group would be put in their place in short order as well. She hadn’t met any of them yet, least of all Demi, as they were less than a month into the project and Chloe had been busy with beginning-of-the-year nonsense at school. She figured it was a matter of time. She was excited to meet them, she always was, to get to know the people in Beca’s life. She didn’t have any time off in October, but maybe she could do another lunch drop-off some Saturday; that had gone over well last time as an introduction-slash-ice breaker.
She shook her head as she reached to tap the spacebar on her computer and wake it up so she could email the listings to their realtor. “What even is my life?”

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**November**

“Okay, you’re right. I love it.”

Chloe took in the views of the city; she could see all the way to Catalina Island. The infinity pool was awesome and she wondered how many shots she’d need in her system to accept the inevitable challenge to jump off the bedroom’s balcony and into it. It was totally possible. If terrifying. And then she thought about how they were going to have to babyproof it all.

Beca sidled up next to her along the patio railing to look out at Los Angeles. “What would you think about converting the office into a recording studio someday?”

Chloe smiled and looked at her. “And here I thought it would be one of the bedrooms you wanted to renovate.”

“I thought about it, but you aren’t really an office-user, and I don’t need an office if I have a studio. And if I have my own studio, eventually, I can be working here instead of being gone all the damn time. And then we get to keep all four bedrooms as bedrooms. Ours, and a guest room, and the other two for…”

She saw a look wash over Beca’s features and Chloe bit her lip, letting her finish.

Beca blinked hard and cleared her throat. “For kids’ rooms.” She ran a hand through her hair. “Jesus, that just made it feel really real.”

Chloe bumped her with her hip and caught Beca’s fidgeting hand with her own. “Is every step along the way going to ‘make it feel really real’?” she teased. “You’re going to be holding your newborn son or daughter and say, ‘This makes it feel really real.’ Will it be real then?”
Beca shook her head and pushed a knuckle on her free hand under the edge of her sunglasses. She was crying, but trying to hide it, so Chloe didn't call her out on it. Instead, she leaned over and kissed her cheek, redirecting the focus of their conversation. “Do you want to put an offer on it?”

Beca nodded.

“Okay. I’m going to go in and talk to the agent. Come in when you’re ready?”

“Yeah, okay.” Beca’s voice was tight, as was the smile she flashed Chloe before turning away again.

She watched Beca from the living room that overlooked the pool area. She could tell she was crying and trying to pull herself together. It wasn't that Chloe didn’t want to wrap her up and assuage whatever she was feeling; of course she wanted to do that. But she knew how to read Beca, probably better than anyone, including Beca herself, and Beca wasn’t looking to fall into her arms and cry it out. She wanted to do it by herself, and Chloe gave her the space to do it.

She kept an eye on her while she talked next steps with their realtor - that they’d notify the seller’s agent, some unglamorous stuff about financing and whatnot.

“Hey, sorry, I had to take a call,” Beca said when she joined them. She left her sunglasses on as she slid into the chair next to Chloe.

Chloe reached for her hand and squeezed it. “It’s okay. We were just talking about the max we’d offer, so he can negotiate for us.”

Beca nodded. “Cool. What’s the asking price again?”


December

Chloe for Beca waited by the front door of their condo, who insisted on going through the kitchen cabinets one more time.
“I just have the feeling we’re going to miss something,” she said as she opened and closed doors.

“Do you have your passport?” Chloe teased.

“It’s in the dresser, and they moved the dresser, so yes I have my passport. Ass.”

Chloe laughed and kept waiting, using the time to appreciate her home of the past year and a half. The past month had been chaotic and exhausting - closing on the house, packing, arranging movers, transferring utilities, dealing with terminating the lease on the condo. Their hope had been that everything would come together over Chloe’s winter break, but things happened too quickly and she was dealing with everything and wrapping up the fall semester.

Beca tried her best to help, and Chloe knew that. She hadn’t been very physically present for thing like packing and running back and forth between the properties, but she’d taken on the responsibility of making the phone calls to set up the necessary meetings and whatnot. It let Chloe focus on getting the condo packed, not having to remember to call the cable company or the bank; Beca handled it and put it into their shared iCal and Chloe could work from that.

“I guess if we left anything, we can replace it,” Beca said, finally stopping her searching to join Chloe. “If it’s not sentimental, anyway.”

“Right.”

Beca slipped an arm around her waist and Chloe leaned into her, doing the same. “I guess that’s it then.”

Chloe turned to kiss her. “Is it getting really real?”

“Funny,” Beca deadpanned, but the corner of her mouth twitched in a suppressed smile. “But yeah. It is. This was our first home.”

“The Bellas’ house doesn’t count?”
“No, and you know it doesn’t,” Beca said with a shake of her head and a squeeze of Chloe’s waist.

Chloe nodded. “You’re right. We made a lot of memories here.”

“Yeah we did.”

“Remember when you threw up outside before your first interview with Capitol?”

Beca groaned and tried to shove her away but Chloe’s hold on her didn’t allow it. “That’s the memory you chose to bring up right now?”

“I’m sorry. I’m trying to be funny so I don’t start crying.” She bit her lip and tried not to look at Beca, though she could feel her eyes on her.

“Ah, the patented Mitchell Method of Emotional Avoidance.” Beca shifted to face Chloe, both arms around her waist now. “Remember when you carried me over the threshold after our wedding?”

“That’s a better memory,” Chloe said with a quiet laugh, and she felt the sting in her eyes.

“Or last Christmas when we both thought the other was giving us an engagement ring.”

Chloe nodded and let her forehead rest against Beca’s.

“The scavenger hunt you set up for me in here for Valentine’s.”

Chloe smiled and thought of the bass clef tattooed on her wrist. It was a reminder to keep tempo, to move at the pace that felt right. This change felt right.

“And the times we christened literally every room in this place.” Beca was smirking, but Chloe still had to reach up and brush a tear away from her cheek.
“And just think how many more rooms the new house has that we get to christen,” Chloe said before leaning in to kiss Beca, lingering long enough for Beca to get impatient and deepen it.

She didn’t know how long they stood there, holding each other, kissing slowly. Long enough, she figured, until they were both ready to let go of where they’d laid the foundation for this version of their life together. Until they were ready to start the next stage of their life.

“Ready?” Beca asked when they parted.

Chloe nodded. “Let’s go.”

“Wait.”

Chloe almost ran into Beca, who decided to come to an unexpected stop at the top of the four super-wide stone steps that led to the front door of their new Hollywood Hills house. “Whoa!”

“Get on.” Beca pointed over her shoulder.

“What?”

“Get on. You carried me over the threshold of the last place. Let me carry you over this one. But I have zero arm strength, so we are doing it piggyback.”

Chloe laughed but put her hands on Beca’s shoulders. “You’re silly. You sure?”

“If I can lift you up to pin you against a wall, I can do this.”

Chloe felt her face warm at the off-the-cuff sexy comment and gave her shoulders a squeeze. “You’re really good at that,” she whispered, nipping the edge of Beca’s ear to make her shiver.
“Then let’s get this show on the road. On the count of three…”

“On three or after three?” Chloe teased.

Beca laughed and Chloe felt her adjust her stance a little. “C’mon. One, two…”

“Three!” Chloe said with a hop. Beca hooked her arms under Chloe’s knees and caught her, leaning forward a little to balance. They both laughed as Beca got situated, and Chloe tapped one of her heels against Beca’s thigh. “Giddyup.”

Beca took a staggered step forward and punched the combination into the keyboard lock on the front door to swing it open and step through. “Honey, I’m home!” she called into the cavernous house, all sharp angles and white walls and floor-to-ceiling windows instead of standard ones.

Chloe giggled and dropped off Beca’s back to hug her from behind as she nudged the door closed with her foot. She heard the mechanical click of it automatically locking and shuffled along with Beca as she moved the few feet to the alarm panel, typing in another code to deactivate the security system.

She reached to activate one of the many touchscreens inlaid into the walls of the house, offering controls of everything from lighting to thermostat to music, but Chloe reached over her shoulder to intercept.

“Which room first?” She rocked her hips against Beca’s backside, not bothering to be subtle. Unlike their first first night in a new home together, this house was already furnished; no waiting for a bed to be delivered or furniture to be assembled.

Beca’s hand that was raised for the touchpad slapped against the wall for support as she sagged forward. “How about here?”

“Impatient?” Chloe let her hands wander a little, the left over Beca’s stomach, the right tickling along her neck. “We should save this spot for when we barely make it through the door without ripping each other’s clothes off. Because that’s just a matter of time.”

She could hear the gears turning in Beca’s mind, and then they were walking, an awkward syncopated shuffle since Chloe didn’t relinquish her hold on Beca’s waist. Beca led them through
the living room toward the massive new white couch that had been delivered a few days ago.

Beca twirled Chloe off her with a surprisingly smooth dance-like move and Chloe found herself deposited on it.

“And here I thought we’d end up in the pool,” she teased, smiling up at Beca.

“It is 50º outside, dude. If you want to get in that pool, be my guest. I’ll be here when you get back.”

Chloe shook her head and reached for Beca, who was already, albeit slowly, unbuttoning her own shirt. “If we’re getting wet anywhere tonight, it’s here.” She deftly slipped her hand between Beca’s legs to press against her through her jeans.

A quiet sound of surprise escaped Beca and her fingers worked on the buttons a little more quickly until Beca pulled it off her arms with gusto, and then Beca was in Chloe’s lap, straddling her on her knees, kissing.

“Why didn’t you take your jeans off first?” Chloe said between kisses, immediately frustrated with the limited access she had.

“Felt like making you work for it.” Beca kissed her again and ran her hands down from Chloe’s shoulders to her chest, not pausing along the way, just moving right under the hem of her sweater to push her hands back up to cover her breasts and squeeze.

Chloe sighed into their kiss and reached to grab Beca’s ass and pull her closer. “Since when do I have to work for it?”

“Since I forgot to take off my jeans first.”

Chloe laughed and broke their kiss. She gave Beca’s rear a few quick slaps and pushed her back off her lap and immediately reached to undo Beca’s jeans and tug them down her hips. “Uh uh,” she asked when Beca tried to reclaim her spot. “Me, too.” She made to take off her sweater and watched Beca lean down to unbutton her jeans and push her hands into them to hold Chloe’s hips.
“Can’t take them off if you’re sitting on them.”

Chloe tossed her sweater aside and laid back, tilting her hips. “If you’d be so kind?”

“It would be my honor, milady.” Beca tugged on Chloe’s jeans until they were on the floor and forgotten.

She sat back up. “You’ve been watching too much ‘Game of Thrones.’”

Beca reclaimed her spot, perched astride Chloe’s lap. “The lady doth protest too much, methinks.”

Chloe slid her hands up Beca’s back until she could twist the hooks of her bra to pull it away. “I’ll keep protesting if it means you keep talking to me like I’m royalty.”

Beca seemed to think for a second, and then a soft smile touched her lips. “Well you are my queen, and this is your castle, which I...hath stormed and captured for you. My queen.”

It was silly, but it sent a thrill through Chloe anyway. “You’re too smooth for your own good.” She sent her hands to Beca’s bare chest, squeezing to give her a thrill of her own. “Castle Beale?”

“House Beale,” Beca corrected.

“You’re such a nerd,” Chloe teased with a whisper and sat forward to recapture Beca’s lips. It was fun to be playful, but she was past the need for foreplay now.

She let Beca take the lead after she made her point with a particularly firm tug of Beca’s lower lip and she shivered when Beca’s kisses traveled to her neck. Hands worked deftly behind Chloe’s back and she felt her bra come down a moment later.

Beca leaned forward and Chloe moved with her, letting Beca lay her back on the plush couch and settle over her, thigh coming to rest in just the right place to make Chloe moan. She pitched her hips up to slide over it and Beca responded, pressing harder as she leaned over Chloe, supporting herself on an elbow as she twisted to keep her thigh firmly in place and move her kisses lower, until Chloe’s back arched at the tongue bathing the tip of her breast with wet heat.
“Bec...God...” she groaned, twisting her fingers into Beca’s hair to keep her mouth firmly in place on her nipple.

Beca hummed a response and changed what she was doing, teeth making light, brief appearances as she rocked her hips and thigh harder into Chloe.

Chloe couldn’t decide what to do with her free hand. She wanted it on Beca, that much she knew. But her reach was limited, Beca’s position over her blocking most of the access points to her body. Her focus was also slipping with every thrust of Beca’s hips and she didn’t notice that Beca’s own free hand had moved between them - specifically, between Chloe’s legs, fingers easily slipping up and in.

She gave up trying to get her hands on Beca and let them land wherever - one on the couch by her head, the other on Beca’s shoulder. Beca’s mouth shifted its attention to her other breast and she arched again, and lifted her hips, and the heel of Beca’s hand pressed hard against her to rub with every thrust of her hips.

“Baby...” she said with a moan, wanting Beca’s attention a different way.

“Hmm?” She didn’t stop. Or even glance up.

“Kiss me.”

Beca moved in a flash to kiss her. Hot. Deep. Chloe moaned into the kiss, feeling that warm prickling sensation growing quickly. A sharp tug on her hair jerked them apart as she was pulled to the side, Beca’s lips planting themselves on her neck.

She gasped at the sudden, sharp pain and felt herself get that much closer. She knew she’d have a hickey to deal with in the morning, the way Beca was pulling at her flesh, but she didn’t care. It felt too good to worry about it right now.

Her body rolled with Beca’s and she hooked her leg around Beca’s waist, pulling her closer and she caught Beca by the hair, returning the favor to yank her firmly off her neck. “I said kiss me.”
There was a new touch of fire in Beca’s eyes when they flashed open briefly, and Chloe had a fleeting thought that she lacked anything to brace herself against because she was sure she was about to need it.

Beca did kiss her, tongue licking and twisting deliciously over Chloe’s as she picked up her pace considerably. And her force.

Chloe tried to swear but Beca truly obeyed her command the second time and she scarcely had time to take a breath, let alone say anything. Instead she dug her nails into Beca’s back and moaned - loudly - again and again until she was pushed over the edge.

Beca finally gave her a chance to breathe then, backing off just enough, though their lips still caught depending on who moved how and when. Chloe was breathing hard, and so was Beca. Her hands slipped where they’d been holding onto Beca, skin warm and slick from her efforts and she ran them down her back and up again to make Beca shiver.

“Mmm, baby,” she said, smiling up at a red-faced Beca. “Wow.”

“Yeah?” Beca said, still working on catching her breath. She shifted a little off Chloe, and while their new couch was wider than average, she couldn’t go too far and settled on her side next to Chloe, hand still tucked in place, leg lazily draped over Chloe’s.

“Mhm.” Chloe rolled a little to reconnect their lips, kissing Beca slowly. She knew Beca was worked up and she didn’t want to let the heat die, so she teased Beca’s tongue with her own, drawing it out and chasing it back until Beca sealed her lips over Chloe’s with an impatient groan. The hand between her legs was thinking about starting something up again and Chloe gave it too long to make up its mind and suddenly she was moaning again.

She couldn’t be totally selfish though, even if Beca was in a giving mood, and their new position let her get her hand where she wanted it, and she groaned at the wetness she found there. The angle was off, opposite what she was used to, but she could make it work.

Beca’s moan was one of desperate relief and she felt her shift to prop her foot against the couch and lift her knee, opening herself to Chloe’s touch.

Chloe had to break the kiss again; it was too hard, too hot, too everything, with the mutual touching to also maintain any level of organized kiss, and they settled on simply lying together, driving each
other closer and higher by the minute.

“I’m so close,” drifted from Beca’s lips.

Chloe worked her fingers quicker and watched Beca’s face, that eye-twitch that would have told her she was close even if she hadn’t said something. Beca’s own pace was faltering, but Chloe didn’t need it - she was struggling to stave off her own second climax to wait for Beca.

“Me, too, baby.” She watched Beca’s jaw clench and then drop. Heard her breathing stutter. “Come with me?”

Beca barely managed to nod before she was gone, hips jerking as she rolled closer to Chloe, legs clamping down on her hand. She felt teeth on her shoulder and the muffled sound of Beca crying out with every pulse that shook her and Chloe followed, echoing her moans until they were both still and quiet, save for the heaving recovering breaths.

“Fuuuuck me,” Beca said with a groan when she finally lifted her head and rolled back a little from Chloe again.

“Again?” Chloe teased and reached a little further to sneak inside her mostly unsuspecting wife. “Because that could be arranged.”

“I didn’t mean…” Beca shook her head, her intent to dismiss Chloe’s suggestiveness, but Chloe curled her fingers just right and Beca’s whole body jumped, and then she was biting down on a moan to try to stop it.

“I’ll take that as a, ‘Yes, please,’” she said with a smile and took a second to work herself onto her side so Beca could finally lay down properly.

Beca nodded as she flipped onto her back, and Chloe anchored her with a knee over Beca’s. Chloe was slow this time, the first being a sudden, mad dash to the finish, but now Beca was already halfway through a marathon and Chloe was going to take her there slowly and steadily. Beca was incredibly turned on - that much was obvious. She could feel it, and it was easy to find that spot that nearly made Beca leap off the couch.

Which is why she anchored her as she found it, and massaged it, until Beca was almost in tears
from being so close, with so much pleasure flooding her. Chloe took mercy on her then and sped up, and Beca came so hard Chloe was worried for a second she was going to hyperventilate.

“Jesus fucking...Christ!” Beca finally said with a sob when the brunt of it had passed.

Chloe smiled down at her, watching her come back to her senses bit by bit. “Good?”

Beca groaned in response and Chloe laughed, leaning down to peck her lips.


Beca, still a bit out of sorts, finally looked up at Chloe. “I love you, too.”

“Christened?”

“ Fucking blessed by the Pope, dude.”
Pancakes

January 2017

“Do it again, but better.”

Chloe smiled to herself. She was at the recording studio with Beca on a Saturday afternoon; she’d brought lunch, as was now her icebreaker tradition like she’d done for the Katy Perry record and the Demi Lovato record (which wasn't yet complete).

She didn't really have to do it for this record. She didn't have some big celebrity to try to win over as the producer’s wife.

“What exactly do you mean by ‘better’?” Emily asked from the booth. It was the fourth time Beca's asked her to sing the chorus, the first three times being met with a shake of Beca’s head.

Chloe itched to get up and punch the button to tell Emily she should riff the third syllable because she knew that's what Beca was wanting to hear. Beca had a habit, though, at least thus far with Emily, of letting the girl experiment and play around with her voice as a way of learning and growing musically.

“You’ll get it, Legacy. You're doing great. Just do it better.”

Chloe could see Beca's reflection in the window of the recording booth, and though Beca's face was all business, her eyes were light and Emily nodded in response and waited for Beca to cue the track again.

Chloe loved this - being an observer to Beca's work. Beca was so confident now, having no trouble commanding the room whether it was one superstar at the mic or a roomful of musicians who all thought they were the hottest shit, or someone as green as Emily. Chloe brought a pile of her students’ assignments along to grade, as was also tradition, and sat on the couch behind Beca, listening to her quietly control every aspect of every sound.

Originally, she hadn't planned on accompanying Beca. She had plenty to do with grading and preparing lesson plans, but she was nervous. And when Beca seemed to intentionally delay her own exit that morning for the studio, Chloe just threw her paperwork into a shopping bag and
grabbed her purse, took Beca’s hand, and led her out of the house and down to the garage to Beca’s
car.

They had an appointment at 4:15, and Chloe’s stomach was in knots despite the peace Beca’s
presence brought.

It had taken months, but one day in December, Chloe’s phone pinged that Beca had updated their
iCal. The newly added item simply read, “Fert clinic.”

They hadn’t really discussed it in weeks prior to that; Beca was swamped balancing two records.
Chloe had her hands full with her students, plus she volunteered to run the elementary’s jazz dance
club which had turned into a lot more responsibility than she had anticipated. She had no issue
choreographing a weekly routine - seven years of the Bellas was more than enough experience to
ready her for doing it for a group of adolescents - but the record-keeping was a time-sucking
nightmare.

But they had found time to spend hours upon hours of Googling, come up with a list of three
doctors that had long lists of same-sex couples as patients. It was stressful enough in general; they
didn’t need to add in the potential for a judgmental specialist. And last month, the appointment
with one of those three popped up on Chloe’s calendar.

Just like that.

Beca had taken the first real step - making the decision and asking Chloe’s brother notwithstanding
- toward starting their family.

And now that first appointment with the first doctor was here. They’d be packing up to leave the
studio in less than an hour, and Chloe’s stomach was already roiling with nerves, and she was so
happy she had decided to come in with Beca today. She would have been bouncing off the walls
alone at home.

Instead, she watched Beca use both hands to move an array of sliders higher on the massive board
in front of her and let the motion calm her enough to resume her own work.

“Hey, Legacy, we gotta cut it short today.”
Chloe looked up, startled by Beca’s voice, which had been replaced by Emily’s singing for most of the last hour. Beca was punching buttons, looking at computer screens, disconnecting computer equipment to put in the custom rolling suitcase that had entered Beca’s daily “take to work inventory” a few months ago when she got some fancy new toys of her own.

“I thought we were going ‘til 5:00?”

“You can stay if you want; we have the studio. But Chloe and I have a thing.”

That made Chloe realize the time, and that it was time to leave. She packed up her things with nervous hands and she knew she would have to sort all the papers she just shoved back into her bag later tonight, but she couldn’t find it in her to care at the moment.

“Ready?” Beca asked once she’d finished her pack-up.

“Is that a trick question?” Chloe laughed nervously and reached for Beca's hand, needing connection.

“Not a trick question.” Beca squeezed her hand. “I'm nervous, too. But this is just a consultation, right? Nothing is happening today. We’re just talking.”

“I don't know if I'm more excited or nervous.”

“It's okay to be both, yeah?” Beca gave her hand a tug to get Chloe's feet moving and suddenly they were in Beca's car and on the freeway, speeding toward the next first step.

“Dr. Merriweather was a pleasant woman, in her 50s by Chloe's assertion. A young 50, though - the crow’s feet at the corners of her eyes and prominent smile lines moved her out of her 40s. Or maybe she was a cheerful 40s who laughed a lot and her face reflected that. She sat behind a super-modern, simple glass desk adorned with naught more than an iMac, a telephone, and a few files. There was no wall of medical books, no posters or plastic models of female anatomy or racks of
pamphlets. It was the antithesis of what Chloe had always imagined a fertility doctor’s office to be.

But she knew the files sitting on top of the small stack were theirs, filled with the paperwork they had filled out online in advance, and even more paperwork that they completed in the waiting room. Dr. Merriweather had entered carrying them, and if Chloe squinted a little, she could make out her name on the label of the file on top. She fiddled with her necklace, a diamond-encrusted white gold infinity symbol she received from Beca for Christmas. Beca was wearing the Hermès Apple Watch Chloe had given her.

She felt Beca take up her hand and answer, “We’d like to start a family.”

The doctor smiled warmly and nodded. “Then you've come to the right place! Why don't you tell me about yourselves?”

It was Beca who started talking first, squeezing Chloe’s hand. “Well, I'm Beca. And we got married last Spring. And we want a kid. Or kids. To be determined I guess. And we know this can be really hard and take a long time. So we wanted to start sooner rather than later.”

“Well, Beca, you are right. It can be a time-consuming, emotional process no matter the route a same-sex couple decides to take to having children. Why have you decided to try in vitro fertilization?”

“We’d like it - the child - to carry our genes, you know. If we can do it that way.”

“And what is your ideal scenario?”

Chloe was grateful Beca was handling this so far. She was so nervous she thought she might be sick if she opened her mouth. Which she didn’t expect - in her mind, anticipating this moment, she thought it would be Beca trying to run and hide.

“Well, I don't really want to be pregnant. But Chloe does. And I don't have a brother to be a...a donor. But Chloe does. So we thought if we used my eggs and Chloe's brother’s...stuff, and then she could carry...”

“That would certainly tick all the boxes, wouldn’t it?” Dr. Merriweather said with a smile. Chloe sensed a ‘but’ coming. “I’m not trying to change your mind, but IVF is a very invasive process.
Many lesbian couples choose a version of natural conception - the turkey baster method, if you will.”

“No, we know that,” Beca said, shifting in her seat. “But I don’t have a brother and we don’t want an anonymous donor -”

“Close male friends?”

Chloe’s mind was still spinning, but Jesse’s face popped into her imagination at the question and she snapped out of her daze. “No, we really want to combine ourselves, best we can.”

“Welcome to the conversation,” Beca teased out the corner of her mouth, and Chloe shushed her in response.

Dr. Merriweather smiled at Chloe speaking up. “Then we will see what we can do to accomplish that! Chloe, have you already spoken to your brother about being your donor?”

“We have, yes,” she said, nodding quickly. “He agreed.”

“That’s great. We’ll get into more detail about things if you’d like to continue moving forward, but to be brief - we’ll need to conduct a few tests on both of you, the standard blood work, as well as fertility tests, physical examinations, et cetera. Beca, as the donor, you will need to undergo hormone treatments. There will be side-effects, as with any treatment, but we’ll work together to manage them. I won’t sugarcoat it: the egg harvesting process is not fun. But you will be sedated for it, and you’ll have pain meds to help. We’ll have already collected your donor sperm by that point, and they’ll be placed together for fertilization. A few days later, we’ll implant the most viable embryos into Chloe - that process is not painful - and hope for the best!”

Chloe knew how it all worked, but hearing a fertility doctor rattle it off, in relation to them, using their names...now she understood Beca and her “it feels really real” moments.

“With implanting multiple embryos, I have to advise you on the possibility that more than one may attach and develop, resulting in fraternal twins, or even triplets. We prefer to transfer more than one embryo because the success rate is higher. We also want to minimize the treatments on Beca as much as we can, and to do that, we either need to really make a go of it, or freeze the embryos, which is less successful.”
“...Triplets?” Beca said hesitantly, glancing at Chloe.

Chloe understood her tone. One baby was scary enough - the thought of ending up with *three* was...a lot more scary.

“The results of the tests we run will help guide us. You’re both still very young, which is beneficial.”

“Right,” Chloe said with a deep breath.

The drive home from the clinic was a quiet one, the radio’s volume so low the music was barely audible. Chloe was sure she was developing an ulcer; they’d spent nearly three hours with Dr. Merriweather, asking and answering questions and while she left feeling far more educated about the process, her anxiety about it all had approximately quadrupled.

“Shit, this is really real,” Beca mumbled as she switched lanes.

If it hadn’t been for the suffocating level of stress, Beca’s comment wouldn’t have been as hilarious as Chloe found it, but since she was drowning in stress, Chloe burst out laughing at Beca’s statement.

“What?” Beca asked, jumping so much from the outburst that the car swerved a little. “What’s so funny?” Chloe’s mystery laughter was contagious, though, and Beca was already starting to giggle when she asked the question. “It’s really real?” Beca guessed.

All Chloe could do was nod her head, she was laughing so hard. She waved her hand, a non-specific gesture toward Beca that was meant to indicate that *she* was what was so funny, but she was laughing too hard to be clear about it. She felt tears on her cheeks, laughter and stress release combined, and then Beca was laughing full-out as well.

They laughed, Chloe either doubled over or head thrown back against her seat, until Beca complained that her abs were sore and that she was having trouble seeing the road, and it was with slow, deep breaths and the cranking of the stereo volume so they could sing along to Sia that they got themselves under control and let off the rest of their stress through song.
By the time they got home, the giddiness had passed and emotional exhaustion had set in, and they were both slow in making their way into the house from the garage.

“I’m going to make dinner,” Beca said the second they were through the front door. “What do you want?”

Chloe was thrilled; their afternoon appointment had lasted well through her usual dinnertime and now that it wasn’t tied into a pretzel, her stomach was demanding sustenance. “Oh my gosh - I don’t care. Food,” she said dramatically, draping herself over Beca from behind to hug her and kiss her cheek. “Whatever it is, bring it to me in bed.”

Beca laughed and departed for the kitchen as Chloe made her way upstairs. The open layout of the house allowed for her journey to overlook the cooking and dining area and she saw Beca looking up at her in front of an open refrigerator.

“You’re not pregnant yet, you know,” Beca called up to her. “Don’t start abusing my kindness to bring your meals up to you in bed or I’ll be over it before it starts.”

“Think of this as much-needed practice. Your clumsy butt needs to get used to walking up and down those stairs carrying stuff.” She poked out her tongue for good measure and went on her way, hearing Beca mouthing off with zero malice as cabinets banged and metal clanged.

Chloe considered showering while she waited, but it had been a good while since she and Beca had done that together. Plus, they still needed to christen their fancy bathroom with the side by side rainfall shower heads in the big marble stall with the glass door and the separate whirlpool tub and what they quickly dubbed the ‘Hers and Hers’ above-counter, rectangular sinks with waterfall faucets.

She didn’t know if she actually had it in her for some all-out shower sex; she really was exhausted after that appointment. But it would be nice to just be together and be close and connected.

They always did have a thing for showers.

For the time being, she shed her clothes and pulled on a baggy T-shirt to climb into their wonderfully massive king-sized bed - such an upgrade from their last one - and flip on the TV that was mounted on the opposite wall to let her mind go numb to the squawking of the Kardashians.
until she was nudged awake by Beca playing with her hair.

“If you go to sleep now, you’re going to be up in the middle of the night.” Beca’s voice was quiet, allowing Chloe the opportunity to either ignore it and go back to sleep or acknowledge it and wake.

She knew Beca was right, and rousted herself enough to sit up, rubbing a hand over her eyes with a yawn. She noticed there was food on the bed. “What’s for dinner?”

“What’s it look like?” Beca said smartly, twisting a grape off the bunch to pop into her mouth. She immediately offered another to Chloe.

“Looks like my favorite.” Chloe smiled at the things arranged on the tray: a plate with a stack of five chocolate chip pancakes, that bunch of green grapes, and a bottle of maple syrup - the real stuff, not the imitation kind. Plus a few napkins and a pair of forks, and two mugs of hot cocoa.

“Thought you could use it. Sorry there’s no bacon,” Beca said, handing a fork to Chloe as they situated themselves at the tray. “I was going to make some, but it was all frozen.”

“It’s okay,” Chloe said with a touch to Beca’s knee. “This is our first breakfast in bed in this house, you know.”

Beca reached for the syrup. “And at 8:00 at night.” She poured and set the bottle back down, staring at the pancakes. “Dude, what if we end up with three kids?”

Chloe’s reach to stab the pancakes froze mid-air as visions of what could be flashed through her mind. She remembered the first time she’d pictured it, and it was Christmas morning a year ago, Beca in the kitchen making the chocolate chip pancakes, and Chloe imagined kids running around, harassing Beca as she tried to cook. “Then we’ll...we’ll be really lucky, and I’ll only have one super miserable pregnancy instead of going through it two or three times. Just...get it all done in one go,” she added with a nod, more to assure herself that it would be okay, should that be in the future.

“Your boobs would be huge.” Beca looked up from zoning out at the pancakes and smiled that genuine smile that always told Chloe it - whatever it was - would be okay.

Chloe laughed and gave her a shove. “My boobs are going to get huge even if it’s one baby.”
“Sweet.” Beca stabbed at the pancakes and tore a forkful off, grinning at her as she chewed.

“Am I to take that to mean you aren’t happy with the size of my current boobs?” she challenged, quirking an eyebrow at Beca and wiping the humor off her face for the moment.

Beca immediately squirmed like Chloe knew she would, starting to stutter an apology until Chloe leaned over and pressed a kiss to her lips, pancake-mouth and all, to shut her up.

“Don’t worry, baby,” Chloe said as she decided to lift her tee up and off to toss it aside. “I know you like my boobs.” She winked at Beca, who seemed to have forgotten to chew between the teasing accusation, the kiss, and her now topless wife eating pancakes next to her. It was nice, knowing she could still affect Beca that way after a year and a half together.

Beca finally came-to and swallowed, coughing a little. “You’re just going to sit here naked?”

Chloe shrugged as she sliced another neat triangle of pancake onto her fork. “Why not?” She watched Beca eye her and then glance at the bottle of maple syrup and back at Chloe. “No, no, no,” she said, reading Beca’s mind. “We are not getting maple syrup all over this bedding, it’s brand new and it was not cheap.”

“But -”

“No,” Chloe said firmly, pointing her fork at Beca. She let Beca fidget for a moment, deciding whether or not she could muster up the energy she decided earlier she was lacking. But Beca getting flustered had done a decent number on her libido, and she let a smile slink into place. “We can take it with us to the shower.”

“Breathe, honey, breathe;” Beca chanted, squeezing Chloe’s hand.

Chloe fought back the urge to curse despite the pain until she couldn’t anymore, letting out an extended “Fuck!” as she hopped in place, clutching her stubbed big toe and relying on Beca for balance.
“I seriously just did that, like, two days ago. Maybe we should move the table over a couple feet. I guess it’s in both our natural paths or whatever.”

Chloe nodded, the stars starting to fade from her vision after slamming her right big toe into the legs of one of the chairs at their large dining table while walking in full stride through the house.

They’d been relaxing outside by the pool, barefoot in yoga pants and tees with sloppy ponytails and sunglasses; it was still too chilly for swimming, but it was a sunny, 72º April Saturday so they relocated outdoors, Chloe with her laptop and teacher’s textbooks to work on lesson plans for the next week, Beca with her own laptop and Ableton Push light up button board thingy that made funny sounds. They were sharing a bottle of rosé, and they’d gotten inspired, Beca putting together some fun music clips that Chloe would transpose for her students to play on their plastic recorders.

Chloe had hopped up to run inside and grab her (slightly nicer) recorder to try it when her foot connected and she saw stars, sending her to her knees in pain. She’d never felt anything like it, and she’d stubbed toes plenty in her life. Beca had come running - she must have screamed or something - and got her off the floor once she figured out Chloe wasn’t actually dying.

“Move it,” Chloe growled, still waiting for any feeling other than white heat to return to her foot as she set it back down, testing it to see whether or not she’d actually broken her toe. It bent without much additional pain, so she decided it was probably okay.

Beca was already shoving chairs away from the table and then she was sliding it a good couple feet closer to the wall when Chloe heard the alarm on Beca’s watch chime, followed by a groan as she finished returning the chairs around the table.

“Come on,” Chloe said, mind finally starting to clear as she limped toward the kitchen taking deep breaths to force the pain out of her mind.

“My leg still hurts from yesterday’s - you really need to work on your skill.”

“Then we’ll use your arm today.” She opened the fridge and plucked one of the vials out, shaking it as she retrieved a new syringe from the box on the counter. “And I’m trying; it’s harder than you think.”

Beca scoffed and sat on one of the stools along the island.
“Don’t you scoff at me - you could do this yourself, but you’re too chicken to do it.”

“I am not giving myself a shot!” Beca gasped, cringing at the very thought. She flinched when Chloe ran a cold alcohol swab over her tricep.

“Then you can sit there and shut up and let me focus,” Chloe teased as she made an excessive show of opening the syringe and stabbing the needle into the vial to draw the appropriate amount of magic liquid hormones that had been wreaking havoc on her poor wife’s mood and stomach for going on two weeks. She flicked the syringe and pinched the back of Beca’s arm, trying to be as quick about it as she could.

“Breathe, honey, breathe,” she said, echoing Beca’s efforts at comforting her just minutes ago.

She wasn’t surprised when Beca started crying. It wasn’t because she was a big baby when it came to getting shots, but her hormones were so out of whack that it seemed almost anything would send her into tears. Anger usually came with it, because she was mad that she was crying over nothing. Chloe learned on Day Three to ignore it; coddling her when there wasn’t anything for Chloe to fix or make better only made it worse.

Today was Day Eleven - three more days and they'd be back in Dr. Merriweather's clinic to put Beca through another battery of tests and, in theory, if all was well...well, Chloe could be pregnant next week.

Which wasn’t at all mildly terrifying-slash-exciting.

They were averaging a visit every four or five days while Beca received her treatments, monitoring her, doing what they could to minimize the side effects. For the most part, the nausea was gone - the first few days were terrible; Beca had been unable to go to work. But now it was mostly just mood swings like the tears right now. Chloe knew it would pass in a few minutes and Beca would apologize for it.

“Sorry,” Beca said with a snifflle as Chloe finished putting everything away.

“It’s okay, baby.”
“I’m going to take a shower.”

“Want me to come with you?”

“No,” Beca snapped, fingers drifting over the spot on her thigh Chloe had injected yesterday.

Chloe held up her hands, silently withdrawing from the conversation as she watched Beca climb the stairs, limping a little when she stepped with her tender leg. Beca disappeared into their room and Chloe started up as well, rolling her eyes as she limped her way up as well.

“Get in here!” drifted down to her and she smiled, stepping a little quicker.

Her smile fell when she saw the bruise she’d left on Beca’s thigh. “Oh, honey, I’m sorry,” she said as she undressed and stepped in to join Beca, reaching out toward the bruised spot.

Beca grabbed her roughly and pressed her into the shower wall, kissing her hard. The hormones certainly had positive side effects as well and Chloe moaned, letting Beca pin her hands above her head as water fell over both of them. Lips and teeth moved along her neck and she braced herself for the sharpness of teeth against her breast, but it never came and instead she was pulled away from the wall and they turned, Beca pressing herself against the wall. Hands shoved at Chloe, pushing her down, demanding Chloe’s mouth on her.

“Please,” Beca hiccupped. She was crying again, but tugging Chloe forward with fingers tangled in hair.

Chloe tried not to laugh, instead giving her mouth something better to do as she dipped a shoulder to lift Beca’s sore thigh over her shoulder and tilt her hips closer. It would be quick; the first one had become quick as lightning with the treatments, they’d discovered the first time they tumbled into bed after starting them, Beca ready to combust before they’d even kissed.

Chloe pressed herself closer, tongue skilled and efficient and she knew it hadn’t even been three minutes when a loud, “Fuck!” echoed around them. And, just as had happened that first time, it was followed immediately with, “Please don’t stop.”

And Chloe didn’t stop - not until Beca begged her to, sliding down to sit in her lap on the floor of the shower and kiss Chloe breathless.
“She’ll be out of it for awhile. Try not to confuse her too much if she doesn’t make sense; just go with what she says instead of telling her she’s wrong. I’ll be back in a few minutes to check on her.”

“Okay, thanks,” Chloe said to the nurse.

She didn’t like seeing Beca this way, in a hospital gown, in a room that was nothing but white and smelled of antiseptic, partially sitting up in bed, groggy from the anesthesia. She seemed so small - smaller than usual.

“Hey, you, Chloe said with a smile as she let her fingers drift along Beca’s hairline, hoping to rouse her a bit. “You did a good job.”

Beca jerked from the touch, a wobbly tilt of her head with unfocused eyes that tried to find the source of what touched her. She finally found Chloe. “I did a good job?” she asked, slurring a bit.

“Yeah you did.” Chloe reached for Beca’s hand.

“I caught ‘em all?”

“What did you catch, baby?” Chloe said, ready to be amused.

“The Pokémon.”

“You caught the Pokémon?”

Beca nodded. “You said I did a good job. I caught the Pikachu. The yellow one. That’s good, right?”

“Sure, baby,” Chloe said, trying not to laugh.
Beca’s finger weaved its way to Chloe to point at her face. “It was cute; it looked like you.”

“Not cuter than me I hope,” she teased.

Beca shook her head and grinned. “Nope. Oh! But...and I caught...a bird and a snake and a goldfish and a vagina.”

Chloe burst out laughing and quickly covered her mouth at Beca’s look of confusion. “You caught a vagina?” she asked, trying not to laugh.

“Well, a purple one. And spiky. It had eyes. I can show you, it’s in my backpack.” Beca made to move and Chloe touched her shoulder to stop her.

“You can show me at home, okay?”

“Okay. I did a good job, though?”

“Yes, baby, you did a really good job.”

Beca smiled up at her and then she fell back against the pillow, eyes drifting closed.

“How’s she doing?” the nurse asked upon her return.

“Out of it,” Chloe said, still keeping a watchful eye on Beca, who was fighting sleep.

“Her mind will clear within the hour. Press the call button if you need anything, but I’ll be by every ten minutes or so. When she’s up, Dr. Merriweather will talk to both of you.”

“Thank you.” Chloe pulled the lone chair in the room alongside the bed and kept Beca’s hand in hers, stroking her thumb over the back of it slowly as she watched her fight for clarity and consciousness.
It was almost an hour to the minute when Beca had her wits about her again, wearing a frown as she got dressed with Chloe’s help sat back down on the bed.

“What’s wrong, honey?”

“I have like...mega cramps.”

Chloe reached to rest her hand on Beca’s stomach, still holding Beca’s hand with her other. “She said that would happen, remember? They’ll be gone soon.”

“Knock, knock!” echoed from behind the closed door to the small room.

“Let’s see how it went, hm?” Chloe asked, leaning down to peck Beca’s lips before turning to take a seat next to her. “Come in!”

Dr. Merriweather entered a moment later, wearing blue scrubs instead of the formal business attire Chloe was used to her wearing. “How are we feeling?”

“Like hell,” Beca said, shifting with her arm wrapped around her middle.

“Cramps?”

Beca nodded.

“That’s normal. But if they don’t go away by 2:00, be sure to call us.”

Beca nodded again and finally gave in to the ordeal and slumped against Chloe’s shoulder.
“Well?” Chloe asked, eager to find out how the procedure went.

“Oh yes! The whole reason we’re here. The harvesting went exactly as we planned. We retrieved nine eggs, and they’re in the lab right now, being processed and prepped for insemination. We’ll check on them in the morning, make sure fertilization occurred in enough of them, and I’ll give you a call so you know.”

“If there aren’t enough, does that mean my eggs are messed up?”

“There are many reasons that fertilization might not occur, but nothing in our tests indicated the risk of a lower than average success rate.”

Chloe felt Beca sag against her further and slipped an arm around her waist to make sure she didn’t just tip backward. “And then…” Chloe prompted.

“And then, if all’s well, we’ll incubate the embryos for a few more days, make sure they’re doing what embryos do, and we’ll select the healthiest ones to transfer to you, Chloe. I’d like to schedule that for Thursday afternoon. Like we discussed, it’s a quick, painless procedure.”

Chloe remembered their first visit with Dr. Merriweather, and how she was so anxious she could barely speak. The now innumerable conversations they’ve since had have allowed her a level of comfort, but the nerves bubbled up again at that.

“Thursday,” she repeated. Today was Monday. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday. “Yeah. I’m uh...I’m finished for the day around 4:00, any time after that would be fine. Bec?”

“Hmm what?” Beca lifted her head and Chloe saw it take her an extra second or two to focus.

“Can you be here Thursday afternoon?”

“I...I don’t...I mean, yeah. Sorry.” She shook her head, looking for clarity. “Yeah, I’ll make it work whenever.”

“Great, we’ll set that up then! Do you have any other questions for me today?”
Beca shook her head.

“She’ll be back to normal soon?” Chloe asked, still not liking Beca’s altered mood.

“Oh yes. Take it easy the rest of the day. Remember to call me if the cramps don’t dissipate by 2:00. You’ll be good as new tomorrow, Beca.”

Beca offered a thumbs up and yawned, trying to curl further into Chloe.

Chloe wiggled her shoulder so she couldn’t get comfortable. “Okay, let’s get you home before I have to carry you.”

It would be today of all days that there was an unannounced mandatory faculty meeting after school.

And it would be today of all days that she got pulled over for speeding on her way to her 4:30 appointment at the fertility clinic. Any other day, she’d have played the ditzy co-ed trick and talked her way out of the ticket, but that routine took more time than the issuing of a ticket, so she accepted it, groaning at the $360 citation as she stuffed it in her purse, saving her comment of, “Seriously?” for after the officer dismissed her and she had rolled up her window.

Beca’s car was in the clinic’s parking lot by the time she pulled in and parked a few spots down from it. She didn’t bother looking at her phone, knowing it probably had at least one text asking where she was. Her dashboard clock told her she was eight minutes late.

“Hey, where were you? Is everything okay?” Beca looked worried, jumping up and walking over as soon as she appeared.

“Yeah, no, I’m fine. I mean, I had to go to a faculty meeting, and then I was speeding to make it on time and got pulled over.”

“Seriously?” Beca said, laughing a little.
“That’s what I said!” Chloe was exasperated and relaxed a little at Beca’s sudden hug, arms wrapping around her middle.

“I gotta memorize how you feel at this size.”

“Shush,” she said, laughing, and then reality fell on her like a ton of bricks. Her realization made her stiffen, and she felt Beca hug her tighter.

“It’s gonna be okay.” Fingernails tickled her lower back under the edge of her shirt to make her shiver. “We’re gonna be okay. And this is getting really real.” Beca stepped back enough to look up at her and waggle her eyebrows.

Laughter bubbled up from Chloe at that and she took a breath just as a nurse called her name from the far doorway.

“Let’s go get you knocked up, hm?”

“We’re still doing two, right?”

Chloe glanced up at Beca, who was petting Chloe’s hair in a way Chloe was sure was meant to be soothing, but it was revealing Beca’s nerves and worsening her own. Chloe reached for her hand and snagged it, holding it by her shoulder where Beca sat next to the table she was reclining on, feet in stirrups. She felt vulnerable and exposed on top of the nerves and excitement and anxiety.

“As long as you’re both still in agreement.” Dr. Merriweather was on a rolling stool by her feet, alternating talking to her assistant and arranging instruments on a tray next to her. “Larissa, do you have those photos?”

The nurse handed Beca two mostly gray photographs, a single big circle in the middle of each of them taking up almost the entire frame. Beca passed one to Chloe and leaned in to look at them together.
“Those are the embryos we’ll be transferring today; the brightest of the bunch.”

“That’s us,” Chloe said quietly, tracing the curve of the cell. “Both of us together.”

“Fucking awesome.” Beca held her photo alongside Chloe’s. “I think they look like me. Don’t you?”

Chloe giggled and nudged Beca with her elbow. “One of these could be our baby’s first photo.”

“It will be,” Beca said, squeezing her hand. “Or both of them will be.” Her voice wavered, betraying her emotion. “I’m kind of getting used to the idea that we could have twins. I think it’d be pretty fucking adorable to see you with a kid on each hip. Jogging with one of those obnoxious double-wide strollers that take up the whole sidewalk. Chasing one while the other’s crying.”

“Excuse you,” Chloe said with a laugh. “If we have two, you’re going to be a lot busier than you think you are.”

Beca turned to smile at her as she set aside the photos. “Bring it on.”

“I don’t mean to interrupt, but if you’re ready…?”

Chloe glanced down at their doctor and back at Beca. “We’re ready.”

“Yeah we are.” Beca leaned down to kiss her forehead.

“You don't have to do that.” Chloe smiled at Beca, who was on her way to the kitchen to refill Chloe’s bottle of water and fetch more snacks.

“You're supposed to chill today and let those puppies attach. If you think I'm going through those hormone treatments and harvesting again because you're too proud to let me bring you water and chips, you've got another thing coming.”
“Okay, okay,” Chloe said with a rolling of her eyes as she accepted the bottle from Beca as she curled up next to Chloe. “You're awfully cuddly today.”

Beca lifted her head from where it had landed on Chloe's shoulder to look at her for a second like Chloe was crazy. Her hand slipped under Chloe's shirt to breeze over Chloe's stomach and rest there, her fingers tickling gently. “I'm going to be fucking cuddly today. You're cooking up a baby or two in there.”

“Are you going to be cuddly the whole nine months?”

“Within reason. I mean, don’t set yourself up for disappointment. I’m entitled to a night or two off.”

“You’re saying you want time off from me?” Chloe asked, teasing. “The day you might have got me pregnant is not the day to tell me you need space.”

Beca yawned, unfazed by the mock accusation and resituated herself on the couch to use Chloe’s lap as a pillow. “If you had to look at your face every day, you’d need a break, too.”

Chloe laughed, flicking Beca’s boob and getting a yelp and swat in return. “I do have to look at my face every day, and I seem to be managing just fine. I didn’t know it was such a burden.” She leaned down and made a face at Beca, eyes crossed, teeth bared, lips twisted into a grimace. “This better?”

“Still annoyingly gorgeous.” Beca lifted her hand to push Chloe’s face back. “Get that away from me.”

Chloe threw her head back in laughter as she grabbed Beca’s hand away from her face to cover the palm in kisses before interlocking their fingers and dropping their arms to rest across Beca’s torso. “Screw you,” she said, still laughing.

“Dr. Merriweather said no, and I quote, ‘uterus-bouncing sex’ for two weeks. So keep it in your pants.”
Chloe felt herself blush at the reminder of *that* conversation with their doctor. “We’re not animals. That sounds so aggressive.”

“Need I remind you of -”

“No need,” Chloe said quickly, lifting their hands to cover Beca’s mouth with her own hand. “Don’t talk about it; you’ll just turn me on.” She saw the corners of Beca’s eyes crinkle and she knew she was smiling under their hands. “You seem to be back to normal. You’re not trying to shove my hand down your pants every ten minutes.”

Beca laughed and Chloe finally moved their hands away to appreciate the girl’s smile. “No, the hormones are starting to wear off, thank God. Now it’s only every twenty minutes, give or take,” Beca added, dragging their hands down toward her lap.

Chloe gasped in fake indignation, but didn’t really do much to stop the fact that Beca was unbuttoning her own jeans to take their hands down the front of them and deposit Chloe’s hand there. Beca patted it like it had done well and smiled up at her.

“You just told me no sex,” Chloe responded, wiggling her fingers a little.

“You’re the one that needs to be chill. I, on the other hand, still have shit messing with my libido, so.” Beca waved toward her lower half with a ‘get on with it’ motion.

“But this episode is hilarious. Kim loses her diamond earring and has a breakdown over it.”

“Chloe, I swear to -”

“Okay, okay!” Chloe laughed. She adjusted her angle a little to start lazily playing with Beca, trailing her fingertips up and down slowly over the damp cotton. “I’m not turning off my show, though.”

“Don’t care.” Beca sighed and lifted her hips to work her jeans off her hips, an awkward wriggling of pushing with her hands and trying to work them down with one foot and then the other.
Chloe laughed again. “You need some help?”

“I got it.” She finally got her jeans down to her ankles. “Keep doing what you’re doing.” And gave them a final shove with her left foot to free them and kick them to the floor so she could part her legs.

“Better?”

“Much.”

Chloe watched Beca re-settle, relaxed, eyes closed. So she was relaxed about it, too, being a little aimless with her touch, or purposely tracing every curve and avoiding the most sensitive one. Dragging the back of a thumbnail along the thin barrier between them made Beca shiver and bite her lip.

It was nice, this lazy form of lovemaking. It wasn't impersonal despite Chloe being somewhat disengaged from the act as a whole. But it spoke to the levels of trust and understanding they shared - Beca needed something and was okay with Chloe being unable to be as involved as she would normally be.

Beca’s hips lifted toward her so she responded by pressing firmly, surprising her with quick little circles that made Beca exhale a curse and grind down hard against her. “Babe…”

Chloe hummed in response and twisted her wrist to slip under Beca’s panties, fingers met with slick excitement. She eased off, though, going back to light teasing, enjoying how Beca felt as she drew random patterns between her legs. It had Beca panting immediately, and Chloe was admittedly getting distracted and turned on, and she squeezed her thighs together, wanting friction and relief.

It would have to wait though and she worked to channel her arousal out of her own center and into Beca through her touch, slow and thorough.

“Oh my God...what are you doing to me?” Beca finally said with a groan and a particularly needy thrusting of her hips.

Chloe slowed down even further at that, lightening her touch to be feather soft against Beca’s nerves. “Taking my time.”
“Evil temptress.” Beca’s eyes were still closed but she was smiling.

“Temptress? I like that.” She slowed her fingers even further, almost removing them completely. “Not sure about evil, though…” She chuckled when Beca’s hand showed up on top of hers to push it back down.

“Too evil for someone who looks as innocent as you do. Fuck, right there, don’t stop…”

“I won’t stop this time,” Chloe said quietly, brushing stray hairs back from Beca’s face. She didn’t stop, working Beca up slowly until one of Beca’s hands was wrapped around Chloe’s knee, the other gripping her forearm as she thrust up into Chloe’s touch to break with a broken cry of a moan that lifted her off Chloe’s lap for a few seconds until her head crashed back down with a heaving sigh.

Beca gave Chloe’s hand a squeeze with her thighs before letting her remove it. She stretched, arms above her head, wearing a lazy smile. “Thanks, baby.”

“You’re welcome. But you know, now I’m super horny.” She really was, and the nails of her free hand dug into her thigh to try to dissipate it. But the fact that she could taste Beca on the finger she’d slipped into her mouth wasn’t helping.

“No sex for two weeks.” Beca was getting resettled, turning on her side to be able to see the television, still using Chloe’s lap for a pillow.

“No _uterus-bouncing_ sex,” she argued.

“Chlo.”

“I know, I know, it’s dumb to risk something. It’s just the horny talking.” She sighed and let her head fall back to stare at the ceiling for a minute, gathering her resolve and patience.

“I’ll take care of you, though. I promise.”
“Morning, sleepyhead.”

Chloe cracked an eye open to see Beca sitting in a lounge chair on the balcony. “What are you doing home?”

“You took the day off, so I decided to, too.” Beca set her laptop aside and crossed the space to crawl back into bed, sliding in behind Chloe to spoon her, hand coming to rest over her middle. “How are you feeling? Any babies happening in there?”

Chloe laughed through a yawn. “You know we aren’t going to know for two weeks. Are you going to ask me every morning?”

“Probably.” Beca pressed a kiss to her neck. “I can, like, stop caring about you if you want?”

“No!”

“I mean, if it’s so bothersome.”

Chloe wiggled in Beca’s arms, which only held her more tightly. “Don’t you dare!”

“Then tell me how you’re feeling. I wanna know.” Beca kissed her again, this time on her bare shoulder. It made Chloe shiver and internally bemoan the sex moratorium.

“I don’t feel any different.”

“You feel okay though?”

“Yeah, I feel normal.”

“I don’t know if I’m sad or relieved?”
“Bec.” Chloe wiggled until she could turn around and face Beca. “You know this is gonna take awhile. We’ll know in two weeks if I’m pregnant or not.”

Beca nodded, and seemed a little worried.

Chloe traced her fingertips along Beca’s features to ease her. “Don’t worry. I’ll be pukey every morning in the nearish future. And then you can be relieved that I’m finally in a constant state of discomfort.”

Beca seemed shocked for a second, and then scoffed, shoving at a laughing Chloe who was successfully working at getting Beca pinned on her back so she could drop down and kiss her breathless.

“How’s the libido?” Chloe asked, grinning down at a flushed Beca. “Still going haywire?”

“Surprisingly, a lot better.”

“Oh, okay then.” Chloe made to move off Beca but legs around her waist caught her and reeled her back in.

“I don’t need hormone treatments to be turned on by you though.”

Chloe bit her lip, her hips instantly wanting to press into Beca. “Baby, it’s not fair. I can’t -”

“I know, I know.” Beca was quick about it, releasing Chloe and wiggling her way out from under her. “I’m sorry. Just...go downstairs and set up our lazy camp for the day?” She climbed out of bed and circled back to her side to dig through the nightstand, “I’m just going to…” and pulled out the purple velvet bag that contained her vibrator.

Chloe groaned and rolled her way off the bed. “This is so not fair. I can’t even watch you do it or I won’t be able to stop myself. I better not hear you downstairs.”

“I’ll be quiet.” Beca flopped down on the bed to work on the drawstring of the bag.
Chloe got dressed, pulling on a pair of shorts and a tanktop, watching Beca get settled until they were just staring at each other across the room.

“Go!” Beca laughed, jerking her head at the door as she clicked her toy on, the buzz sending a tingle straight between Chloe’s legs. “I’ll be done in a minute.”

Chloe left with a groan, waving her hand behind her in annoyance. “This isn’t fair!”

“Love you!”
The Test

Chloe was back at work Monday; taking time off at the end of the school year was rough on both her and the students, not to mention generally frowned upon by school leadership. They had year-end standardized tests to prepare for to help ensure the continued success of the school, not to mention the more important but confusingly less emphasized general readiness of her students to transition from the still loosey-goosey kindergarten classroom to what would become a lot more structured next year in the first grade.

She did her best to balance it all, though, on top of the stress in her personal life with this whole babymaking thing. They’d chosen to keep their decision close to the vest; only their immediate families knew their plans. They didn’t want or need friends and distant family members constantly inquiring as to the status of Chloe’s uterus. She was confident in their decision, but it did make it difficult to not be able to jump on the phone or shoot off a text every time something happened: Beca’s crazy mood swings, the Pokémon-anesthesia story, how nervous, anxious, excited, and scared she was about all this.

They were going it alone together. And it wasn’t always easy.

She’d been stuck with traffic duty today, which she disliked on sheer principle. But today was different, watching children of all ages escaping for the day, older kids running to buses, little ones being met at the door by parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, or older siblings. A couple of her own students from last year ran to hug her hello and she told them how much they’ve grown since their first day of school nearly two years ago, and how proud of them she was. She watched a mother hold her daughter’s hand, the little girl - a third grader, Chloe recognized her - sniffling as she limped awkwardly and dramatically, a Band-Aid on her knee.

In a flash she saw that mother as herself, having run from her classroom, asking another teacher to keep an eye on her students, to check on her nine-year-old daughter in the nurse’s office after falling and scraping her elbow on the playground trying to jump into Double Dutch jump ropes during afternoon recess. It was nothing new, her daughter was rambunctious, always getting into trouble, climbing and running and inevitably injuring herself. She’d taken after her Beca with her clumsiness and Chloe with her adventurousness which was a scary combination, and Chloe wondered if it was only a matter of time until her little girl earned a scar on her forehead, too. Chloe acquired hers when her knees lost their grip on the tree branch from which she was hanging upside down.

She’d ask her if she was okay, and the girl would grin proudly and nod, showing off the gap where she recently lost one of her front teeth and chat her ear off about how it happened and how much blood there was (an exaggeration, to be sure), and Chloe would tell her she’s happy she's having so much fun with her friends and trying new things, but that she needs to remember to be careful. She’d let her sit in the back of her classroom to read since the last period of her daughter’s day was
dedicated to reading anyway, and she’d walk her out to meet Beca who was picking her up because Chloe had to stay late for the jazz dance club. Beca would notice the neon blue Band-Aid on her elbow when she waved and ask her what happened, and she’d recount the event with even more drama and spectacle than when she’d told Chloe, and Beca would bend down and lift the girl’s arm up and kiss her elbow and tell her she was proud of her for trying hard and to not give up, and then she’d kiss Chloe hello and goodbye and, “See you at home; I’ll have dinner ready.”

“Mrs. Beale?”

She jerked out of her daydream and looked around for the source of the voice, finding it with the group of students waiting on the sidewalk.

“Are you ever gonna let us cross?” One of them said, gesturing wildly at the street.

“One sec,” she said, stepping out into the roadway to hold up the stop sign to interrupt the traffic and let the crowd of kids sprint across, ignoring her shouts reminding them to walk.

She called Aubrey on the drive home. Beca might get mad, breaking their pact to keep this in the family for now, but she was going to explode if she didn’t talk about it. And maybe because of the guilt that her best friend didn’t even know she might be pregnant right this very second.

“This is Aubrey Posen.”

“Hey, Bree! I miss you!”

“Chloe! I miss you, too! What’s up?”

“On my way home from school and wanted to say hi. You got a minute?”

“For you? Of course!”

“How are you? Engaged yet?”
Aubrey laughed. “Not yet. I want a six-month engagement and a Summer wedding, so he’s not allowed to ask me unless it’s January, February, or March.”

Chloe laughed because of course Aubrey would answer that straightforwardly and have her own surprise engagement planned. “That poor man. Does he have any idea what he’s getting into with you?”

“He likes the role reversal now and then; he’s not afraid to give up control to a woman. Especially in the bedroom.”

“Ew, Bree, c’mon!” Chloe shrieked with a laugh.

Aubrey cackled. “As much as I’ve had to deal with you and Beca? You can deal with Eric and me now and then.”

“No, I know. It’s only fair. I just...Bree, I’m sorry but I am so horny.”

“Chloe, oh my God. I mean, okay...what is the, uh...are you having marital...troubles?”

“No, no! Not at all.”

“Then what’s wrong? I have been under the distinct impression that you two go at it like rabbits.”

Chloe laughed, rubbing her hand over her forehead. “That’s pretty accurate, yeah.”

“Well then?”

“I can’t have sex for two weeks. Well, eleven more days. Not that I’m counting. I’m totally counting.”

“No,” Chloe said, laughter turning nervous as she chewed on her thumbnail. “Bree, ah...so, Beca and I, we -”

“Spit it out, Chloe. And stop biting your nail.”

Chloe whipped her thumb away from her mouth guiltily. “We’re trying to get pregnant,” she said in a quick jumbled exhale.

“You...you’re...really? Wow...Chloe, that’s...sorry, I’ll come back to that in a second. What exactly does that have to do with the sex thing?”

“We uh...there’s a chance, we don’t know yet, won’t know until next week. But there’s a chance I could be...pregnant. Now. Already. And I can’t, like, run or jump around or you know...have sex. Until we know if it worked her not. So the embryos don’t get...dislodged.” The silence on the other end of the line was deafening and Chloe squeezed the steering wheel harder.

“Okay, hold up,” Aubrey finally said. “So many questions. I mean, I’m sorry, let me back up and try this again. Chloe, that is so exciting! I know you’ve wanted kids since you were a kid.”

“Yeah, I really, really want to be a mom. And Beca does, too. You might not think it, but she is going to be so good.”

“Spoil them rotten, no doubt.”

“Of course.”

“So? What’s happening? Fill me in!”

Chloe recounted in a rush everything they’d been through over the past months - the doctor visits, the hormone treatments, the conversations they had with her brother when they’d gone home to Florida for her birthday, all the what-ifs and what-comes-nexts.

“Oh my God, I hope you have twins,” Aubrey said when Chloe finished her story. “That would be so cute.”
“You think this isn’t scary enough, the concept of being pregnant? And then being pregnant with two? I mean if they both stick, they both stick and we will be so lucky. But I’m mildly terrified of what that would be like. Not to mention going from zero to two kids overnight.”

“Chloe, you are going to be amazing, no matter what happens. And I know Beca will be, too. She’s been there with you through all this, right? She’s making the time?”

Chloe smiled, the question prompting nothing but warm fuzzies just as she turned onto the winding road that led to their home. “It’s weird. I mean, yes she’s totally doing everything right. For some reason, that surprises me? But it doesn’t surprise me either. And now I feel bad for saying it surprises me.” She’d been sitting on that admission for four months, since the day she was surprised by Beca taking the initiative to make their first fertility appointment.

“Don’t feel bad. You’re only surprised because this is a new side of Beca that you didn’t know existed, right? Because until you got here, to this point of your relationship, you had no way of knowing how she would act or react to becoming a parent with you. Being surprised doesn’t mean you thought less of her - it means you learned something new about her.”

She sighed. “Thanks, Bree. I needed to hear that. I didn’t realize how hard it’d been, keeping all this bottled up ‘til today.” She waited for the garage door to lift, hoping to see Beca’s Corvette parked in its space. It wasn’t. “Oh, boo.”

“Hmm?”

“Nothing. I just got home. Was hoping Beca would be here but she isn’t.”

“It’s still early there, isn’t it? Not even 5:00?”

“Yeah, yeah.” Chloe shut off her car and sat in it, listening to the overhead door slide down behind her to sit in the dark for a minute. “Talking about all this made me needy.”

“She’ll be home soon I’m sure. I’ll let you talk my ear off about her if you want.” Chloe heard the smile in Aubrey’s voice. “How’s Emily’s record progressing?”
“What if we get one and try it ourselves tonight?”

They were at Target picking up a few household necessities and a stroll through the feminine aisle brought Chloe's feet to a stop in front of the home pregnancy tests.

“You know Dr. Merriweather said we shouldn't do that. It's too early for a home test to be accurate. And frankly, if it were to turn out to be a false positive…”

Chloe glanced at Beca, who seemed lost for a moment before blinking hard and meeting Chloe's gaze. “No, you're right.” Chloe set the box back on the shelf in exchange for Beca's hand, making Beca push the shopping cart one-handed.

“I'm anxious, too,” Beca said after a quiet minute as they strolled down one of the wide main aisles - and right past the baby department.

Chloe couldn't help it; the onesie caught her eye and she reached for it to hold it up. “Oh my gosh, look at this!”

“It's a chicken?”

“What planet are you from?” Chloe asked with a huff and flipped the little hood forward to reveal the wide floppy orange bill. “It's a ducky! When are chickens yellow?”

“Baby chickens are yellow,” Beca said defensively, but Chloe could see the smile fighting for purchase on her lips. And it finally won out, a wide grin breaking through the gruff. “Okay, that's fucking adorable.”

“Can we get it?” she asked excitedly.

“Chlo...I mean...I just don't want to build ourselves up to much in case it's negative tomorrow.”

Chloe nodded. Beca was right. IVF was far from perfect, and while their doctor had given them a
prediction that it would be a success, there was no guarantee. She'd already teared up once this week when she still didn't feel anything different in her body despite knowing it was far too early for morning sickness and the like. She knew Beca was only trying to prevent that again, the amplification of potential disappointment.

“But…” Beca resumed, swaying forward and back in such a way Chloe wondered if she was about to faint. She took a lurching step forward to snatch a different onesie off the rack to hold it up. A pig. “It's going to happen now or later, right? I guess there's not that much harm…”

Chloe hopped and squealed and checked the sizes on the items in their hands, swapping them out for ones marked Newborn and dropped them in the cart. “They have frogs, too!” A frog joined the duck and pig, and before more things ended up in the cart, Chloe let herself get tugged away and toward the music section so Beca could take a photo in front of the Demi Lovato new release display as requested by Capitol to be used for a social media promotion.

“Stand there, look excited,” Chloe directed as she snapped photos with her phone.

A meek voice interrupted them. “Excuse me?”

“Oh, sorry,” Beca said, getting out of the way so the other shopper could reach the CD rack.

“No, I - sorry, um…”

Chloe smiled at the girl, probably seventeen or eighteen, and definitely seemed to be channeling a little Beca Mitchell style with her Chucks and skinny jeans and flannel. She knew what was coming next, though Beca was oblivious, flipping through the photos Chloe had taken.

“You're Beca Mitchell, right?”

“What?” Beca looked up, confused, and then it clicked. “Oh. Yeah, hey.” She slipped the phone into Chloe’s rear pants pocket.

“Oh my God.” The girl lit up immediately, and Chloe saw her hands start trembling. “I just bought the CD yesterday on iTunes. It's so good. I didn't really like Demi but you made her really cool.”
“Thanks,” Beca said, smiling and scratching the back of her neck. “Did you want…”

“Oh! Yes, totally, can I take a selfie with you?!”

Chloe chuckled to herself as the girl rushed to Beca's side once she agreed, phone held up in the air to take the photo. It finished with a sudden hug, making Beca freeze and stare at Chloe over her shoulder.

“Thank you. You fucking rock,” the girl said, already on Instagram on her phone. “And you,” she added, looking at Chloe, “are the luckiest bitch in the world.”

Chloe had to laugh aloud as the girl departed. “I know I am,” Chloe said, reaching over to pinch Beca's cheek which was blushing a little from the unexpected attention. “You're adorable with your fans.”

“You hush,” Beca said, blushing harder as she turned to walk.

“You know she already tweeted that picture. Go retweet it and make her even happier.”

Beca rolled her eyes and handed Chloe her phone. “Be my guest.”

“I still can't believe you have to go to New York this week,” Chloe said as she finished playing with Beca’s social media.

“I asked if it could get pushed back but Fallon’s calendar is booked weeks in advance. I don't want to leave you either, so soon after we find out tomorrow. Good or bad, I'm going to want to be with you.”

Chloe smiled and bumped Beca's shoulder with her own as they walked toward the front of the store, and eventually took her elbow to be escorted. “I like when you say things like that.”

Beca turned to look at her, face showing a touch of confusion. “What?” she asked with a chuckle.
She shrugged. “It's just nice to be told. Or reminded. That's all.”

“That I want to be with you?”

Chloe grinned and nodded. “You know I'm a sucker for you being affectionate.”

“Beale, if my desire to be with you is still in question…”

“It's not,” Chloe said quickly with a giggle. She started emptying their shopping cart onto the conveyor belt at the checkout, tossing a couple packs of gum - her favorite and Beca's favorite - onto the pile. “But I can still like hearing you say it. I know you haven't forgotten I was the one pining over you for years. The novelty isn't going to wear off so fast.”

Beca tried and failed to hide a smile as she dug through her purse for her wallet. “Then I can still like hearing that you pined for me for years.”

Chloe smiled at her. “Then I’ll tell keep telling you.”

Chloe woke with a start. Her pulse was racing. A glance at the clock told her the alarm was due to go off in a few minutes; the colors of dawn were starting to filter through the sheer curtain she’d drawn over the wall-length window before bed and Beca was still snoring softly to her left. There was a moment of confusion, of wondering why she had an alarm set at all when it was Saturday, but before she finished her thought, her stomach lurched. Her palms started sweating, and she needed to make it to the bathroom, pronto.

There wasn’t much in her stomach to empty; she’d had a light dinner early in the evening, but that didn’t stop the wretching.

“Babe? You okay?” Beca’s voice was behind her, a hand on her bare clammy back a second later. “I mean, obviously you’re not...sorry...I’m not awake yet.”

Chloe managed a hiccup of a laugh at Beca’s attempt to correct herself before she dry heaved again. Once she’d been still for several seconds, she saw Beca’s hand reach over her to press the
handle down. Her presence disappeared for a second, but Chloe heard the sink around the corner turn on and off and Beca returned just as Chloe got herself off her knees to sit on her rear against the wall.

“Here,” Beca said, voice still gravelly from sleep, as she crouched down to Chloe’s level to hand her a glass of water. It was dark in the bathroom, but enough morning light filtered in through the high window to see.

Chloe sipped the cool water and it soothed her raw throat. “Sorry.”

“Don’t apologize.” Beca bounced a little, balancing on the balls of her feet in her crouching position and finally grabbed onto Chloe’s bent knees for balance. “So…”

The word hung in the air between them, and Chloe knew what Beca was thinking, because she was thinking it, too. Chloe’s phone’s alarm blared in the next room, startling them both and she remembered why she’d set an alarm to begin with. Her stomach rolled again and she took a long swallow of water to either stave it off or give it something to reject so it didn’t hurt so much.

“It’s uh…” Beca twisted her head a little, an internal battle as she chose her words. “It’s too early for uh…morning…sickness? Isn’t it?”

Chloe nodded, still clenching her jaw as the queasiness ebbed and flowed. “Nerves,” she finally said.

“Me, too,” Beca said with a long exhale. Then she stood and stretched and Chloe’s nausea disappeared, cured by the sight, given Beca was completely nude and fresh from bed. She extended her hand down toward Chloe. “Come shower with me. Let me wash your hair. Help you relax.”

Chloe let Beca help her to her feet and into an embrace, shivering at the fingernails that tickled down her spine until they pinched her rear to make her giggle. “Pit stop at my toothbrush?”

“Oh. Yes, please. If you think I'm kissing you without it…”

“Chloe? You can come on back.” She recognized the nurse from their previous visits, and the
woman smiled at her warmly.

She jumped out of her seat with nerves, but Beca's grip on her hand kept her from getting too far. “Sorry,” she said sheepishly when Beca laughed, having been jerked to her feet. Her anchor, as always.

“Don't get too excited and pee your pants or we’ll have to wait another hour so you can pee again.”

“Baby, it's a blood test, remember?”

“I know that babe - but I couldn't come up with anything funny about blood, so…”

“Chloe? We’re ready for you,” the nurse reminded.

“Yeah, sorry, I'm coming. Can she come with me for this?”

“As long as needles or blood don't make her squeamish,” the nurse answered as she stepped aside to prompt them through the door into the hallway.

“Maybe I won't look,” Beca said, and Chloe felt a squeeze on her hand.

Chloe let the nurse situate her in a chair and prep the crook of her elbow for the blood draw, and she saw Beca blanch the moment the needle pricked Chloe’s skin.

“How are you going to be with me through childbirth if you can't handle a little blood?” she said, teasing.

“That's...that'll be different.” Beca was pale, almost to the point of turning green, and Chloe watched her half-stumble to sit in the chair across from her. “It'll be you.”

“And this isn't?” Chloe heard the nurse chuckle under her breath and ask Beca if she was feeling faint, to which Beca nodded and folded herself to put her head on her knees.
“Still different,” Beca mumbled.

“Like how you refused to go near any of the Bellas if they were throwing up drunk and yet you were always the one holding my hair?”

“Please don't talk about throwing up right now.”

Chloe cooed her sympathy, unable to do more than that as the nurse made quick work of bandaging her arm and excused herself to send the sample to the lab, but not before waiting until Beca’s color started returning to something closer to normal.

In her absence, Chloe relocated to crouch in front of Beca, a mirror image of how they had started their day. She turned one of Beca's hands over to play with her cool and still-clammy fingers. “You gonna be okay?”

Beca nodded and swallowed thickly. “I've never had that happen before.”

“Yeah, I've never seen you freak over blood. Not more than anyone else anyway.”

Beca shook her head. “I was anxious before we even got here. That,” she gestured at the tiny strip of tape at the bend of Chloe's arm, “didn't help things.”

“Anxious?” Chloe asked with a smile, standing up straight to look down at Beca, who seemed smaller than usual in that medical chair, pale, woozy. “Why are you anxious?”

Beca rolled her eyes and smiled, a sign she was starting to perk up again. “Gee, I wonder why.”

Chloe giggled and considered taking a seat in Beca's lap for a good snuggle but before she could act, the nurse returned, ushering them to Dr. Merriweather’s office to await the test results. They sat side by side in the chairs they'd spent countless hours in, Chloe always in the right and Beca in the left one, fingers entwined. They'd somewhat subconsciously scooted the chairs closer together to make it easier, and their hands rested on Beca's knee, which bounced nervously.
“We’re going to be okay.” Beca’s voice was oddly firm, like she was overcompensating.

“Of course we are.” Chloe didn't sound as sure. She didn't really feel it either, and maybe that's why Beca sounded like she did. To balance them.

“Either way, this has all been...really crazy and I've...learned a lot about myself, and you, and us, and if it's negative, I want to try again until it works.”

Chloe looked at Beca. She was staring straight ahead, out the window opposite them, and Chloe could see her eyes shining more than usual. She lifted their hands and leaned to the side to kiss Beca's knuckles, holding her lips to them for several seconds. “We -”

She was cut off by a knock and quick opening of the door, Dr. Merriweather breezing into the room, file in hand.

“Good morning, ladies,” she said with an unreadable but pleasant smile as she sat down at her desk. “How are we doing?”

“Seriously?” Beca asked, exasperation evident.

“Impatient,” Chloe said in a quick attempt to apologize for Beca's outburst. “Nervous. Excited. Do you have the test results?”

“I do.” The doctor patted the folder she’d arrived with, not bothering to open it.

“How does this work?” Beca asked, grip on Chloe's hand turning into a vise. “You're just going to blurt it out? Pregnant or not pregnant like calling heads or tails?”

Chloe shook their hands a little, trying to get Beca to calm down. She was nervous enough; she didn't need Beca freaking out, too. “Bec…”

“Well, yes,” Dr. Merriweather said with a smile. “Unless you'd prefer charades or Pictionary?”
“Please,” Chloe said, her turn to be exasperated. “Just tell us.”

“Beca, Chloe…” she hesitated, and then smiled.

For a split second Chloe wondered if she had blacked out. She didn't remember standing up. She didn't remember throwing her arms around Beca. She didn't remember bursting into tears, but she was crying. So was Beca. She didn't even remember hearing Dr. Merriweather say the test was positive.

But she had.
“We’re going to have a baby,” Beca whispered in her ear as they hugged.

Chloe didn't trust her voice; she was sure nothing would come out if she tried to speak so instead she just nodded and held Beca.

She didn't know how long they stood that way, and she forgot where they were until a quiet throat-clearing got her attention and she remembered they were standing in the middle of a doctor’s office.

“Sorry,” she said, voice as froggy as she expected it to be, as she and Beca unwrapped themselves from one another to take their seats again, hands clasped more firmly than before.

“No need to apologize. I don't mean to rush you, but there are a few things for us to discuss before you go home and celebrate.” The doctor seemed to smirk a little at the end of her sentence, and in the midst of the excitement, Chloe had forgotten about their medically required bedroom hiatus - which had now ended. Arousal zinged through her, but it was different than usual; it wasn't pure lust, or pure love, or even some combination of the two. She couldn't put her finger on it, but her attraction toward Beca felt different now, like a new layer had been uncovered. Or added.

“What do we need to do?” Beca asked, leaning forward a little. “Vitamins, exercise regimens, Lamaze classes? Birth plans? Dietary restrictions or requirements?”

Chloe smiled at Beca and her eagerness and wondered just how much she had been anticipating this.

“All those things in time, yes. Of course, alcohol is off-limits. Recreational drugs as well. We’ll start with prenatal vitamins, plenty of reading materials, and schedule a sonogram and check-up for four weeks from now.”

That reminded Chloe. “When do we know if we’re having one or two?”

“We’ll definitely try to make a determination at that first appointment.”
“And her due date?”

“The April 17th conception date puts you at January 8th.”

“January 8th, 2018. 1/8/18? Lucky shit,” Beca said with a wide smile as she glanced at Chloe.

“Of course, that day could change due to a variety of factors. Some babies come early, some late. You have several birthing options to consider. All things in due time. So to speak.”

She did it again in the garage, finally speaking to tell Chloe to wait a second while she rushed around the car to open the door and take her hand to help Chloe to her feet.

“I'm not suddenly an invalid, Bec,” Chloe said with a smile as she let the momentum of standing guide her right into Beca’s arms to pull her close.

“No, but you have our baby in you now and I’m not going to have you trip on your wedges and fall out of the car on my watch.”

“Are you going to hold my hand every time I walk somewhere? Because that would be nice.” She smiled into Beca's neck and placed a kiss there.

She felt Beca lean into the affection. “I might.”

“You wanna take care of me?” That's what it was, that new layer of attraction. It wasn't a new thing in itself, Beca taking care of her. She's been doing that for years - backing her up, defending her, making sure she was okay.

But now Beca was protecting her.

Her hands drifted to Chloe's waist. “Duh.”
Chloe giggled against her neck and leaned in to get Beca walking backward until she spun out of Chloe's embrace to lead her into the house.

For her entire life-to-date, Chloe had imagined finding out she's pregnant leading to a raucous celebration. Cheers and tears (there had already been tears) and calling friends and family. Hopping around the room in elation.

Instead, they were quiet, moving through their home sharing little more than glances or a murmured word or two as they drifted through the living room to climb the zig-zagging staircase to their bedroom.

“Two weeks,” Beca said, hands back on Chloe's waist, untucking the blouse from her jeans.

Chloe's fingers worked on the buttons of Beca's shirt, slipping them through the holes one by one. “Miss me?”

Beca's hesitation made Chloe look up from her work where she'd just revealed white lace that made her wonder if Beca had anticipated this breaking of their fast. Beca looked up a second later. “You have no idea.”

Their lips met quickly but carefully. Chloe could feel Beca holding back, her wife’s hands roaming up her back and down her chest to grasp the hem of Chloe’s shirt and lift. Chloe raised her arms to help and smiled when she saw Beca staring intently at her cleavage.

“I think they're bigger.” Her hands hovered thoughtfully just off Chloe's body.

Chloe laughed and used her arms to accentuate them. “You think?”

“Maybe?”

“It's just the bra,” Chloe said with a wink as she reached back to unhook and divest herself of the garment. She caught the millisecond that was Beca's tongue wetting her lower lip and it made her blood rush.
“Not that important, I'm just excited,” Beca said with a smiling glance up from where her focus had fallen to Chloe's body as she covered her breasts with cool hands, making Chloe shiver. “Love 'em no matter what.”

“That's good; I'm kind of attached to them,” Chloe teased. She could hear the airiness in her own voice; she missed Beca, too. “Yours, too,” she added, grabbing Beca's with less gentility than she had received. “This needs to go.” Her hands traced the band around Beca to her back to quickly unhook the bra.

Beca opened her mouth - perhaps to speak, perhaps to make a sound of satisfaction - but Chloe cut her off with a kiss, arms around her neck, fingers in her hair. Beca sighed into it and angled their shuffling trajectory toward the bed until Chloe started to sit down, only to be stopped by Beca's hold on her belt loops.

“No?” she asked, leaning backward a little to let Beca's hold catch her.

“Not yet,” Beca said with a little half-smile that made Chloe weak, because the half-smile came as Beca's fingers moved to the button and fly of Chloe's jeans to open them. She expected them to be pushed down next, but instead Beca's hands landed on her thighs, fingers curled into talons to drag her nails up them, a rough, dull heat through the denim that made her lips part in a gasp.

The heat traveled higher despite Beca's touch changing direction to travel around her hips until she had a grip on Chloe's backside, squeezing it hard enough to bring Chloe to her tiptoes as she got tugged closer, her neck right to Beca's waiting mouth.

“Baby…” she exhaled, twisting her fingers further into Beca's hair. A warm tongue fluttered along the curve of her neck, wet kisses interrupting its path as it traveled from Chloe's collar up to her ear to tug on her earlobe.

“Mm?” Beca questioned. It was rhetorical of course, but Chloe answered by tugging Beca's mouth from her neck to bring it to her lips.

She kissed Beca hard, growing needy. She was rewarded by the hands on her rear finally releasing her so they could work the jeans over her hips. Chloe sat once they got to her knees and scooted back, knowing Beca would tug them the rest of the way off; they'd undressed each other enough times to be efficient about it.
Once the jeans were gone, Beca moved to join her on the bed but Chloe stopped her with a foot pressed against her stomach.

“Um…?” Beca smiled and leaned into it, reaching a bit dramatically toward Chloe who was way out of reach.

“No pants allowed in bed,” Chloe teased, wiggling her toes against Beca’s stomach to make her twist away from the touch. She watched Beca shed her jeans and politely yet excitedly wait for permission at the foot of the bed. “That’s better; come here,” she said, beckoning Beca with a crook of her finger.

Beca crawled onto the bed smoothly, but when she made to settle on top of Chloe between her legs like always she stopped short, shifting to straddle her waist on her knees instead.

“What?” Chloe asked when she saw Beca think about her positioning. “What’s wrong?”

“I don’t want to squash it. You.” Beca shifted to reach between them with one hand and lay her hand on Chloe’s abdomen. “The baby. Or babies.” She was looking down at her hand, brows knit with concern and a touch of awe.

Chloe felt the sting of tears immediately and bit her lip. She lifted her hand to Beca’s cheek to encourage her to look up and meet her eyes. She still looked worried, but the tension in her features softened a bit. “You’re not going to squash any of us. Now come down here, I miss you.”

Beca moved, but Chloe could see how cautious she was being as they both shifted so Beca’s hips could settle between Chloe’s legs. To make her point, Chloe hooked her heel behind Beca’s thigh and reeled her in more firmly while reaching up to pull her down into a kiss, hips lifting for friction against Beca. A moan escaped and Beca reacted immediately, her own hips rocking into Chloe. “Better,” Chloe mumbled against her lip as she dragged her nails down Beca’s back and up.

It made Beca shiver and she nodded, rolling her hips into Chloe as she sent her tongue into Chloe’s mouth to steal her breath. Chloe could feel Beca’s hesitations crumbling so she moaned again, knowing the things her voice could do to her.

Beca broke away from the kiss before the moan had even ended and Chloe watched the flash of
pride on Beca’s face as she looked down at her before firmly pushing Chloe’s chin up and to the side to drop her mouth to her neck. She nipped at it and it made Chloe groan, loud and uninhibited without the muffling of a kiss. It encouraged Beca, who thrust up and against Chloe more quickly as she licked at the sensitive flesh below Chloe’s ear.

It was making Chloe crazy - if felt amazing but she needed more, soon. It had been far too long since Beca had touched her. “God, you’re so good with your tongue, baby,” she breathed, fingernails holding tight to Beca’s shoulders.

Beca lifted her head at the statement and Chloe’s eyes fluttered open to see her smirking.

“What?” she asked, unable to ignore the fact that they were still moving against one another.

Beca’s lips twitched. “If you like it so much, why don’t you ride it?”

Chloe shuddered, the confident, bossy, suggestive words burning right through her. “You haven’t touched me and you’re going to make me work for it?”

Beca laughed, already extracting herself from their embrace to shift off Chloe and prop herself up on her side, hand immediately appearing between Chloe’s thighs to test the wetness there. “Better?”

Chloe gasped and reached for Beca’s wrist to grab it, not to remove it but to bring her closer, guiding it down until Beca was inside her. She held her there, just indulging in how perfect it felt to be touched again - until the need for more became too much to resist. She pushed Beca’s hand away and rolled, urging her onto her back with a kiss as she moved atop her. She started crawling north when Beca’s hands caught her shoulders and stopped her.

“What’s wrong?”

“Nothing.” Beca flashed a smile. “Can I make a request?”

“Anything you want.”
Beca’s hands showed up on Chloe’s hips, pushing and pulling in an effort to twist them. “Turn around? Make this a...mutual affair?”

Chloe’s lips curled into a smile and she kissed Beca soundly. “Still making me work for it?” she teased, though moved off Beca to get on her knees and turn before moving to straddle Beca.

Hands were on her back immediately, trailing down and down and over her hips to urge her lower. She could feel Beca's breath, warm against her, followed by the press of lips against her left inner thigh, and then her right, the softness of a tongue following in the wake of the kisses.

She sighed, still upright, letting her fingertips play along the curves of Beca's breasts. She watched the way her legs shifted restlessly as she brushed over hardened tips and the way they tensed when she pinched them. She definitely missed Beca - not that she hadn’t got her hands on her a few times in that two-week semi-hiatus as Beca’s hormones returned to normal. But that was different, very much a one-sided affair, the few encounters a battle to keep her own arousal in check so it didn’t become overwhelming.

But not now - now the arousal could flourish, and it was doing so, and quickly. She let her knees slip a little wider at the gentle tugging of Beca's hands on her hips, until she felt a kiss right where she needed it.

“Mmm, baby…” she sighed, tilting her hips into the contact.

The soft press of a tongue followed and she groaned; it had been far too long. She heard Beca echo it and saw her shift impatiently again, hips lifting and thighs parting and squeezing until an actual whine escaped her.

She let her hands move along Beca, teasing her ribs and down her stomach to trace along the curves of her hips. She reached further and started to lean down, the motion earning a noise of excitement out of Beca and a firm stroke of her tongue that caught Chloe off-guard and made her arms weak, dropping her more quickly. Her ability to form rational thoughts was slipping, but it was there just enough to know Beca had done that on purpose to hurry Chloe’s descent.

She went voluntarily the rest of the way, pushing Beca’s thighs apart - not that she had to try much. Beca was needy so Chloe didn’t tease, slipping her tongue out and down the wetness between Beca’s legs.
She felt more than heard the moan of gratitude behind her as Beca’s legs spread further and her hips lifted. Beca showed her gratitude as well, flickering more quickly against Chloe. It made it difficult to focus on the task in front of her, but she figured she’d get an A for effort at least; with the way Beca was starting to writhe and grind back against her, she didn’t have to try that hard anyway.

Her own hips were starting to grind, working in a slow circle. It was going to be over for her soon; it had been so long, and she didn’t care that this had only been a few minutes. She knew if she asked - and probably even if she didn’t - Beca would keep going.

With that in mind, she retreated a little, letting her cheek rest on Beca’s thigh to replace her mouth with fingers so she could breathe and just let Beca take her there. Her hips moved on their own accord, starting to become desperate as Beca’s tongue was joined by her lips, suckling exactly where Chloe needed her to.

She cried out, turning to nip at Beca’s thigh, almost forgetting to not bite too hard as Beca’s lips pulled at her. Her fingers moved carelessly against Beca, probably doing more for herself and being able to touch her than it was actually helping Beca.

“Bec...baby…” she whined. She was close, and the way Beca doubled down on her attention made it clear she read Chloe loud and clear. The hands on her hips moved and nails dug into her thighs just hard enough to burn. It made her groan and Beca moaned in response, her hips jerking suddenly under Chloe’s touch.

Suddenly she realized Beca was closer than she had expected her to be, lost in herself as she was. She tried to get a little more precise with her fingers and Beca reacted instantly, moaning again and tugging Chloe down even closer. The action yanked Chloe’s climax closer and she showed her appreciation, fingers slipping down to dip in briefly, making Beca’s entire body roll before withdrawing them and mustering the breath and energy to lean down and use her tongue again.

She could hear it in Beca’s voice, the gradual higher pitching of her moans the dead giveaway that she was on the verge. That was enough to push Chloe over the edge, breaking with a cry as her hold on Beca’s thigh grew too firm and she would probably have fingerprint bruises in the morning but for that minute, Chloe couldn't find it in herself to care.

Beca followed a few seconds later, the one thing that kept Chloe in the moment instead of completely losing herself to the ecstasy that started building again as Beca's lack of precision in her distraction did wonders for Chloe.
The kisses against Chloe turned lazy, though, so she let herself roll off Beca onto her back to stare at the ceiling. “I missed that,” she said with a sigh.

She felt toes nudge her shoulder. “Seriously.”

Chloe laughed and grabbed the prodding foot, kissing the top of it before sitting up just enough to turn and flop back down alongside Beca.

“Holy shit,” Beca said suddenly. And then she burst out laughing.

“What?” Chloe asked, her giggles bubbling up again.

“We’re having a fucking kid!” Beca sounded a touch delirious, but when Chloe looked over at her, she was all smiles and laughs and was already staring back at Chloe.

Chloe reached for Beca’s hand that laid between them to hold it. “Yeah, we are.” Her voice was soft in comparison to Beca’s outburst but no less enthusiastic.

She watched Beca work herself onto her side, her free right hand lifting and coming to rest low on Chloe’s abdomen, cautious and thoughtful as she’d been when they first laid down. “We just corrupted our child. They shouldn’t have heard that. No child should hear their parents having sex, and they’re two weeks into existence and we’ve already scarred them for life.”

Chloe burst out laughing at Beca’s mood shifting from glee to serious concern.

And then Beca’s face split into a grin again. “Kidding. I know they don’t start hearing things inside the womb until eighteen weeks. We have sixteen more weeks to get really nasty before we’re terrible parents.”

Chloe sobered quickly. “You...know when babies start being able to hear?”

Beca was still smiling, fingers drawing swirling patterns over Chloe’s stomach. “And here I thought you’d question the ‘really nasty’ part of that.”
She shook her head, eyes stinging again. “How do you know how many weeks until they can hear?”

Beca shrugged. “Fingerprints at thirteen weeks. Kicking around sixteen or seventeen.”

“How many weeks?”

Beca rolled to reach behind her to her nightstand, fumbling to open the drawer. She rolled back and held up what she’d dug around for, gripping it by the binding to flop it back and forth a couple times in front of Chloe’s face.

Chloe’s breath caught a little. “You’re reading What to Expect When You’re Expecting?”

“Read. I finished it a few weeks ago. I know it’s a cliche book, but I wanted to know what you’d be going through when this worked.” She offered it to Chloe. “Wanna read it? You probably should. You know. Since you’re the one expec-whoa!”

Chloe interrupted Beca by pulling her down with the hand not already entwined with hers, the cold cover of the book pressing against her chest between them as Beca fell on her gracelessly, unprepared as she was to be yanked into an embrace. It wasn’t that comfortable, the book and Beca’s arm at an awkward angle between them, but Chloe held her tightly.

“Erm...babe?” rumbled against her cheek from where Beca’s face had smushed into the pillow next to her.

“Shh.” Chloe tried to pull closer and turned to press a kiss to Beca’s ear before loosening her hold.

She didn’t rush to extract herself from Chloe, though, instead wriggling until she’d set the book aside and returned to kind of half-lay on top of Chloe, holding herself up enough to be smiling down at her.

“So how long are you going to keep being surprised that I’m like...down with this whole starting-a-family thing?” Beca was smiling, not quite smug, a little bemused.
Chloe’s guilt came rushing back to her, despite Aubrey having helped her rationalize her feelings. She started to apologize when Beca’s finger fell over her lips to shush her.

“Don’t apologize for being surprised I’m into being a mom with you.”

Chloe smiled shyly behind the finger and then kissed it so Beca would remove it. “It just makes me really happy.”

“Good. I mean, we’re kind of in it to win it now.” Beca chuckled and leaned down to kiss Chloe. It lingered a little, and then she moved to get cozy next to Chloe. It was too early to go to sleep for the night, but Chloe wouldn’t complain if it happened.

Though a guilt still gnawed at her. “Bec?”

“Hmm?” She was absentmindedly toying with Chloe’s nipple, and when she didn’t stop at Chloe’s question, she covered Beca’s hand in order to stop her and focus.

“I told Bree that we’re trying to have a baby.”

Beca was quiet for a moment and then startled Chloe with a loud sigh. “Oh, Thank God. I told Legacy.”

Chloe shifted so she could pull back a little to try to see Beca at the steep angle of their cuddling. “You told Emily?!”

“Well, you told Aubrey!”

“But Bree can keep a secret!”

“And Legacy can’t?” Beca said, offended for a second until she shook with laughter. “Touche. But in my defense, she hasn’t told anyone, as far as I know. And if she did, no one’s acted like they know.”
Chloe laughed, too, and relaxed. “It was eating at me, though, to not tell someone. You’re not mad?”

“I’m not mad,” Beca said, shaking Chloe’s hand off hers so she could resume her teasing, circles and flicks and pinches. “I did it for the same reason. And since I know you’re already thinking about it, I’m vetoing extravagant pregnancy announcements. And baby gender announcements. I don’t get that. Why are we still making it a big thing about being a boy or girl? What if they’re a they? Or a girl that’s a he or a boy that’s a her or neither, or both, or -”

“Okay, no gender announcements,” Chloe said with a laugh.

“It’s just dumb. What does it matter? The nursery is going to be outer space-themed anyway.”

Chloe blinked hard. “Wait. Outer space-themed?”

“Yeah. Like, glow-in-the-dark stars on the black ceiling, legit painted ones, not those tacky stick-on ones. And in the right places, so the real constellations are there, so they can learn about them and find them in the real night sky when we get out of the city to go stargazing. And the mobile above the crib can be the solar system; I found a killer one online. And I kinda want to paint the walls black, too, but that might feel weird for a baby, I don’t know. So maybe just the ceiling. And maybe one wall, so we can have the Milky Way painted on there? Or maybe a nebula. I’m going to find an artist to come do this. And the crib sheet can have little rocket ships on it. And when we’re in the rocking chair when they’re a little older we could be rocking to blast off into space to go on an adventure together, and…”

Beca’s voice drifted off and Chloe felt her shift a little and then sniffle.

“Make yourself cry?” Chloe teased, her own voice tight.

“Shut up.”
Hi, all you awesome readers!! First up, Happy Holidays and Happy New Year!

I know I’ve been slower than usual with my new chapters; this is due to my starting a new job that is very demanding of my time and energy and I’ve not had the same freedom to write as I once did. Rest assured, I have not and will not abandon this story! I do thank you for your patience!

With that...enjoy a new chapter!

Chloe woke up and got ready for work on Monday like every other day for the last year and a half.

It wasn’t until Beca admonished her for pouring herself a cup of coffee that she remembered something was different.

She was pregnant.

“Sorry,” she said sheepishly as she finished the cream-and-sugar combo for Beca instead of herself and relinquished the insulated to-go cup. “I...it's not really sunk in yet?”

“What?” Beca said, fake-shocked. “You’ve been officially pregnant for two days and you haven't broken every bad habit yet?”

“You shush,” Chloe said with a chuckle as she dug around for the mini bottles of orange juice Beca came home with yesterday when she offered to pick up Chloe’s new prescriptions from the pharmacy. “Extra vitamins and stuff,” Beca had said when Chloe questioned the purchase.

“As long as you kick that meth habit soon.”

Chloe sighed. “Do I really have to?”
She had a text waiting for her at lunchtime. Two, actually. Well, several, in two threads. She thumbed the first one open, from Beca, and smiled.

*Feeling ok?*

*I'm not worried.*

*I just want to make sure you're ok.*

*It'd be nice if you would tell me you're ok tho*

*I realize you're at work and probably aren't seeing these*

*JUST LET ME KNOW IF YOU ARE OK??*

*Seriously Chlo*

*Omg don't make me come check on you*

*I am literally 5 mins from leaving the studio!!*

Chloe laughed and tapped out a quick response thanking Beca for her concern, that it was adorable, and yes she was fine and that it's sweet of her to be concerned, and that she loved her and was sorry she didn't reply more quickly, she was wrangling her kids through an improvisational music lesson. It had been a headache-inducing cacophony, and they'd loved it. So had she.

The other thread was from Aubrey.

*I have some news. Call me when you have a moment.*

*By the way, it's been eleven days, hasn't it? Do you have news, too?*

Chloe shook her head; leave it to Aubrey to be professional even through a text message to her best friend. If Chloe didn't know her as well as she knew herself, the text would feel ominous. Instead, she was pretty sure Aubrey would be informing of her of an unexpected engagement or similar happy news.

She still had five minutes, so she decided to find out; she called Aubrey - who answered on the first ring.
This is Aubrey Posen. Hi Chloe!

Chloe giggled at Aubrey’s obvious high energy and lack of patience for Chloe to respond to her traditional greeting. “Hey!”

“Well?!”

“Well what?” Chloe feigned ignorance.

“I know how to count. It's been eleven days. Or twelve, depending on whether or not you include the day you told me. Am I going to be an aunt?”

Chloe laughed and pressed her hand to her forehead. “It’s too soon to tell people -” An uncharacteristic muffled squeal from the other end of the line made Chloe laugh. “But it looks like you will be.”

“Oh my God...I cannot...you...and Beca!...and...a baby!”

Chloe wished she could see Aubrey right now because she’s experienced many versions of Aubrey being excited, but nothing quite like what she was hearing now. And then she realized she could see Aubrey right now and swapped their phone call to FaceTime and found her red-faced and crying.

“Bree, stop crying, you’ll make me cry and my kids are back in four minutes!” Chloe said with a laugh. She could feel the sting of tears and she blinked them back.

“You’re going to have so many kids!”

All Chloe could do was laugh; she’d never seen Aubrey in such a state and she was more than caught off guard. She wondered if this was how Beca felt every time Chloe got super emotional, unsure of what to do to help the situation. “Just one,” she tried. “Maybe two. For now.”
“Twins!”

“Oh my gosh, okay, this is not the time or place for me to have an emotional breakdown. So press pause on yours, and please, please don’t tell anyone. It is way too early for people to know, because…” She couldn’t bring herself to finish the sentence. “Well, you know why.”

“You’re right, I’m sorry.” She watched Aubrey compose herself with impressive speed, a flash of something sparkly catching her eye as she did so. “I’m so, so happy for you guys. Of course I won’t say anything, but I expect a courtesy notice in advance of your big announcement.”

Chloe laughed and dabbed at the corner of her eye with a knuckle. “Don’t expect anything too over the top. Beca already put the kibosh on that. Now, are you going to show me that rock you’re wearing before the bell rings?”

Chloe woke up with a smile. She stretched, feeling the pleasant pull of muscles sore from the hours of lovemaking the night before. They had gone out for a fancy and ridiculously overpriced dinner under the excuse that their days of doing such things without significant planning were now numbered. She’d driven so Beca could indulge in a glass or two of wine, something Beca resisted but Chloe had encouraged both for Beca’s enjoyment and so she could drive Beca’s Corvette. It had resulted in Chloe getting an adrenaline rush from speeding on the freeway on the drive home and Beca being more than a touch tipsy and they’d failed to even make it back into the house before someone had an orgasm.

It had been Chloe, and it was on the hood of Beca’s car where Beca had deposited her before slipping her lace thong off and tossing it over her shoulder. It was still somewhere in the garage, sure to be found by a handyman during some future embarrassing encounter.

Beca’s turn followed on the staircase landing on the way to the bedroom.

Chloe sighed, enjoying the tinges that came with the memories and rolled over to reach for Beca and officially wish her a Happy First Wedding Anniversary but her hand hit cool sheets instead. She opened her eyes to seek her out; their massive bed and Beca’s comparatively petite body sometimes let her disappear out of reach.

She was gone, but there was a piece of paper lying on Beca’s pillow and Chloe reached for it, smiling. It was torn from a notepad, stationery from the desk at the resort lodge in New Zealand
where they’d spent their honeymoon. Chloe didn’t know Beca had brought it home.

*Good morning, my beautiful wife of 1 year.*

*If you’re reading this, I have successfully (and regrettably) extracted myself from your embrace without disturbing your adorable slumber.*

*Stay in bed as long as you want. I’ll have breakfast ready when you come down.*

*I’ll be working on some music in the office downstairs. I woke up inspired. We should start renovations on it now that I think about it…*

*Happy Anniversary, my love.*

- Beca

Chloe was grinning by the time she got to the end of the note and clutched it to her chest. She took a deep breath to stretch again and the scent of fresh ground coffee made its way to her, followed by the scent of bacon, and Chloe realized Beca was almost assuredly making her favorite chocolate chip pancakes and for approximately four seconds, Chloe wanted nothing more than to devour a stack of them with a stack of bacon.

Approximately five seconds later, it all sounded like the most repulsive food ever invented and another breath filled with the scent of frying pork flipped her stomach.

She barely made it to the bathroom in time.

Beca didn’t magically show up, though, and Chloe remembered she was downstairs, not in the bedroom within earshot when this happened the morning of her pregnancy test.

When it was over, she stood at her bathroom sink, letting the water run until it was ice cold to rinse her mouth and splash on her face.

The bacon smell was pervasive, that fatty burning smell of scalding pig flesh and it made her gag again.

“Baby?” she finally managed to yell. “Beca!!”

She heard Beca bounding up the stairs and she immediately felt terrible. Beca had set out to make today a perfect little day for them and she was about to ruin it. “What’s up, babe? Where ya - oh
God, are you okay?"

“Make it go away.” She was breathing through her mouth to avoid the smell permeating the house and she was aware it might make her look a bit manic.

Beca rushed to her side but stopped short, hands in the air like she was held at gunpoint. “Make what go away?”

“The bac-” Even the word made her gag. “Bacon smell.”

“Oh my God, is this morning sickness?! It is, oh my God!” For the love of all things holy, Beca was smiling.

“Beca -”

“Oh right, right! Sorry, I’m sorry, I didn’t know. I’ll just…” Beca was grinning like an idiot as she backed away and then scampered to the sliding glass doors of the bedroom to push them wide open.

If Chloe wasn’t trying to keep down the handful of water she’d sipped, she would have yelled at her for taking some kind of twisted pleasure in this situation. Instead, she glared as Beca zipped past the bathroom door.

“I’m not happy you’re sick, it’s just the first real pregnancy thing!” Beca shouted as she ran out of the bedroom and down the stairs, presumably to dispose of breakfast and open more windows (at least, that’s what Chloe hoped was happening).

Chloe just shook her head and stared at her pale reflection in the mirror that spanned the length of the bathroom. She waited until she made it five minutes without retching before brushing her teeth, pulling on yoga pants and a hoodie, and taking a glass of water with her to sit on the lounge chair on the bedroom-adjacent balcony to get as much fresh air as possible.

She heard doors and windows sliding open one level below and a few seconds later she saw Beca leave the house and disappear barefoot down the path that led to the small storage shed that mostly housed the groundskeeping equipment. Chloe didn’t go in there much. Beca returned a couple minutes later hauling a box fan with her, banging against her leg as she walked.
Chloe whistled to get her attention, not trusting her stomach to withstand a shout quite yet.

“Oh! Feeling better?” Beca asked, smiling up at her from where she’d paused by the corner of the pool.

“Fresh air,” Chloe said with a nod.

“Yeah, I’m trying to air the place out,” Beca said, lifting the fan as though Chloe wouldn’t have noticed it. “I got everything open and the ceiling fans are on but I figured more is better.”

Chloe smiled; it was another moment of Beca doing something not specifically romantic yet managing to bowl Chloe over with romance. She had a knack for that. “Thanks. And I’m sorry, I...it kind of came out of nowhere. I appreciate the thought, though. It smelled so good and I was so excited and then...I wasn’t.”

Beca shrugged and shifted the fan to the other hand. “It’s okay. Your job is to create a human. My job is to keep you comfortable and happy, which is way less work. So tell me what you want if you know, or don’t want, if you even know, and I’ll make it happen. Even if it’s pickles and ice cream at 3:00 am.”

“Pickles and ice cream?” Chloe frowned and clenched her teeth, ready for the reaction from her gurgly stomach, only for none to come. “That...sounds...gross...I think? Or...not?”

Beca laughed. “I’ll put it on the grocery list. Let me know if I need to bump it up earlier than tomorrow’s run. I’m going to go set this up, okay?”


“How are we doing? Better?”

Chloe was still relaxing in the late morning sun on the balcony. She peeked an eye open in the
bright sunlight to see Beca looking down at her.

“Totes. Almost back to normal. C’mere.” She patted the lounge chair and scooted to make room for Beca’s slight frame to fit in next to her. It was shaping up to be a nice, sunny day, but there was still a touch of cool spring in the air and she pulled Beca close for the warmth. “So, happy anniversary,” she said once Beca was settled, leaning over to peck her lips. “Your letter was super cute.”

Beca shrugged with one shoulder. “Well...paper is the traditional First Anniversary gift. So.”

“So you scribbled me a note on stationery from the ski lodge as my anniversary gift?” she teased.

Beca squirmed immediately. “No! That’s...that isn’t like, your gift or whatever. I haven’t...you were sleeping and I was cooking for you and then you got sick and now we’re out here and...well, where’s mine?!”

Chloe laughed and pulled her close to kiss her soundly. “On the top shelf of my shoe closet.”

“Oh my God, that sounds so pretentious,” Beca said as she pinched the bridge of her nose and scowled. “Who has a closet just for their shoes?”

“I do,” Chloe said with a proud wiggle. “Because my super sexy and super successful wife is an awesome provider and bought me a house with a shoe closet that has a shelf that I know she can’t see what’s on it, because I can barely see if I stand on my tippy toes.”

“And that’s where you hide things?”

Chloe nodded, grinning.

“You do know I could just get the step ladder and snoop now that I know it’s your secret hiding place.”

“I know. But you won’t.” She shrugged and booped Beca’s nose, making her scrunch her face. “If you let me up, I’ll go get your present.”
Beca shook her head and was up and off the lounge chair before Chloe could argue. “You stay. I’ll fetch. And I’m getting the step ladder to find that present, but not because I’m snooping, because it’s time to swap. If that’s okay?” she added, as if realizing she was being too bossy about the situation.

“That’s fine.” She held out her empty water glass. “If you bring me a refill?”

Beca was gone for a few minutes, and Chloe could hear the quiet thump...thump...thump... that told her Beca was jumping to reach the shelf instead of using the step stool that is always resting along the wall in the walk-in closet because Chloe does need it to comfortably reach the higher shelves.

She returned with two wrapped packages and a full glass of water, which she passed to Chloe before taking her spot on the lounge again. “For you,” Beca said, handing Chloe a gift; it was flat, about an inch thick, and slightly biggish - maybe 16” x 20” - and Chloe surmised it was something framed. “You first, go ahead,” Beca said with a nod and wave of a hand.

“Okay!” Chloe said excitedly, flipping the package over to find the seam in the paper to slide her finger under it and along the length to lift the tape. She was right, it was something in a frame and she pulled the paper away and flipped it.

It was a sort of collage, a checkerboard pattern of selfies they’d taken together. At first, Chloe thought it was an assortment of random photos - they’d taken so many over the years. But then she realized they were laid out chronologically, zig-zagging down the long side of the frame in two columns, the very first being the selfie they’d taken on the bench in the courthouse after Beca clipped the lily in Chloe’s hair for their marriage ceremony.

It was followed by other moments captured by selfie:

- at Chloe’s school’s prom where Beca had chaperoned;
- on a ski lift in New Zealand on their honeymoon;
- at the Fourth of July barbecue at Chloe’s school;
- in Chloe’s childhood bedroom on her birthday;
- and in the park at dusk where Chloe had taken Beca for hers;
- on the steps of their new home;
- in front of the first Christmas tree in that new home;
- at the Grammy Awards after-party where they had been shitfaced after Beca’s win for Record of the Year that they genuinely had no recollection of the photos they’d found on their phones the next morning;
- a smiley one of both of them laying in bed, phone held above them, taken after they returned from getting news of the positive pregnancy test just over a month ago.
Chloe traced the timeline with her fingertip, enjoying the memories stirred up by each photograph from their first year of marriage. She could feel Beca’s eyes on her, taking in her reaction to the gift and it only amplified the emotions and she heard herself hiccup with unexpected tears. The other two-thirds of the frame were taken up with another hand-written message. Chloe recognized it immediately, the vows Beca had sung at their impromptu wedding, the vows that were written to be Beca’s marriage proposal.

Will you
Spend all your days with me?
A family of our own
As we start our lives anew.
Are you the one who stays with me
Through seasons of my life?
Chloe, will you be my wife?

Will you
Commit yourself to me,
Knowing we were meant to be?
We will have our day.
There is nothing standing in our way.

All that’s left between us are some vows to say.

Just you and me
And nothing in our way.

“Oh, sweetheart…” she said, choked up with emotion. “I love it.” She ran her fingers around the carved edges of the wooden frame. She turned to face Beca to lean in and capture her lips. “Thank you. It’s perfect.”

She felt Beca kiss her back perhaps a tad too enthusiastically than what the moment called for, and it made Chloe smile. She gave her one more peck and then pressed her forehead to Beca’s. “Down, girl. I’m still a little gurgly.”

“Sorry,” Beca whispered and then tilted her chin to steal another kiss before leaning back. “I’d kind of mentally prepared for a different series of events this morning. Body’s still working on reading the memo.”

“Ooh,” Chloe said with a giggle. “Last night wasn’t enough for you?”

“When is it ever enough?” Beca responded with a smile and a lip bite. “Now, on to more important
“things…” she teased, giving her own gift a shake of curiosity. It gave a dull double-rattle. “What is it?”

“Open it and see!”

Chloe watched Beca pull the red ribbon and white paper off the small cube-shaped box she’d wrapped with extra precision, and pop the top of it open to peer into it, furrow her brow, and reach in to fish out its contents. She pulled out the square of red paper Chloe had painstakingly folded into an origami heart with the help of a YouTube tutorial and glanced back in the box, and then at Chloe.

“Unfold it,” Chloe said with a nod. She bit her lip as she watched Beca carefully unfold it edge by edge to reveal the letter Chloe had written. She had loved that Beca had also followed the first wedding anniversary gift tradition of paper, starting with her own letter left on her pillow and the handmade and framed photos and note. She waited as Beca read the note.

Beca,

We’ve been married for a whole year! Can you believe it? I barely can. I still remember a day (lots of days) not that long ago when I would daydream of reaching this milestone with you, and now it’s here and real and I feel like I need to pinch myself every day to make sure it’s not just another daydream.

Chloe saw Beca’s free hand sneak down and pinch the side of Chloe’s thigh with a smirk, and she knew where Beca was at in the letter.

But it’s not. It’s real, and you’re here with me and I’m here with you and I’m so, so in love with you and you’re so, so in love with me - at least, I think you are?? You better be!

Beca rolled her eyes. “Of course I’m in love with you, you nerd.”

“Good,” Chloe said with another giggle and reached to pinch Beca in return. “Had me worried for a second.”

Beca squirmed from the pinch and stopped Chloe from getting any more pokes and pinches in by grabbing Chloe’s hand and holding it still, but Chloe flipped their grip and pulled Beca’s hand to rest on her stomach.
Because we’re going to bring a child into this world together and they deserve to have so, so much love in their life and I cannot wait to be sitting here, wherever it is we are sitting right now, with you next year, holding our little snuggle bug who is going to depend on us for everything and as much as that scares me, it excites me even more. Because we are going to be mommies together, and I can’t imagine being a mommy with anyone else but you.

Happy Anniversary, baby. I can’t wait for the next one, and the next five, and the next ten, and the next twenty…

I love you with every bit of my heart.

Love, always and forever,
Chloe

Chloe could tell Beca had reached the end of the letter because her eyes stopped scanning lines, but she was still pretending to read, eyes brimming with tears that she tried to blink back once, twice, and then with a huff she moved the box out of the way and threw her arms around Chloe’s neck.

“I love you,” Beca choked out, voice muffled where her face pressed into Chloe’s shoulder. “I’m so happy I married you.”

Chloe wrapped her arms around Beca and pulled her tight. She pressed a kiss to her hair. “So am I,” she said with a watery chuckle. “There’s still something else in that box.”

“I saw. What is it?” Beca sniffled and eased back a little to snag the box from where it had tumbled to the floor.

Chloe nudged her. “Open it, silly!”

“First anniversary is supposed to be paper, you know,” Beca said as she reached into the box to pull out the oblong black case. “And this is definitely jewelry.”

Chloe looked at with wide eyes. “Is it??” She bit her lip to stop a giggle.

“Obviously.” Beca spun the case and pried open the lid with her thumb, her apparent protest dying on her lips. She immediately rolled her eyes and laughed as she plucked the bracelet out of its case.
“My kids helped me make it,” she said, taking it from Beca to help slip it over her hand.

“Really?”

Chloe whispered conspiratorially, “Well, I let them eat the Starbursts that I unwrapped while we watched *Shrek*.”

“It’s stunning,” Beca said as she regarded it with the same fervor as though it was a diamond tennis bracelet and not a rainbow weaving of waxy candy wrappers. “I’ll never take it off. Until I need to wash my hands or shower...venture anywhere else that might be wet.” She waggled her eyebrows at Chloe.

“Beca!” Chloe gasped before cackling with laughter and giving her a shove. “Keep it in your pants.”

Beca leaned in and nipped the shell of Chloe’s ear, making her shiver. “I’d rather keep it in your pants.”

Chloe felt heat start to seep through her, one part of her body not getting the morning sickness memo either. She squirmed, wanting to pull Beca on top of her and do it right there on the balcony outside. But her stomach was empty and a little sloshy and it didn’t seem like the best idea. She did indulge in a little teasing contact of her own, running a hand up Beca’s thigh from her knee and along her side to trace the curve of Beca’s breast through her tee. It made Beca sink into her more heavily. “Later, okay?”

Beca nodded and brushed her lips along Chloe’s cheek and jaw before sitting back a little. “How are we feeling now?”

“A lot better. I think I want some toast. That would probably sit okay.”

“I’ll make you some. And I said ‘we.’” Beca’s hand slipped under the edge of her hoodie to settle on Chloe’s abdomen. “What about Beale 2.0?”

Chloe laughed. “Our baby is not an app update!”
“I know that,” Beca said with a shake of her head. “But just calling it ‘baby’ seems impersonal. And calling it ‘it’ is even worse.”

“We could start talking about names, you know.” Chloe bit her lip, excited.

“Oh, you want to actually have a discussion about it?” Beca teased.

“What’s that supposed to mean!”

Beca’s eyes were bright. “You’re really going to try to tell me you haven’t had your baby names picked out since you were like seven years old? I knew it!” she added when Chloe failed to hide her reaction.

“I’m sorry! You know I’ve been w-” She was cut off with a hand over her mouth.

“It’s fine. I’m open to suggestions.” Beca smiled and returned her hand to Chloe’s stomach. “What’s on that list of yours?

Chloe smiled at the nurse she’d gotten to know so well over the last several months. “C’mon. I’m excited.”

“Wow.”

“Wow, what?” Chloe asked as she got herself situated in her hospital gown on the uncomfortable exam table after having her blood drawn. She watched Beca look around the room and back to her.

“This is just…”

“Really real?” Chloe said with a teasing smile.

Beca nodded and then jumped when there was a knock at the door.

“You can come in!” Chloe called. “Hi, Dr. Merriweather!”

“Hello to you, too! Someone’s chipper today.”

“We’ve been waiting a long time! I don’t mean for you. Just, you know, in general.”

“Of course, of course,” the doctor said with a laugh as she said hello to Beca and went about some preparations. The nurse popped her head in and handed Merriweather a piece of paper with a smile. “Well, we’re off to a good start. You are definitely still pregnant.”
“Oh, I know. I’ve been puking, like, every day.”

“It’s true, she has,” Beca added. “I can’t eat or cook anything without fear of setting her off.”

Dr. Merriweather laughed. “And you’re happy about that! I guess I can understand. But I’ll give you something to try to help. Can you scoot back for me? And heels up.”

Chloe moved back and swung her feet up into the stirrups affixed to the table, chit-chatting about how she’s been feeling while watching her doctor prep a wand-like device connected to a computer and monitor.

“Like we discussed on the phone, we’re going to check and see how things are progressing. It can be difficult to see anything this early in a sonogram, but we’ll see what we can find. And if we don’t see anything today, there’s no reason for alarm; you’ll come back in a couple days and we’ll check again. Sound good?”

Chloe nodded and looked at Beca, who remained calm until her eyes landed on the wand in Merriweather’s hand.

“Whoa, what are you doing with that?” Beca asked.

“This lets us have a better chance at seeing things this early; we’ll start with the standard ultrasounds at your next appointment.”

“It’s too soon to do it on my tummy. You read that book; remember, honey?”

“I know. Yeah, I just...wow...okay. Is it...will it hurt?”

“No more discomfort than a regular pelvic exam.”

“I’ll be fine, baby,” Chloe said with a laugh and a pat to Beca’s cheek. Beca grabbed her hand and squeezed it, pressing closer to the table. “Besides, I think what we have at home is bigger than
that.”

“Oh my God, Chlo.”

Chloe burst out laughing and watched Beca turn three shades of red. It was a rarity to embarrass her with sex nowadays, but she’d found a weak spot: bringing up sex toys at a clinic in front of a doctor.

“You two are refreshing,” Dr. Merriweather said with a laugh of her own. “Nothing wrong with a healthy sex life. Now, Chloe even if you aren’t worried about this, your body can tense up and make it uncomfortable to insert. You’re welcome to do it yourself, and then I’ll take over; many women choose to. Makes it all feel a little less clinical.”

“Okay, sure,” Chloe said after considering it for a moment.

“You’re going to -”

“Nothing you haven’t seen me do before, baby,” Chloe said with a wink, doing as instructed.

“This is a doctor’s office.” Beca seemed mortally offended. “The doctor is right there.”

“Oh calm down, you Nervous Nelly. You’re going to have to get used to other people being all up in my vajayjay this year.”

Beca snorted in mock dissent. “We’re going to have to have a little talk, Doc.”

“I promise, I’ll take the utmost care of her vajayjay. And that’s perfect Chloe. I can take it from here.”

They watched shades of gray move and squish around on the monitor until a pocket of black showed up. The doctor tapped a key or two on the keyboard and the contrast changed a bit.

“I think...ah, yes, here we go.” There, on the screen, along the edge of the wobbly black circle, was
a dot of brightness no bigger than a pea. “There’s your baby.”

Chloe didn’t realize she was crying until she felt Beca brushing tears off her cheeks. She glanced up at her and saw her push a few tears of her own from the corners of her eyes. “Is that...what…” Chloe didn’t know what to say. She felt like she had a hundred questions but didn’t know a single one to ask.

“I know it’s not a lot to look at right now, but if I can...do you see that fluttering? That’s the heartbeat.”

Beca squeezed her hand, covering their grip with her other to hold Chloe’s. “Can we hear it?”

“Of course.” Dr. Merriweather adjusted more settings and audio clicked on, along with a visual monitor on the screen, and the room was filled with the quick whoom-whoom-whoom of a tiny heartbeat.

“Oh my gosh. Beca!” Chloe said, struggling to get words out as she glanced back and forth between the screen and her wife.

“Yeah,” Beca said, her voice breathy. “Wow. That’s...wow. I love you,” she added, like she was unexpectedly struck with the feeling.

Chloe pulled their entwined hands over to press a kiss to Beca’s knuckles. “I love you, too.”

“Sounding great,” Dr. Merriweather said. “I’m going to take a few measurements and we’ll take a look and see if they have the place to themselves or if they have a roommate.” She smiled at her own humor and Chloe would have found it hilarious if she wasn’t so overcome with other emotions.

“We’ll be okay if it’s twins,” Beca said with a nod. “We can do it. Two babies, two parents. Totally fine.”

It was quiet for a few minutes, the heartbeat fading as the focus of the sonogram shifted to be replaced with clicks and beeps.
“Try to relax, Chloe. We’ll be finished soon.”

She didn’t notice she’d tensed up and took and released a long breath. Bec’s hand moved to rest on her shoulder and tap out a quiet beat as they waited.

And waited.

And waited.

And waited.

“It’s okay, just tell us,” Chloe said, unable to bear the suspense.

“It’s still early, and we’ll check again at your next appointment, but today it’s looking like you have one hearty baby on the way.”

Chloe had accepted it before the appointment, but hearing it, that one of their little embryos didn’t make it...a wave of sadness washed over her. Loss.

“Oh. Okay.” It was Beca. “So, one.” She sounded disappointed, too.

“It looks that way. And everything is right on target with its development. I’ll have a few stills of the sonogram printed and you’ll be able to download the video through your patient profile later today. Did you have any questions?”

Chloe felt like she had whiplash and she moved somewhat numbly when Dr. Merriweather patted her foot so she could sit up. She shook her head.

“Not right now,” Beca answered. “Thanks.”

“You can have the room for a few minutes. If you have any questions, you can ask for me up front. Otherwise, I’ll see you in four weeks.”

The doctor took her leave and whatever emotion Chloe had been holding in ripped free and she broke down crying. It was all too much - seeing, hearing their child for the first time.
Understanding that it was likely they lost what could have been another.

The concept that this was really real and she was thirty-some weeks from holding their child in her arms for the first time.

The fact that at some point, Beca had climbed onto the tiny exam table to sit behind her and wrap an arm around her to rock them back and forth. “We’re going to be parents,” she murmured into Chloe’s hair as she smoothed it. She pointed at the image still paused on the screen. “And that’s our baby, and they will be perfect.”

Chloe sucked in a stilted breath and tried to nod.

“And you are going to be the best mom in the world,” Beca continued. “And I am going to be the worst and completely mess them up, but it’s okay because you always did like a fixer-upper.”

Chloe hiccuped a laugh and hugged the arm that was pressed protectively across her chest. “Yeah, I do.”

“I’m lucky you do or we wouldn’t be sitting here right now.” Beca leaned around to press a kiss to Chloe’s cheek and Chloe leaned into the affection. “With a baby on the way.”

August 2017

“We’re going to need child-proof locks on all the windows and doors,” Beca said as they made a slow loop through their home with their hired contractor. “And latches on some of the kitchen and bathroom cabinets. I’ll show you which ones.”

“And we’ll need some type of security system for the pool, to keep kids out, and tells us if something’s in the water or opens the gate or whatever’s best to install,” Chloe added, prompting a detour outside for measurements and photos of the pool area. “We’ll be inside when you’re finished.”
The contractor gave a wave and they returned to the house, making their way upstairs to the mess that was their future nursery.

“It’s coming along, right?” Beca said, gesturing around the room.

They had been slow to get started on the remodelling and babyproofing; they had every intention to do it over the summer, only to take an impromptu trip to Europe for a month in honor of Chloe’s birthday once her morning sickness eased and Beca wrapped Emily’s album (which had taken much longer than expected).

It had been the first time in three years they both had a significant length of time with no commitments, except to one another.

They also knew it would be the very last time they had no commitments, except to one another.

Now it was the middle of August, Chloe’s summer break would be over in less than a month, and the new nursery was little more than an empty box of a room.

"I guess?” Chloe answered with a sigh. "I’m ready for this mess to be done."

"They said they’ll be finished painting tomorrow and then all this junk will be gone."

"Remind me when Clementine is coming?"

“The 3rd.”

“Right, sorry,” Chloe said with a shake of her head. Clementine was a hipster of the highest order; a Brooklyn artist, Beca had come across her work on Instagram (after Chloe had taught her how to search hashtags) and promptly flown her to Los Angeles to discuss painting the nursery. She was the sweetest girl with a take-no-shit attitude; it was no surprise to Chloe that Beca had taken to her. Chloe had, too. “Did we ever find out if that’s her real name?”

“No.” Beca smiled. “Wanna make a bet?”
“We both think it’s fake!”

“Then I’ll take the bet that it’s real.” Beca offered her hand for shaking.

“What’s the wager?”

“If it’s fake, you’re making dinner for a week. If it’s real…” Beca paused and then smirked. “I’ll let you do whatever you want to me.”

Chloe laughed and turned to leave. “Sounds like a no-win for me.” She felt Beca catch her by the wrist to stop her and press herself against her back.

“Then I’ll do whatever you want,” Beca breathed in her ear before biting it and running her hands over Chloe’s rear to squeeze.

Chloe yelped and twisted away with a giggle. “Deal.”

“Deal.”

August 2017

“Close your eyes.”

“Why?” Chloe asked with a smile.

“Because I said so. Do you want me to blindfold you?”

Chloe smiled bigger. “Maybe. It’s been awhile.”
Beca huffed and stepped behind Chloe to put her hands over her eyes. “Close enough. Ready?”

“I still don't know what all the fuss is about,” she said as she shuffled forward, Beca guiding her with a hand to her lower back.

Chloe did have a little bit of an idea, though. Beca tended to be a bad secret-keeper, overcompensating in the detail of her answers when questioned about her suspicious activity. And for the last several weeks, Beca had declared the nursery off-limits to Chloe, citing potential health hazards with the fresh paint and lingering drywall dust. Of course, Beca had taken no worry to Chloe being in there all the time during the renovation, but as soon as the contractors departed, she was banned.

She played along because Beca was trying so hard and it was, frankly, adorable. But it was hard to remain in the dark when she would see broken down cardboard boxes shoved into the recycle bins the few times she managed to take out the trash without Beca snatching it out of her hands, insisting she would take care of it.

Beca was building a nursery.

“I'm ready.”

She heard the door open and there was a beat of dramatic pause before she felt Beca's hand disappear. She kept her eyes closed for a moment longer, enjoying the suspense.

“Okay. Open them.”

Chloe stood in the entrance to a new world.

The last time she saw the room it was a barren primer white.

Now...now the wall she faced was painted with an elaborate but whimsical landscape of what she realized was...the entire earth. Desert morphed into ocean which wrapped around a corner onto a second wall with mountains into grasslands, depicting all manner of flora and fauna. A blue sky, dotted with songbirds in flight and geese in formation and fluffy clouds that framed the window,
the shade of blue darkening the higher her eyes went until it exploded into a sea of purple-black across the ceiling that was speckled with dots of white.

There was no cloud nebula on the wall to the left like they had once discussed. It was actually rather plain, a simple clean shade of gray.

“Do you hate it? It’s too much, right? It’s too much.”

“No, Bec...it’s…”

She stepped into the room which was also furnished, or, mostly furnished. There was a chest of six drawers, a bookcase, a nightstand, and a changing table, all matching, made of a rustic gray wood. There was a lamp on the nightstand and a handful of books she didn’t remember buying on a shelf.

Everything was placed with purpose and thought, but there was one very important thing missing.

“There’s a crib, too,” Beca said, pushing past her to reach behind the door and drag out a heavy-looking flat box and leave it leaning against the wall. “I thought we should build it together. And I have more stuff, but like...I wanted you to see this first because it’s okay if you don’t like it, I know maybe it’s tacky or something or not what you had in mind but everything I’ve read said colors and shapes are really stimulating for brain development, and -”

It had been rising like water in a bath, and then it was a tidal wave, the emotion catching up with the moment and Chloe burst into tears.

“Oh no, you’re crying. Bad crying?” Beca rushed over and grabbed Chloe by the shoulders.

Chloe shook her head.

“Good crying?”

She nodded and pulled Beca in to hug her. “You did all this?”
“I mean, I didn’t paint it. Well, no I painted that wall,” she said, pointing at the gray one.

Chloe hugged her harder and then let go, opting instead to grasp her hand so she could walk around and take in the detail of the panoramic depiction of the planet. There was a particularly cute dolphin in the ocean sector and her appreciation must have been obvious.

“I knew you’d like that one,” Beca said, pointing at what Chloe was admiring.

Chloe’s eye caught a shadowy figure set further away in the scene, off in the distance. “You painted a shark in our baby’s room?!”

“Oh, sharks get a bad rap. They are really cool and important to the ecosystem or whatever. Don’t make our kid biased against sharks. There’s a snake in the plains part and a tarantula in the desert, too. Not that I like either of those things, but...we should be equal animal opportunists.”

Chloe barked a laugh and pinched Beca’s cheek. “I can’t deal with how cute you are.” It made Beca blush, and for a second it felt like old times. Especially when Beca rolled her eyes in response.

Beca walked her through the regions of the world, pointing out the special things about it that she thought Chloe would like (which she did), like the baby elephant holding its mother’s tail and the baby gorilla on its mother’s back and the twin polar bear cubs, and Chloe noticed maybe a theme was developing.

“They all have babies!”

Beca lit up in the same way she did when it was Chloe’s turn to open a gift at Christmas. “Yeah!”

“I gotta say it again: I can’t deal with how cute you are. Bec...baby, this is...so amazing. You are amazing.”

Beca gave an awkward but proud kind of shrug. “I told you. You're creating a person. This stuff is the least I can do. How is that person by the way?” Beca laid her hand over the slight, only recently noticeable swell of Chloe's abdomen.
“They say thank you for this amazing room and that you're a pretty rad mom.”

Beca grinned, tongue poking out between her teeth. “You’re welcome.”
“Chlo, honey, don’t. I’ll get that,” Beca said over top the box she was holding. Chloe was reaching for a box identical to the one she was carrying, and that was not okay. “What the fuck is in here Aubrey? Dumbbells? It’s heavy as shit.”

“Yes,” Aubrey answered as Beca passed her in the doorway.

Beca half-dropped the box on the floor of Eric’s house with a telling metal clang. “Maybe next time use smaller boxes for them. Or label them ‘heavy as shit.’” She huffed and turned to make another trip to the moving truck, meeting Chloe halfway; she’d thankfully traded her first choice of box for what appeared to be a lamp covered in bubble wrap. “I thought you, of all people, would have your moving boxes labeled and organized by size, room, and shade of brown.”

“I was busy,” Aubrey explained, in great length and detail, the paperwork and meetings involved in finding someone to run The Lodge At Fallen Leaves in her absence.

“You could have hired movers,” Beca countered. “My back is killing me.”

“I don’t trust strangers with my things,” Aubrey said simply.

“Where’s Eric?” Beca was aware she was whining. Not that she cared. “You’re his fiancée moving into his house and not to be sexist but three women are moving you in. And one of us is pregnant.”

“It’s me,” Chloe said as she exited to make another trip. “I’m the pregnant one.”

“We know, Chlo,” Beca said with a laugh as she jogged to catch up with her wife just to swat her on the ass. “Thanks for the non-stop reminders.”

Chloe’s response was to squeal and hop and put more distance between them as she ran to the moving truck, leaving Beca and Aubrey behind.

“We don't need a man. And he’s at work.”
“He couldn’t take time off to help you move?”

“He offered, but I insisted.”

Beca cracked an imaginary whip.

“Besides, I wanted the quality time with my girls. He’s not the only reason I moved here.”

“Aww, Bree!”

Beca rolled her eyes at Chloe swooning over Aubrey’s sentiment, but she smiled, too, and bumped the blonde’s hip with her own.

It had been quick - relatively speaking, anyway. The last time Beca overheard Chloe talking to Aubrey about her boyfriend, there was a lot of chatter about the need for a very specific schedule of life events; of course, Aubrey had the next ten years of her life mapped out in a planner. She was always meticulous, especially about things that were important to her, like their militarized Bellas’ rehearsal schedule back in college, the way she ran her lodge, to mundane things like scheduling catch-up phone calls with Chloe (even though Chloe always called her whenever she felt like it).

Not three months earlier, right around her own wedding anniversary, Chloe had spilled the beans with a shriek and plenty of tears to Beca when they got home from work that, several months ahead of schedule, Aubrey was engaged.

And not only was she engaged, she was moving to Los Angeles because her fiancé secured a partnership in his father’s law firm and she found it a good a reason as any to be able to be closer to her ‘sisters.’

Chloe, of course, has been bouncing off the walls in excitement over her best friend’s impending arrival for weeks. Beca has done her part to bemoan it, but they all know she’s only doing it for the sake of humor because Beca has considered Aubrey one of her best friends for a very long time. She was happy, too, to have an old friend in town. She had her new network of LA friends, but the concept of having someone else around who knew her before she was Grammy Award-winner and multi-platinum selling Beca Mitchell, someone who acknowledged her now as Beca Beale when appropriate, was a nice one.
Dare she think it, it was nice to know there was someone else around that knew plenty of embarrassing stories about her college years.

“No we just need to get Emily out here permanently and we can start up a West Coast chapter of the Bellas!” Chloe had taken a seat on the edge of the open back of the truck while she waited for the other girls to catch up with her, but instead of hopping down and resuming the trek in and out of the house she stayed in the truck to wiggle boxes toward the edge so Beca and Aubrey could reach them.

“Hilarious,” Beca deadpanned, but the concept did make her smile once she had a box in front of her face.

“Oh my God, we need to get a tiny Bella uniform for your baby!” It was half a shriek from Aubrey and Chloe’s reaction was amplified by the metal box she was in.

“No, we don’t!” Beca yelled over her shoulder.

“Yes, we do!” was Chloe’s immediate response, and Beca knew it was inevitable.

And she couldn’t wait.

“I distinctly remember vetoing extravagant announcements.” Beca sat on the bathroom counter as she let Chloe do her makeup. She was, of course, more than capable of doing it herself, but Chloe had asked with puppy eyes and a pout and Beca had no choice but to allow it.

Chloe tutted and touched Beca’s chin so she’d look up while she dabbed concealer under her eyes. “You vetoed extravagant gender announcements.”

They’d had the debate a dozen times in the last week over the course of setting this up, a discussion Beca knew was fruitless, lost from the start. “I thought it went without saying that extravagant announcements of any kind would fall under that umbrella.”
“You should have been more specific,” Chloe sang, and then took a liner to Beca’s lips in what Beca knew was a purposeful action to block further argument.

Beca let her lips twitch in a quick smile as Chloe painted them with a brush. Nothing in these recent chapters of her life had gone how she thought it would, so what was one more deviation from her non-plan?

“Blot,” Chloe directed as she handed Beca a tissue. “That’s such a good color on you.”

Beca glanced at the lip print on the tissue she gave back to Chloe to toss and saw she’d used her Dragon Fruit shade, one Beca rarely used because she thought it too bright, but it was unsurprising that Chloe had chosen to use it; she’d picked it out for Beca in the first place. Beca snagged Chloe by the waist with her foot and reeled her back in close. “It’d look better on you,” she said suggestively. She leaned in to kiss her but Chloe angled her lips out of reach with a giggle.

“Wait ‘til we’re done. Then I’ll let you put it anywhere you want.” Chloe darted in quickly to kiss Beca’s cheek, her own lips still bare, and ran her fingertips along Beca’s thighs.

The touch made Beca squirm; Chloe’s libido, which had all but disappeared at the start of this pregnancy to be replaced with morning sickness, had come roaring back in the last week and they’ve been making up for lost time ever since. Beca groaned at the promise of what was in her very near future. “Hurry up, let’s get this over with.” She hopped off the counter and made her way downstairs to take her spot on the couch.

They’d told their families already, a couple weeks ago, starting with Skyping Chloe’s parents, which of course had been an hour long weepy conversation about growing up, the beauty of children, and the miracle of life. Then it was a phone call to her brother to let him know he was going to be an uncle, and two dozen white and yellow roses had shown up on the doorstep an hour later. Beca’s parents were next, and that conversation was a lot about her dad being proud of her and how it was a lot of responsibility but he knew she was ready for it, and that he was too young to be a grandfather. Aubrey was the first non-family member to know, and because once Beca had confided in Legacy that they were trying, the girl had bugged Beca about the results until she caved. She’d held up her end of the deal, though, and kept the news secret from the rest of the Bellas.

The rest of them were about to find out now, and Beca opened her computer to sign in to Skype for the group video chat they tasked Aubrey with coordinating. Most of the girls were already online and immediately started sending her messages asking what was going on; Legacy’s messages to her were a series of emojis that seemed to indicate she was about to pass out from the excitement and stress of keeping the secret for so long.
“Sorry, sorry,” Chloe said when she finally showed up. “I know I’m late. I wanted to change.”

“Again?” Beca looked her over; she had already assured Chloe she looked great in her other outfit, but she’d changed out of it and into a new sundress Beca hadn’t seen before, and - “Whoa.”

“Hmm?” Chloe settled next to Beca and leaned forward to look at the messages on the screen.

“You’re...wow. Okay. They’re uh...it’s definitely not just the bra anymore.” She shamelessly eyed the ample cleavage on display and then reached out to trace a finger over the curves.

“They’re no bigger now than they were when you saw them two hours ago.” Chloe let her play, but when Beca made to full-on cup one, she grabbed her hand to instead hold it down on her lap.

Beca wasn’t so sure about that, but she knew she’d decide for herself when this dog and pony show was finished. “Alright, let’s get on with it,” she said as she reached to open and connect the multi-way video call.

She watched their friends’ faces pop up one at a time in squares tiling across her screen - Legacy was the quickest to accept the call, followed by Aubrey. Jessica and Ashley showed up in the same square, followed by Lilly, Cynthia Rose, Flo, and finally Stacie, who apologized for being late having just returned from a date.

The chatter was loud and nonstop as everyone said hi to everyone else simultaneously and all Beca could do was sit there and wait for them all to shut up, Chloe included - until Aubrey whistled so loud from her square that it hurt everyone’s ears and brought silence.

“So what’s all this hullabaloo for?” Amy asked from her square. She was apparently calling in from her phone, sitting in a chair at a nail salon getting a pedicure.

“Well -” Beca started, but she was interrupted by Stacie.

“Chloe, your boobs are humongoUSOHMYGOD YOU’RE PREGNANT!”

The exclamation was followed by gasps and demands to know the truth and threats of imminent
tears. Beca expected Chloe to respond since it was she who was the subject of the matter, but unsurprisingly, she’d broken down crying and was struggling to pull herself together so Beca reached to grab the print they’d brought for just this purpose, and held up the image from Chloe’s latest sonogram.

The reaction was instant, more shrieks, actual tears, many flailing hands, Flo was jumping up and down cheering and Jessica and Ashley were hugging each other, presumably crying. Emily seemed to be screaming into a pillow letting out all the pent-up excitement, Amy was hugging the women in the chairs next to her and shouting about how she was going to be a father, Cynthia Rose was applauding and pointing right into her camera in a way that Beca assumed was meant to imply she’d done a good job, Lilly had disappeared, and Aubrey was smiling quietly in her little square, teary-eyed.

“Can you guys, like, all mute yourselves for five minutes and let us talk?” Beca said loudly enough to break through the ruckus. One by one the celebrations cut out until they were in silence. “Thanks. So uh, yeah. Chloe’s pregnant,” Beca started, letting Chloe sniffle next to her until she was just hugging Beca’s arm and resting her head on her shoulder. “She’s due January 8th, no we don’t know if it’s a boy or a girl and we aren’t going to be finding out in advance. We’re going live on Facebook in ten minutes to like, publicly announce it and we didn’t want you guys to find out that way. And it’s not going to be public info, but you guys can know because I know you want to know - we did IVF, with my eggs and Chloe’s brother’s...stuff so...here’s hoping we get a happy ray of sunshine Beale instead of a Mitchell.”

“Either way, they’re going to be a Beale,” Chloe added with a sniff and a smile. “Like us.”

Beca watched everyone react to the news and Chloe’s sappy statement; it varied from Emily openly weeping to Amy fake gagging.

There was a quiet click and then Aubrey spoke. “Thank you for not telling everyone by way of a Facebook status update this time.”

Beca rolled her eyes at the reminder of how they announced both their engagement and their elopement. “No, we’re saving that for the strangers.” She glanced at the time; their live broadcast had been announced in advance at the urging of Beca’s publicist and would start up automatically, ready or not. “We gotta go do that, you guys can watch on my Page if you want. Just give us like, twenty minutes, and you can call us back or whatever.”

There was a chorus of well-wishes and goodbyes and demands for Chloe to stand up so they could see her baby bump - which was still small but effective nonetheless in making everyone swoon and Beca finally had to disconnect the call herself since no one was hanging up. She opened her Facebook Page and saw the live feed counting down from five minutes.
“You okay?” she asked Chloe, who was eerily quiet after so much excitement.

“Yeah,” Chloe said. “I just really love those girls.”

Beca chuckled and put her arm around Chloe’s shoulders to hold her close and press a kiss to her hair. “So do I.”

“Oh, no, don’t mess up your lipstick,” Chloe said with a burst of energy. She pulled back and grabbed Beca’s chin to examine what damage had been done, but decided it was minimal enough to let slide. “Oh geez, I’m going to be on live TV in like two minutes and I bet my face is a mess!”

Chloe was off the couch and up the stairs before Beca could tell her she looked fine, which meant Beca was alone on the couch staring at a timer that was now showing under three minutes. There was no stopping it - once it reached zero, she would be live to her Facebook audience of who knows how many. Alone or not.

“Babe, I need you to hurry!” she shouted nervously. She busied herself by darting into the guest bathroom to reassure herself that Chloe wasn’t lying about her lipstick situation, give her hair a fluff, and adjust her bra. Chloe still hasn’t returned by the time Beca was back on the couch and she bounced her knee nervously. Less than two minutes now, but much to her relief, she heard footsteps.

“Sorry, I’m sorry!” Chloe was saying as she made her way back downstairs. She plopped onto the couch with a huff - wearing a completely different outfit.

“Why…?”

“I don’t need everyone in the world staring at my boobs,” she said with a gesture at her chest. The sundress had been replaced with a loose-fitting off-the-shoulder black blouse and...

“Sweatpants?” Beca said with a smirk.

“No one is going to see. Might as well be comfortable.” Chloe flashed a smile and toyed with the way her shirt draped. “Plus, easy access for later,” she added with a wink that made Beca’s pulse race. “Ooh, ten seconds!”
Beca watched the timer tick down and felt the familiar rush of adrenaline she always got right before walking out onto a stage, whether Lincoln Center or “The Tonight Show.” But as much as she didn’t want it to be the case because it made her feel like a fame whore (which she wasn’t), the moment the cameras rolled, her nerves fell away and this weird extroverted performer version of herself showed up.

So when the green light came on alongside her webcam, her performer persona slid right into place.

“Hey guys!” she said with a wave, watching the viewer numbers grow by the second. “Thanks for coming. In case you somehow don’t already know, this gorgeous woman right here -” she put her arm around Chloe's shoulders and pulled her close - “is my wife, Chloe.”

“Hey!” Chloe chirped with a wave before catching Beca off-guard with a kiss.

“Uh, anyway,” Beca said after her moment of distraction, “I - we have some news to share with you.” She spared a glance at the comments popping up in real time and smiled that they were swooning over Chloe and their kiss and then the abrupt change of people guessing their news and preemptively freaking out. “Aaaand some of you figured it out. But yeah, Chloe and I are having a baby! Well, specifically Chloe.”

“That’s me, I’m pregnant,” Chloe said with a giggle.

“Yeah. That’s her. So, anyway, you guys are awesome, and I just wanna ask that you’re like, chill about this cuz, you know: personal. But I’m sure now that we’ve told everyone Chloe’s just going to document the whole thing on Instagram anyway.”

“@chloemarieb, hashtag Bechloe baby!” Chloe piped in.

“There’s a hashtag?” she asked, momentarily forgetting they were broadcasting live to thousands right now.

Chloe grinned. “There is now.”
“Oh my God.” Beca turned back to the screen. “I guess follow #BechloeBaby? And Chloe. Because I’m terrible with this stuff.”

“You do okay, baby,” Chloe said with a nudge and a kiss to her cheek and Beca watched nonsensical jumbles of characters show up in the comments. The term *keys mash* came to mind and she smiled.

“Okay, we’re gonna go now. And uh, we see all your comments and stuff so thank you. And maybe I’ll try this Facebook Live thing again sometime?” She checked the comments one last time. “No! We are not broadcasting the birth. You weirdos. Alright, Beca out!” She reached to end the broadcast but not before hesitating long enough for Chloe to say her goodbye.

“I guess that went okffffff!” Beca was cut off and knocked backward by Chloe kissing her until she was on her back on the couch.

It took her a second or two to catch up, unprepared as she was, but when she did she threaded her fingers through Chloe’s hair and twisted her hips to get her feet up on the couch to be more comfortable.

Chloe was being aggressive and it made Beca sizzle. She decided to test the waters, see where things were heading - not that it wasn't obvious with the way her lip burned where Chloe was biting it.

She made to sit up, really not doing more than tensing her stomach and lifting her neck, and a hand on her shoulder stopped her and held her down. A quiet, “Nuh uh,” against her mouth made her smile and she felt it returned, the tension broken for a second.

Neither of them said anything, though, just acknowledged the moment and then Beca’s wrists were pinned to the armrest of the couch above her head. She tried to send her tongue into Chloe’s mouth but she was blocked - by Chloe's slipping into hers. It was slow, and deep, and rhythmic and she sighed into it, moving in tandem.

She gave her hands a wiggle and felt the pleasant possessiveness of Chloe tightening her grip. But then she felt Chloe shift, releasing her wrists to slip a hand behind Beca’s neck to support it as they kissed. Beca hadn’t noticed the ache there caused by the angle she’d been pushed into, but she felt it eased at Chloe’s touch. There was shifting and shuffling and Chloe worked them down far enough that Beca could finally lay flat.
It was a relief and she reached for Chloe, forgetting she’d been somewhat instructed to keep her hands to herself. But the second she ran her hands down Chloe’s back and then remembered and pulled them away, Chloe shivered.

“Touch me.” It was whispered against Beca’s lips before they were sealed by Chloe’s again and she ran her hands freely up and back down Chloe’s back again. Her fingers met bare skin around her waist where her shirt had ridden up a bit and Beca traced it slowly, right along the edge of her pants, feeling the dips in her back and the curves of her hips. Beca had every inch memorized.

But that’s where it became...certainly not surprising by any means but just...different because Beca knew exactly where the v-lines of Chloe’s abs started, but they were gone now. They’d been gone for several weeks, in fact, but she wasn’t used to it yet. It was a novelty almost, and she backed up and traced the pattern again, from the dip of Chloe’s back to the soft curve of her stomach.

Before all this - before the pregnancy, before their marriage, before Chloe - Beca couldn’t wrap her head around the concept of sex during pregnancy. She imagined it would be weird and unsexy and clumsy and she was certain that when she was pregnant, she wouldn’t want anyone to touch her.

Though now, after Chloe and marriage and this pregnancy, Beca thought it fascinating. She’d never been more attracted to Chloe, caused by some maternal switch, she figured, flipped by Chloe carrying their child. She splayed her fingers over Chloe’s stomach at the thought and just held them there for a minute feeling the warmth.

Chloe huffed a little and Beca knew she was being admonished for getting distracted. That was sexier, too. Chloe had turned into a woman who was “always on,” and it made Beca feel sexy, too, always being desired. She remembered how it was when their situations were reversed and it was Beca with a crazy libido thanks to her hormone treatments. She had wanted, needed Chloe constantly. The memory drove Beca’s hands higher, over Chloe’s ribs and briefly to her back again to unhook her bra. She pulled the straps down Chloe’s arms and Chloe lifted one hand and then the other to let Beca pull it off. Her shirt hung limply over her shoulders and Beca made her wait while she dragged her nails down the expanse of her bare back to make her shudder.

It worked and Chloe moaned and adjusted her stance over Beca, still on her hands and knees. Beca knew Chloe was being impatient, the force of her kiss pressing her head into the cushion of the couch.

“Touch me,” she repeated, this time as a whine, not a whisper.

Beca kept her smirk to herself and instead kissed her back harder and trailed her fingers down
Chloe’s sides to move up and under her shirt. She followed the curves of the underside of Chloe’s breasts and Beca heard her huff again so she turned her hands to cover them and cup them gently.

They’d both learned the hard way a few weeks ago that all of Chloe’s sensitive parts were now super sensitive; Beca had pinched and Chloe had cried. So now, despite Chloe’s very apparent impatience, Beca was gentle, just holding for a moment before moving to draw slow circles over the flesh in her hands. That was different, too, from what she’d come to memorize over all their time together. It wasn’t just a good push-up bra anymore. Her B’s had turned into C’s, and despite all of Beca’s joking and teasing, she didn’t care what size Chloe’s breasts were. But there was still something sexy about there being more of Chloe to touch. She couldn’t help herself and covered them again, squeezing this time and Chloe whimpered, finally breaking their kiss to drop her mouth to Beca’s neck.

That made Beca moan and arch her neck to offer it to Chloe. She shifted beneath her wife, all the making out was taking its toll and she wanted to be touched, too, but with the way Chloe hovered over her, everything below her shoulders was painfully ignored. She could wait, though, because she knew once she took care of Chloe, Chloe would take care of her; depending on Chloe’s mood, she might not have to wait so long as that.

“Touch me, baby.” It wasn’t a request anymore; it was a command, and it came with a warning of teeth just shy of The Spot on Beca’s neck and it made Beca give in and send a hand south, over the new curves and into Chloe’s sweatpants, meeting no other barriers.

“Easy access, hmm?” she teased as she reached lower between Chloe’s legs. She was gentle; they’d learned that lesson the hard way, too.

Chloe’s only response was to breathe an, “Oh my God,” into Beca’s neck before putting her tongue to work along Beca’s neck.

It, and the wetness under her fingers, made Beca moan and shift again; she needed relief, too, and her neck wasn’t going to do it for her today. She hesitated for a second, and then decided to just go for it and abandoned the breast she was still holding and made up for the loss by pressing the slightest bit harder against the swollen flesh under her fingertips. Chloe moaned and rocked a little and Beca reached between them, tugging at the button and zipper on her own jeans. It was a little awkward, one-handed with her right hand, but she got them open and slid her hand into her underwear.

She was as wet as Chloe and the mutual contact made her curse in pleasure at the relief. She tried to touch herself as slowly and gently as she was Chloe, but it felt like torture to her whereas Chloe had given up licking her neck to just hold herself up, head hanging listlessly, moaning with every breath as she rolled her hips into Beca’s fingers.
Some sound that Beca made must have gotten her attention because suddenly Chloe’s eyes were open to stare down at Beca. She didn’t stop her rocking, nor did Beca, but Beca knew she was busted. So she just flashed a smile, groaned, and rolled her own hips so Chloe would feel it.

Chloe glanced down between them, having to shift herself to one hand to push her hanging shirt out of the way to see, and then just yanked it off completely to look down again. “God, that’s so hot,” she said, still watching, so Beca picked up the speed on herself a little, and the happy little sound Chloe made her own hips pitch up again. And then Chloe was moving to one hand again, this time so she could grasp Beca’s right forearm to pull on it.

“You want me to stop?” Beca asked.

But Chloe just shook her head and moved her hand to Beca’s wrist to guide it back up between their bodies until Beca’s fingers were in her mouth.

It made both of them moan and Beca watched her sucking on them, felt the way her tongue moved between and over them. She sped up her touching just a bit and it was with a somewhat hurried motion that Chloe pulled her fingers out of her mouth and guided Beca’s hand back down until Beca was touching herself again.

“Kiss me,” Beca asked and Chloe’s tongue was in her mouth immediately. She groaned at the relief and worked both of her hands with more purpose. She could taste herself and it made her ache to have Chloe’s mouth on her, but she could wait because she knew Chloe was close. As was she.

Things grew sloppy and they finally gave up kissing to instead just breathe and gasp and moan and beg.

“I’m so close,” Chloe said with a moan that told Beca she was the five-seconds kind of close. Her eyes were closed but she opened them just long enough to look at Beca and say, “Come with me, baby.”

All Beca could do was nod as she felt her building orgasm reach its peak at the sound of Chloe reaching her own. She watched Chloe fall apart above her, a sight she wasn’t and never would be tired of, and rode out her climax while she helped Chloe down from hers.
It was a minute or so before Chloe opened her eyes again, sparkling blue as she smiled down at Beca. “Fuck, how are you so good at that?” She dropped to kiss Beca, and between the cursing and the kissing Beca knew Chloe was far from being finished. She was about to say something about needing Chloe to touch her when Chloe broke out of the kiss and climbed off Beca to kneel on the floor. “Sit up,” she demanded and once Beca did, reached for her open jeans and pulled, taking the underwear down, too.

Beca knew what was coming next and she let her head fall back against the couch to wait as she felt hands run up her calves to her thighs, and then her knees were over Chloe’s shoulders and Chloe’s tongue was between her legs and with a grateful sigh she ran her hand through Chloe’s hair. She held it out of the way for her, something they figured out a long time ago that made for a better experience by both.

“But the rush of adrenaline from the moment of fear of an accidental live sex tape was definitely a new feeling and she let herself think that it was broadcasting this moment of lust. She thought about what they must look like, Chloe topless, herself bottomless, heels digging into Chloe’s back as Chloe’s head bobbed between her legs.

It was hot.

So hot.

“Stop for a second,” she said with a tug on Chloe’s hair.

“What’s wrong?”

“Nothing. Just...sorry. This...can we record this? Is that too weird?”

Chloe blinked at her before a smile replaced the concern on her face. “You wanna make a sex
“Just for us. If you’re down.” She felt Chloe’s fingernails dig into her waist where she’d been gripping Beca.

“I’m so down,” Chloe said, eyes flashing. “I still think about that time at the beach house when we could see our reflection in the window and you wanted me to watch you go down on me.”

Beca’s pulse and arousal soared and she pointed at her computer. “Open Photobooth. And close everything else so we don’t fuck up. And turn off the WiFi.”

With an excited giggle, Chloe twisted to open and close programs until the two of them were on the screen with a big red RECORD button which Chloe clicked with another giggle before she spun back around and went right back to what she was doing before Beca had interrupted things with her idea.

It was exactly how Beca had imagined it - sexy as fuck. Her fingers tangled in Chloe’s gorgeous red curls, Chloe’s hands roaming her body from her thighs to her stomach until she’d pushed her way under Beca’s bra. She only wished that what she saw when she looked down could be captured, too, because there was literally nothing hotter in the entire world than Chloe Beale looking up at her as she slid her tongue inside her.

Beca tightened her grip in Chloe’s hair and used her free hand to reach behind herself to unhook her bra and pull off her shirt so Chloe could touch her there without the battle. She watched that happen on the screen, Chloe’s perfectly manicured, strong hand first cup, then squeeze her breast before fingers caught and rolled her nipple.

“Oh my God, you look so good,” Beca said with a moan as she glanced back and forth between the screen and reality until she settled on the reality that was Chloe pushing her fingers into her while she licked her with the kind of teasing precision that could only come from knowing Beca so well.

Chloe hummed at the compliment and she smiled up at Beca, best she could, and pushed and pulled her fingers until Beca gave up on watching altogether to close her eyes and let Chloe guide her into another climax.

When she looked down again, Chloe was smiling up at her properly this time, her cheek resting against Beca’s thigh as her fingers still pumped slowly, just enough to keep Beca turned on instead
of letting her settle into the afterglow. “What?”

“Can we do something else so I can watch you doing me?”

Beca laughed and liked the way Chloe purred from it; she knew what it felt like to be inside someone when they laughed. It was as fun as it was sexy and Chloe pressed in deeper until the heel of her hand was grinding slow circles flush against Beca. “God, how’d I get such a babe to marry me?” Beca wondered aloud.

“I ask myself that every day,” Chloe said with a grin and a kiss to Beca’s navel. “So?”

It took Beca’s mind a second to remember what Chloe was asking. “Oh - oh! Yeah, yes. What do you wanna do?” She watched Chloe thinking and caught the moment when Chloe decided what she wanted. “What? What is it? I’ll do anything you want.”

“Can we go upstairs?”

“Kinky.”

“Shut up,” Chloe said with a laugh. “I want you to - to use the strap-on.”

Beca’s eyes rolled, not out of snark but out of arousal. She shoved at Chloe’s hand to get her out of her body. “Off, let me up.”

Chloe moved backward quickly, bumping into the coffee table that held the computer. “What’s wrong? Is that not okay?”

Beca was already on her feet and she reached down to help Chloe up and pull her right into a kiss. “More than okay. But I can’t make it to the bedroom with you fucking me.”

Chloe threw her head back and cackled and though Beca made to get out of her embrace to head upstairs, Chloe held firm. “That sounds like a challenge to me.”
Beca only had the warning that was the realization of what Chloe meant before Chloe was inside her again. “God damn you, Beale,” she said with a groan. “Just...let me grab the computer.”

“I’m not stopping you,” Chloe said with a chuckle as she did little to make it easier for Beca to bend and grab her laptop.

“You’re not making it any easier,” Beca countered and took a step backward in the direction of the staircase. “You gotta come with me if you want to do this.”

Chloe smiled and followed her, and then guided her so she wouldn’t trip over the corner of the couch or the first stair. “I already came with you.” Her fingers were moving at an increasingly distracting pace and Beca’s knees almost gave out when she took the next step up backward.

“Funny. Don’t let me bust my ass. Or my Mac.”

Chloe pouted. “We wouldn’t want that.”

“Not if you want me fucking you from behind two minutes from now.” She knew the crassness would have an effect on Chloe and she was right, dark eyes turning darker and suddenly they were moving up the stairs with surprising grace.

They were in the bedroom in a few more steps and Chloe finally let go of Beca to take the computer and decide where to set it up. Beca just shook her head and watched her analyze angles with all the scrutiny of a movie director while she dealt with the straps of the harness.

“I’m ready for my close-up, Mrs. DeMille,” Beca said once she had herself organized.

Chloe looked up from where she’d been adjusting the computer an inch left and an inch right atop a stack of books she’d piled up on a chair, apparently to get the height just right. She’d been super focused but Beca saw the arousal come back as soon as she saw Beca waiting for her. She strode across the room and then stopped short to push her sweats down and kick them aside.

Beca had expected her trip across the room to lead Chloe into her arms for more kissing but instead, she just climbed right onto the bed on her hands and knees and waited.
“Well, okay then!” Beca said with a laugh as she turned and climbed up to follow her.

“Please make me come, baby. I need you.”

It took Beca back, just the slightest bit because her innocent angel Chloe was a horny devil tonight, and she was so, so happy this was being captured on tape so they could watch it together later.

Maybe even tonight.

She ran her hands over Chloe’s back and then down to graze between her legs before lining herself up and pressing forward. The groan that escaped Chloe made Beca shiver. “Don’t worry,” she answered, easing her hips into a slow rhythm to let Chloe adjust. “I’ll take care of you.”
The BFF Obligation

“Ohh my God. Fuck.”

Chloe glanced over at Beca and laughed. They were both still breathing hard but enough time had passed that the orgasmic exclamations should have been done by now. “What?”

Beca laughed, too, and looked at Chloe. “I was thinking about how guys always say that once they get married, their sex life is over? I mean, I don't know about you, but this is still pretty fucking great. Greater, even.”

“You think?” Chloe said with a giggle as she started pulling at the buckles and straps around her own hips to toss the contraption aside. At some point during the course of the evening’s activities, their roles switched and while they'd arrived in the bedroom with Chloe begging for it, they had finished with Beca on her hands and knees doing the pleading.

Beca rolled onto her side and held out an arm until Chloe wiggled her way into her embrace. “Uh, yeah.”

She got comfortable with Beca's bicep as her pillow. She knew she'd have to move soon because it would fall asleep, but she was content for now. “Then I'm happy to hear you're not bored with our sex life yet.”

Beca scoffed at this and Chloe felt fingernails tracing up and down and along her back. “Yet? Please. Never gonna happen.”

Chloe smiled and leaned in to touch her lips to Beca's. “No?”

“Nope.” Beca kissed her back and trailed her wandering hand over Chloe’s hip to come to rest on her stomach.

Chloe had noticed that the action had become a habit for Beca; if their positions allowed for it, whether cuddling in bed or the couch or talking in the kitchen if she was within reach, Beca’s hand was on her stomach. Beca had many habits and tics Chloe loved: how she’d talk to herself to think through a problem, the half-smile she gave Chloe in the mornings when she didn’t want to be awake but didn’t want to be rude, how she’d sing to herself if she thought no one was listening - or
if she knew Chloe was. But this new habit was a definite favorite.

“Well thank goodness, because - whoa.”

“Well whoa?”

“I…” Chloe put her hand over Beca’s. “Did you feel that?”

“Feel what?”

Chloe pressed Beca’s hand against her more firmly. There was nothing, and then Chloe felt it like butterflies in her stomach, but not like the kind of butterflies she felt the first time she saw Beca. This felt like actual, physical butterflies floating inside her. “The baby! I can feel it moving!”

“You can? Oh my God, what’s it feel like?!” Beca sat up in her excitement and then had both her hands on Chloe’s stomach, desperately trying to feel it.

“I… I don’t know! It’s like…like a fluttering.” She knew she was about to cry again, but Beca had beaten her to it, tears already on her cheeks. “It feels so weird! Can you feel it?” She tried to guide Beca’s hand to where the sensation was focused, but when Beca shook her head Chloe tried it herself and she couldn’t feel it with her hand, either. “Too early, maybe.”

“Have you felt it before?”

“No, duh!” Chloe said with a little huff of a laugh. “Like I wouldn’t tell you if I felt our baby kick?!”

They were silent then, all four hands on Chloe’s stomach, searching.

“It stopped,” she finally said after a minute or two of quiet.

“That’s so cool; there's like...a person inside of you. I can’t wait until I can feel it, too,” Beca said with a grin, still staring at her hands. “I guess all that - “
“Don’t,” Chloe interrupted, clapping her hand over Beca’s mouth. “Do not make some crass comment about sex waking up our baby.”

Beca looked up, eyes wide in the worst version of innocence Chloe had ever seen. “I would never!”

“Uh huh. What was the second half of that sentence going to be?” Chloe seized Beca’s wrists and gave her a tug to pull her back down to lay next to her.

“IIIIII was going to say I guess all that...Vitamin...D...”

Chloe bumped her with her knee. “Yeah right, good try.”

Beca tossed up her hands. “Well! Sorry, but you gotta admit, the timing -”

“Shush!” Chloe reached for Beca's arm. “Get back over here and cuddle me.”

“Always with the cuddles,” Beca said teasingly as she settled next to Chloe again. “I kinda miss our old cuddles.”

Chloe sighed and trailed her fingers along Beca's side before turning over to let her move up behind Chloe to spoon. It wasn't considered healthy for Chloe to spend much time on her back anymore, let alone with the added weight of a whole extra adult, petite as she may be, laying on her like they used to. She usually slept on her side anyway, and a lot of their cuddling happened by way of spooning so it hadn't been a major adjustment, but moments like this when they wanted to be close now needed alternate approaches.

She felt Beca get comfortable behind her, followed by the familiarity that was Beca petting her before sleep - playing with her hair, tickling the back of her neck, kissing her shoulder, circling her palm over Chloe's backside to make her giggle and squirm, until her hand came to rest loosely, not pressing or holding, just still against her stomach, one finger idly drifting back and forth over the small curve. “G’night, baby. I love you.”

“Night,” Chloe replied. “I love you, too.”
“Oh, I wasn’t talking to you. But I love you, too.”

“Hey, Chloe?”

“Yeah?” she yelled from her camp on the couch. There was an awful ruckus in the kitchen, the sound of ice being pulverized in a blender.

“Do you have plastic glasses somewhere?”

She raised her voice to be heard. “Next to the fridge, very top shelf!”

“Found them!”

Chloe returned her attention to her project - grading a week’s worth of spelling and math quizzes. They were at that sweet spot in the school year - a month into the year where the novelty of a new grade had yet to wear off for the kids, but they were adjusted enough to the change that they were able to focus. The novelty had yet to wear off for her, too; she’d been moved up a grade from Kindergarten to First, and she’d been amazed at the difference one year could make. She loved Kindergarteners, but First Graders, though only one year older, were as different as night and day - their level of independence and self-awareness lent itself to a whole new way to approach her teaching.

She’d been reluctant to make the grade move; it wasn’t her idea, and it was going to be her third year in Kindergarten and she felt ready to really crush it this year. But a First Grade teacher had retired, the school struggled to fill the position, and it was decided to move Chloe into First and let a new hire, fresh out of college, take Kindergarten.

She liked it, though. And there was the added bonus that the majority of her class was made up of the students she’d had last year as Kindergartners! The learning curve to Mrs. Beale’s Classroom Etiquette had been a short one, and she considered that may have lent itself to the speed with which most everyone settled in so quickly.

She’d been able to jump into actual, constructive teaching earlier than anticipated and she hoped it would make for a banner year for her kids.
The one wrench in that plan, of course, was the fact that after the winter break, she'd be back for a week at best before going out on maternity leave for two months. She didn't think negatively of substitute teachers, and she would have all her lesson plans ready for them before the end of the year in case the baby decided to show up early, but she knew the change in teachers would shake up their routine and have an impact.

Which was all the more reason to be aggressive now while she could to help them get ahead.

“Here you go,” Aubrey said and Chloe looked up over the frame of her glasses to see her bikini-clad friend holding a pair of plastic margarita glasses filled with pink slush, one of them extended down to her. “Made you a virgin.”

“I haven't been a virgin in a long time,” Chloe said with a wink and the swiping of her hand over her belly, as though her pregnancy had anything to do with sex. “Thanks, this looks yummy.”

“You get one more hour of teacher time before it's my turn.”

“Awes, thanks, Bree.” Chloe smiled and clicked her pen a couple times as she watched Aubrey flip her sunglasses off her head and back into place on her nose before turning to stride back out to the pool.

Beca had been unwillingly roped into lengthy contractual and legal meetings that, for whatever reason, had to happen that day - a Saturday - but it had offered the first real opportunity to cash in on the fact that she and her bestie now lived in the same city. So she’d texted Aubrey a pool day invite and sat down to do some work while she waited for her to arrive, and suddenly she’d been on the couch for two hours grading and planning.

She chewed her lip for a second and with a breath of motivation set her grading aside and hauled herself off the couch to make her way upstairs and change into a bathing suit.

She really only had one that fit her well now, so she put it on and wrapped a sarong around her hips, and made her way outside, virgin strawberry margarita in hand.

“Careful, don't want you to turn to dust,” Aubrey said with a smile from her spot floating on a lounge chair in the pool.
“Ha ha,” Chloe said with a sticking out of her tongue. She grabbed the sunscreen sitting on a nearby table and sprayed herself down.

“You know, I’m not surprised.”

“You’re not surprised?” Chloe asked, working a heavier SPF into her face, hoping she didn’t have white streaks all over it.

“You look great even when you’re pregnant.”

Chloe glanced down at herself; she didn’t really recognize her body anymore and it changed every day, but she was weirdly used to the lack of familiarity. She smiled and picked up her drink again to make her way into the water. “Thanks!”

“It’s cheesy, but you’re really glowing, you know.”

Chloe only giggled at that. She knew she was; she felt like she was glowing. “I’ve never been happier.”

“It’s funny how things work out, isn’t it?”

Chloe nodded and sipped her drink, the ice feeling good outside in the 85º sun. “What do you mean?”

“I mean all this.” Aubrey gestured at herself and Chloe and the house. “If Beca hadn’t joined the Bellas, you two probably wouldn’t have gotten together, you wouldn’t be married to her or be having a baby with her, or living in LA. And if you weren’t living in LA, I never would have been here that Halloween and met Eric, and now I live in LA, too, and I’m getting married. And now you’re crying - Chloe!” she added with a sad laugh and a shake of her head.

“I’m sorry! I’m sorry,” Chloe sniffed as she took a sip of her drink and pulled herself back together. “You’re right, is all.”
“Of course I’m right.”

“You’re giving an awful lot of credit to Beca though,” she said with a smirk and a nudging of Aubrey’s floating lounge.

Aubrey scoffed. “You know I don’t harbor any ill-will toward Beca, Chloe. I haven’t for a very long time. I have no issue giving her credit where credit is due.”

“What I meant is that you’re giving Beca all the credit, saying if she hadn’t joined the Bellas. Well, who’s the one that got her to join, hmm? Who didn’t even want her in the group, hmm?” She grinned and took another pointed drink of her margarita. “Credit is due, my rear end.”

Aubrey laughed and sat forward, chair wobbling a little. “I swear to God, Chloe, if I have to hear you tell the story one more time about how you convinced Beca to audition because you seduced her in the shower -”

“I did not seduce her!”

“You kind of did, sweetie.”

“Well…” Chloe didn’t have a good argument. What she had done at the time, what now felt like a lifetime ago, was the very definition of seduction; she convinced Beca to do something she thought she was against doing. It hadn’t been a sexual seduction, at least, not overtly - sure, they were both wet and naked in a shower, and they were singing the song Chloe had, at that time in her life, been almost unable to climax without listening to. But that seduction was all about Beca’s voice, even if she became the unwitting star of Chloe’s fantasies from that point forward. “Well...fine, we won’t talk about that. But my point still stands!”

“Okay, okay,” Aubrey resigned with a fair bit of dramatic hand waving, “you changed all our lives, Chloe.”

“You bet your butt I did,” she grinned. “For the better, too! Now, I want to talk about your wedding. My BFF only gets married once! I can't not help plan the wedding!”

“Funny, I said the same thing. And yet…”
Chloe scoffed and flicked the surface of the pool to send droplets flying into Aubrey’s face and make her flinch and sputter. She got a full handful wave to the face in return and she paddled back a foot or two into safety, both of them laughing.

“If we ever renew our vows, you’ll be the first one invited.”

“I better be in the ceremony.”

“You were basically the first one to know I was pregnant. Doesn’t that count for anything?”

Aubrey was quiet for a second and Chloe could see her calculating, and then, “It counts for sixty percent of lifetime BFF obligations.”

“And the other forty percent?” Chloe asked with a laugh.

Aubrey’s response was without hesitation. “Twenty percent for weddings and relationships, fifteen for career and other non-romantic life milestones, and five for protecting one another from making dumb decisions or embarrassing herself in public.”

Chloe sobered. “I failed twenty percent of my BFF obligations?!”

Aubrey shook her head and used her hands to gain enough momentum in the water to drift toward Chloe. “You eloped.” She smiled. “If you’d had a big ceremony and not put me in your wedding party, then you’d have failed. I give you a pass. You’re still at one hundred percent.”

Chloe relaxed at that, feeling like less of a terrible friend. “Okay. Then that brings us to your wedding.”

“My planning binder is inside, but we can talk through some things.”

Chloe flicked water at Aubrey again.
“What kind of Maid of Honor splashes the bride?” Aubrey said after flinching and splashing back.

“The kind that’s going to make sure you actually have fun at your wedding, duh!”

Aubrey had asked Chloe to be her Maid (well, Matron) of Honor several weeks prior; the asking was really more of a formality since they long ago agreed to serve the role in one another’s weddings. She had, of course, cried despite the predetermined destiny. In the weeks following, the bridal party filled out - Chloe would stand with Aubrey alongside one of Aubrey’s lifelong friends, her fiancé’s sister, and - after a moment that had led to a lot of disbelieving laughter before acceptance - Beca.

The other Bellas would have roles, as well, though she and Aubrey were still working out what would suit each of them best. So far, the only things they could decide on were Amy on the guest book because she would make sure everyone signed it before letting them in, and Stacie at the gift table at the reception because she’d be able to memorize everyone’s names in advance and chat them up while steering them to the table.

There was the obvious opportunity to involve everyone with a performance during the ceremony, and while Aubrey had been a little hesitant to it, she eventually agreed that it would be nice; that ball was now firmly in Chloe’s court to execute. But finding “jobs of honor” for seven people which don’t include being in the wedding party proper, when the groom also has special people to find jobs for, was proving to be quite the project.

“Did you pick a date yet? Still Summer, right? Please don’t say Spring. I’m not trying to tell you when to have your wedding but I need enough time to lose the baby weight so I’m not puffy in your pictures, and -”

“Chloe,” Aubrey interrupted. “It’s fine. Yes, Summer. Well, technically late Spring, but we can call it summer: June 17th.”

“June 17th! Aww, that’s such a good date,” Chloe sighed.

“It’s Father’s Day,” Aubrey said quietly and Chloe cut her dramatics about needing to lose weight and reached to put her hand over Aubrey’s forearm.

“Oh, Bree...that’s...that’s really special.”
“I thought that’s the best way to have him there with me, you know?”

“Oh, of course, yes. That’s really very...thoughtful.” She could see Aubrey fighting emotion, hiding behind her sunglasses and a lengthy sip of her drink.

“Let’s not dwell,” Aubrey said after a moment. “I’d rather think about the adorable five-month-old that’s going to be interrupting my wedding every two minutes.” She smiled.

Chloe bit her lip, smiling, too, as she gave Aubrey’s arm another squeeze. “Sorry in advance. But you’re the one who put both their parents in your wedding.”

“I hope whoever you put in charge of them will be able to handle it. Things start getting pretty interesting right around that age.”

“Yeah, I…” Chloe drifted for a moment, thinking. She had no idea who would watch their child while both of them were performing their wedding duties. But that was an hour of their life. She also had no idea who would watch their child any other time they were both needed somewhere, or even if they just wanted a night out with each other. They hadn’t discussed the concept of a nanny, and Chloe had always sworn against such a thing.

But she could recognize the benefits of it, of a child having another constant caretaker in their life, someone with whom they could bond and trust and learn to mind and respect like a parent rather than a rotating door of teenage babysitters.

She and Beca definitely needed to start talking about that.

“Chloe?”

“Hmm?”

“Where’d you go?”

She blinked and realized she’d been quiet too long. “Thinking about the fact that I’m going to be a mommy way before this wedding we’re planning right now happens.”
“Kind of surreal?”

Chloe smiled. “You could say that. Now, where’s my floaty chair…” She glanced around, looking for the chair she’d brought into the pool with her.

“This one?” Aubrey asked, pointing at the one in which she was sitting.

“No, the one I got out of the pool shed.”

“You didn’t get anything out of the shed.”

“I so totally did! I came out here and I put on sunscreen and...and...” And she walked to the shed to get a floating chair for herself. Except not. “And...got in the pool, oh my gosh I didn’t get a pool chair. I swear, Bree, this baby is taking my brain cells. Yesterday, I couldn't remember my middle name. It was just like poof! Gone! I had to check my driver license to remember it.”

Aubrey laughed at her. “Really? Aw, Chloe. You could have texted me and asked. Or Beca.”

“And tell you I forgot my own name? Pfft.”

“You just told me, sweetie.”

“I -” Chloe shook her head; it was like she was having this conversation on a five-second delay. “I know! But admitting it yesterday - I probably would have had a breakdown over it. Enough of that dumb stuff; June 17th?”

“No, come on, I think you’ve had enough sun.” Aubrey slipped off her chair into the water and took Chloe’s hand, leading her toward the stairs. “I want air conditioning and chips and salsa.”

“Ooh, chips and salsa!” Chloe said with a wiggle of her hips. “Great idea!”
Chloe was stepping out of her post-pool shower rinse-off when she heard Aubrey knock on the bathroom door. “What’s up?”

“Eric asked if I could make dinner reservations and their website sucks on my phone and I don’t want to call. Can I use your computer really quick since it’s right here?”

“Yeah, sure.” Chloe slipped her arms into her bathrobe and tied it before moving to the mirror to make sure she didn’t really get too much sun.

She felt her brain suddenly shift into slow-motion, facts clicking into place one by one like Tetris. Her computer was downstairs. Aubrey was upstairs with her in the master suite. Beca no longer toted her laptop to and from work; she had a newer, nicer one that she used for work. Beca’s computer was still on the -

“Why is it sitting on all these books? That doesn’t seem safe.”

- stack of books Beca built the night before so it would be the necessary height. That at some point in the night when Chloe got up to pee, she sleepily snapped it shut. That she didn’t do anything like quit the program doing the recording.

She reached for the door, hurrying but feeling like she was trying to run underwater. “Bree, don’t...don’t open it!” She’d barely made it around the corner in time to see Aubrey holding Beca’s open laptop, her back to Chloe, and Chloe could definitely see what was auto-replaying on the screen: a certain private moment that happened on the couch yesterday after the Facebook Live.

“Oh my God...oh my God, Chloe! Why...why?! Why am I seeing this?!”
First

Chapter Summary

This is Chapter 69.

Heh.

Heheheheheh.

“No, no, I need to hear it again,” Beca said between gasping breaths of laughter. “What did she say?” She already made Chloe repeat it three times, but it was too funny and got more dramatic every time.

“Again? Oh my gosh, Bec. Okay. She was like,” Chloe tightened her voice; she had long mastered imitating her best friend and it made it all the better, “Oh my God, Chloe! What is happening? Why am I seeing this?! You’re making porn?! Why would you leave this out for everyone to see?!”

Beca gave up trying to stay upright and tipped to the side doubled over in laughter. Her abs ached from it. “I can’t...I can’t...” she said weakly, waving her hand at Chloe who was sitting next to her.

Chloe was laughing, too, and Beca felt her knees get lifted to encourage her to lay out properly on the couch, legs over Chloe’s, instead of the cramp-inducing pose she’d fallen into in hilarity. “It was so embarrassing, baby,” Chloe said, still laughing, and when Beca got herself situated so she could see Chloe again, her wife was blushing, though whether from actual embarrassment or humor, who could say?

“Videos don’t just start playing, you know. I’ve literally never had that happen. She pressed play so she deserves it for being nosy. Why didn’t you put the computer away?” Beca asked; now she was just messing with her.

“It’s your computer!” Chloe shrieked, managing to laugh while doing so. “Why should I be responsible for putting it away? And it was all your idea in the first place!”

Beca smirked at that and bent one of her knees so her heel fell right between Chloe’s legs. “You
seemed into it.” She twisted her ankle to press against her and watched the reaction play out over Chloe’s features - surprise, a touch of confusion, a flash of pleasure - and then Chloe’s hand clamped down over her ankle.

“Maybe I was.” The laughter was gone from her voice and it had dropped into that pitch that Beca knew meant a switch got flipped. Thank God.

Beca was, to be clear, horny. She’d spent the whole day in mind-numbing legal meetings sitting idle while Luke and her lawyers negotiated with suits from the label for more money. She sought the meeting at the urging of Chloe, telling Beca she deserved it, that she earned it, that the men in the industry aren’t too shy to demand more, that she has a Grammy Award and two platinum-selling albums, that if she has a seven-figure offer from a non-label artist (which she does), she needs to be able to use that in her favor and she should be allowed to negotiate a higher cut of royalties for her next three projects. She couldn’t even believe she had three projects lined up, let alone that she was in the position to demand more money for her work. She still remembered how excited she was over the $250 fee she got to mix “Flashlight” for a real release, and how awesome it was she got $250 to make a song.

Today she was in a meeting where she - by way of Luke, she didn’t say a word - demanded $8,000 per song and a four point royalty on top of any songwriting and arranging royalties, on top of the six-figure non-compete agreement to keep her only working with Capitol artists.

So she sat through the boring meeting feeling like a money-hungry celebrity as her reps and the label’s went back and forth talking about dollars and percentages as she tried to ignore them yet appear to be listening when all she was doing was playing back in her head the way Chloe’s fingernails had dug into her hips, how her right ass cheek still kind of stung from where Chloe’s palm had connected with it, how her own fist had looked gripping the sheets, and how her hair swung in her face as Chloe fucked her last night.

And it was all caught on camera.

She’d shifted in her seat and crossed and uncrossed her legs, feeling wet and swollen and wanting to leave to go home and ask Chloe if she could sit on her face for awhile.

Instead, she’d had to sit at that conference table for six hours.

She’d had every intention to speed home and ask to be ravaged but by the time the meeting was over and she walked away with her demands met in addition to a new contract that would allow her to work with non-Capitol artists so long as she gave Capitol eight tracks per year, her arousal had
subsided to a tolerable level. Instead, she felt like kind of a badass.

So when she got home and a bathrobed Chloe said she had to tell her something and that she was going to die, she said, “Oh God, what happened?” and dropped onto the couch to let Chloe regale her with the tale.

The tale was about Aubrey’s innocent attempt to borrow Beca’s laptop and getting an eyeful of Chloe’s head between her thighs and as funny as it was - truly, it was fucking hilarious, it reminded her of how she’d felt all day and the fact that her underwear were still wet from all her thoughts about what was in that very video.

“Wanna watch it?” she asked. “Or do you have stuff to do?” she added, noting the fact that the table next to her was covered in papers, notebooks, textbooks, and pens. She kind of had important information to share, too, but it could wait.

She watched Chloe bite her lip and take a breath and hold it before giving a quick nod.

“Thank God,” Beca said with a groan as she rolled off the couch to her feet and offer a hand to help Chloe up, too, and used the momentum to pull her close. “I’ve been turned on all day thinking about it.” She let the words register and then she was kissing Chloe, slowly but making sure to be quite clear that her desire and need was real.

Chloe sank into her, arms draping around her neck as she kissed her back, and Beca wondered if she’d been thinking about that video today, too. Chloe’s hands started drifting and Beca pulled away with a groan and a smile to capture one of those wandering hands and start toward the stairs. “C’mon.”

“How do you want to do this?” she asked, standing in the middle of the bedroom holding the open laptop.

The moment had, admittedly, been broken. They both had needed to pee, and then Beca discovered the computer was dead and had to go hunting for a charger. Not that it had lessened her excitement one bit, though, because Chloe was sitting on the edge of the bed, her bathrobe untied and barely doing anything to offer modesty. Beca started unbuttoning her own shirt one-handed as she waited for Chloe to decide.
“Umm, well...we both need to be able to see it. And I don’t want to like, knock your computer on the floor and break it.”

“Oh, you think something’s going to happen that might bump it off the bed?”

Chloe laughed at that and intentionally shifted so one side of her robe fell off her left shoulder. “It might. Why don’t you AirPlay it to the TV?”

Beca gasped at that. “You are an evil sex genius,” she said, grinning around the words as she changed settings on her computer and watched Chloe stand and fetch the necessary remotes. She let the robe stay hanging off that shoulder and Beca reveled in the creamy expanse of exposed skin it offered.

It took a few seconds, but her computer screen popped up on the wall-mounted TV, a blurry still image that was clearly the two of them on the couch downstairs, in the middle of the desktop wallpaper of a selfie of Chloe that Chloe had changed it to nearly a year ago.

“Oh, there we are!” Chloe said with a clap as she climbed back onto the bed and sat on her knees. “Make it full screen.”

She kind of loved that Chloe was so into it. She changed the display, checked that the video was set to start at the beginning and set the computer on her nightstand as she hurried to join Chloe. She shucked her shirt along the way but Chloe caught her before she could hop into bed, catching her by the hips to stop her and work the button fly of Beca’s denim shorts. She tugged her underwear down next and Beca caught the smirk Chloe tossed up at her; she knew her level of arousal was obvious and she shrugged and removed her own bra and then bent to kiss Chloe. She felt fingers dragging up her inner thighs already and she was ready to climb into Chloe’s lap and ride them.

But Chloe sighed into her mouth so sweetly that it tapped the brakes a little and instead she just focused on the kiss and the way they teased each other with it, with flicking tongues and mouths held just out of reach for a second too long until the other chased it. She thought about how Chloe felt under her hands, how soft her hair was as she ran her fingers through it and how smooth and warm her shoulders were as she pushed the robe off them, and how Chloe’s hands seemed to be mapping and memorizing her back and chest.

She thought about the very first time she touched Chloe like this, an unplanned encounter in a retreat shower, and how scared she had been, but at the same time so confident and now she was living this life where she could lazily kiss that same incredible woman all night long if she wanted to.
A nip to her lower lip pulled her off memory lane and she let her hands slide from Chloe’s shoulders to her breasts, gentle and cautious but completely confident because Chloe wanted this, wanted her, loved her, had married her, was pregnant with her child. “I love you,” she said between kisses.

She felt Chloe smiling and then she got kissed so well her knees quite literally weakened. It made Chloe giggle an “I love you, too,” and then Chloe was scooting away out of reach. “Plenty of room for both of us.” She patted the bed.

Beca smiled and turned down the bed covers, making Chloe lift herself up and get out of the way in the process. “Want me to start it?” She pointed at the computer.

Chloe wriggled excitedly. “Okay!”

So Beca clicked play and joined her on the bed to sit against the headboard.

“Oh my God, you look so good.” It was her own voice and she looked at the TV.

There they were, in HD on the 70” flatscreen on their bedroom wall. Or, more accurately, there Chloe’s back was, Beca’s bare legs stark against the black of Chloe’s shirt and Chloe’s red hair clutched in Beca’s fist, her own flushed face and wet lips, her own voice panting and moaning, and her own eyes looking back at her now as she watched it then.

It was...hot, but a little weird being the star of this little movie. “I need this to not be my face.”

“Then let me watch it. I never get to sit back and watch you while I do that. I’m always busy.” She winked.

Beca parted her legs and patted the space between them which earned her a fair bit of sexy grief until she pointed out she wanted Chloe to come sit between them. “Like when we take a bath, Chlo,” she finally had to explain.

Chloe’s body was warm when it settled against hers. They both got comfortable, adjusting legs and arms and hair until Chloe was relaxed in her arms and cradled between Beca’s legs.
On screen, Beca was getting closer. She didn’t really like to be the star of the show, so she occupied herself with Chloe instead. She let her hands glide down her arms from shoulders to fingertips to play with her fingers as she peppered the curve of her neck with kisses. She felt Chloe sigh so she parted her lips to wet the kisses, tongue starting to draw patterns along the side and base of her neck, the length of her shoulder. She let her hands wander a little more, using Chloe’s knees as a starting point to start creeping higher. She tickled and teased and scratched and walked them up and up until she felt slickness before she’d even gotten to the very apex of Chloe’s thighs.

“Bec…” Chloe said with another sigh and a pointed lifting of her hips, but Beca didn’t give in yet. She knew there wasn’t enough time left in the scene playing out on the screen to get Chloe there for something simultaneous which meant the only other option was to wait for when they scrambled upstairs to the very bed they’re on now and make Chloe come with herself.

So she teased more, trailing her fingers through the escaping wetness, pulling at the skin of Chloe’s thighs. In a moment that made Chloe gasp, she tucked her left leg over Chloe’s and used the leverage to spread Chloe’s wider. She still teased, though. She liked the way Chloe was gripping her own thighs or sometimes reaching back to paw at Beca’s hair in an effort to get her mouth on her skin again if she made her wait too long between kisses. She squeezed at Chloe’s inner thigh feeling the heat there, the wetness that the teasing and anticipation was generating as she let the fingers of her left hand creep closer.

Chloe’s breath was quick and Beca craned her neck a little to see if she was even still watching herself going down on Beca. She was, and something about that made Beca feel proud, that Chloe was so turned on by watching Beca, and it turned Beca on even more and the fact that their position didn’t offer her any relief wasn’t lost on her. But she had a panting, quivering Chloe in her arms which was a pretty damn good consolation prize so she let her fingers ghost over Chloe’s clit. The reaction was instant, her whole body jolting backward away from the touch with a whimper. But Beca knew she wasn’t trying to escape; she felt how swollen Chloe was, how much her body was begging for attention like Beca’s had been all day. She was so, so sensitive, more than her new normal, so Beca shushed her and touched her again, this time letting the pads of her fingertips rest against Chloe, not pressing, not moving, allowing Chloe a chance to get used to the contact.

“Beca…baby…” Chloe said with another whimper and Beca waited until she heard her suck in a breath and tilt her hips closer to Beca’s hand before she dared move her fingers again.

And when she did, it was minuscule. Almost undetectable, the tiniest back and forth had Chloe moaning and her back arching, the hand on her own thigh moving, quick as lightning, to reach and grip the back of Beca’s instead. The other scratching at the sheets and flailing until it found a home
knotted in the hair at the base of Beca’s neck.

Her grip was a little painful but Beca didn’t mind being an anchor. She did mind that it restricted how far her lips could travel and she was forced to suck a mark into Chloe’s skin at her hairline instead, but some sacrifices were worth making.

On the TV she heard herself climaxing and heard the way Chloe had moaned in that moment as she took pleasure in Beca’s pleasure, and the way Chloe echoed it again now. Chloe pushed back harder against her, her writhing starting to be less cautious, and Beca widened her legs, hoping, praying that their movements and bodies would line up just-so, so Chloe would end up writhing against Beca like she was against Beca’s hand. They were too close together for her to be able to touch herself, but she wanted her hands on Chloe now anyway. She dared increase the pressure and Chloe cried out like she’d been burned and had liked it.

She brought her other hand up from Chloe’s leg, tracing over the curve of her stomach until she could trace over the curve of a breast, concentric circles over it that made Chloe shiver. Beca could see that hand and that breast from her restricted angle, and she watched the pink, pert flesh pucker and strain expectantly as her fingers drew nearer and nearer to it. Then she stopped and lifted her hand until she flexed her fingers in front of Chloe’s mouth.

“Lick them,” she said before pointedly drawing her tongue up Chloe’s neck.

Chloe groaned at the request - or maybe it was the touch - and leaned forward enough to take Beca’s fingers into her mouth, the second time in twenty-four hours that she’d done it. Only this time, she wasn’t tasting Beca, but she did dirty things to them with her tongue all the same until Beca pulled her hand away and returned to Chloe’s breast to take her hardened nipple between wet fingers and twirl it.

“Oh my God, Beca,” Chloe said with a groan and a shudder, and if Beca didn’t know Chloe as well as she knew herself, she might have thought she’d come. But no, it was Chloe being almost, it was Chloe being so close, it was Chloe winding up for something bigger than the usual and every selfish desire Beca had been fighting with all day and the need for her own release flew out the window.

“Not if you want me fucking you from behind two minutes from now.”

The video on the TV was a blurry mess as they played with each other to get upstairs, Beca holding the computer without trying to be a cinematographer, and she could see Chloe had closed her eyes. Chloe was sweating, they both were despite the relative lack of physical exertion, and
Beca kept her pace slow and steady as she watched Chloe playing with the placement of the computer in the bedroom, building a stack of books that still sat across the room until she showed up in the background, somewhat unflatteringly suiting up with the strap-on harness. She was glad Chloe’s eyes were still closed, but they popped open at Beca’s teasing, “I’m ready for my close-up, Mrs. DeMille,” and Chloe moaned again.

“Oh to the main event,” she whispered in Chloe’s ear, and while she was pretty sure Chloe meant to laugh at it, all that happened was another moan, and together they watched Chloe climb onto the bed they were on now, on her hands and knees, and Beca take her place behind her.

“Please make me come, baby. I need you.”

That line made Beca swallow; she loved when Chloe got dirty, and she’d been so, so dirty last night. That’s not to say she wasn’t being dirty tonight, too, but she wasn’t begging Beca to make her come. At least, not yet. “Don’t worry, baby, I will,” she whispered in her ear as though Chloe had issued the plea just then and not twenty-four hours earlier.

It made Chloe whimper and nod and whine in anticipation, and when she pressed into Chloe from behind on screen she reached to slide her fingers into her now, all the way in in one smooth, effortless motion that had Chloe sinking down to meet Beca halfway.

Chloe shuddered again and Beca felt her clench around her. She resisted the urge to go hard and fast like her lust was begging her to do. Instead, she was still, save for her fingers pulling back and forth with a bending of her knuckles. Chloe was doing the rest, her hips swiveling to add to the motion, to grind herself against the heel of Beca’s hand.

Beca was watching the video with rapt attention now; they were hot together and Chloe looked good on her hands and knees from every angle, even on camera. She looked good with Beca’s hands on her, with Beca fucking her. She sounded as good as Beca remembered from last night as she begged Beca to go harder, faster. Beca did that now, as though the request had been voiced in the room then and not last night, and Chloe cried out again, swearing.

Beca wasn’t a narcissist, not by any means, but she looked good, too, and it was hot watching herself and the effect she had on the beautiful woman begging on her hands and knees and moaning in her arms.

She needed her mouth on Chloe again, and if it wouldn’t interrupt everything about to culminate any second she would have gotten out from behind Chloe to lay her down and finish this with her tongue. She had to compromise and bit the shell of Chloe’s ear.
Chloe was warm, waves of heat coming off her as her moans turned into broken cries.

“You’re going to come so hard for me, aren’t you? I can feel it.”

Chloe might have tried to nod, but she seized up, every muscle in her body tensing, especially those around Beca’s fingers which were forced to stop because they simply couldn’t keep moving, and what happened next stunned Beca.

Chloe came. So hard. So hard that the strength of it actually forced Beca’s fingers out of her so instead Beca pressed her fingers to her and worked them in quick circles. So hard that Beca felt the burning pain of her hair being pulled out. So hard that her hand was suddenly really, really wet. So hard that Chloe wasn’t even moaning anymore. She was completely silent and stiff as a board for so long that Beca worried about her need for oxygen but then with a gasp and a moan that turned into a sob, she went limp in Beca’s arms.

It was all so unexpected and...not the usual and Beca didn’t know what to do. So she sat there in silence listening to Chloe whimpering with each quiet aftershock that followed any movement of Beca’s hand that still laid against her.

Chloe’s orgasm broke the relative silence, the one on the screen, that is, and Beca felt herself quiver at it, the shock of everything starting to wear off to be replaced by her own screaming lust. She needed relief or she thought she might die if that was a medical possibility. She’d needed relief for hours and it seemed very much that time was up on her body’s patience in the matter.

She shifted a little to see what Chloe’s status was and the movement made Chloe moan again and despite the seeming spent-ness of her wife, and despite her own desperate need, she pressed her hand firmly against Chloe and with a shuddering gasp Chloe fell right into another orgasm, one much more like those Beca was used to, all moaning and jerking until Chloe fell back against her again, this time more spent-weight and less dead-weight.

“Beca…” was Chloe’s hoarse first word.

“Mhmm.” Beca pressed a kiss to her temple. “Feel good?”

Chloe’s response was nothing but a nasal exhale, something that perhaps was intended to be a laugh. There was an awe-inspiring sense of pride and power that came with rendering Chloe
helpless from pleasure. She’d done a good job, she’d made her happy and made her feel so good her brain didn’t even work correctly as a result. It made Beca feel good, too, which served to fan the flames she’d been trying to ignore. “Can you...can you let me up, babe?”

With a sigh Chloe worked with Beca, though still fairly limp, to sit forward enough for Beca to detangle herself and slip out from behind her.

Once freed, however, Beca didn’t know what to do. She hovered on her knees as Chloe worked on curling up on her side. Frankly, Beca could rut against something for 0.3 seconds and she’d be finished. She considered, briefly, grabbing a pillow and going for it. Chloe’s leg wasn’t an option; she couldn’t be pinned on her back like that, which reminded Beca that dammit she couldn’t ask to sit on her face, either and dammit she didn’t make it a point to have one last go at that position before it was too late. And she didn’t want to be so anticlimactic (so to speak) as to reach down and finger herself. So boring. So uninspired after hours-long buildup and that crazy shit that just happened.

“Please don’t pass out,” she rushed, watching Chloe’s face turn sleepy.

“Hmm?”

“Please I-I-I...I need…” The same mind-blowing orgasms Chloe had, is what she wanted to say.

“What do you need?” Chloe asked dreamily, smiling at Beca like she was stoned.

“I need you to get me off.”

That seemed to clear the haze a bit for Chloe, the dopey smile being replaced with something a little more focused. “I’m gonna,” she said, reaching out to rest her hand on Beca’s knee. “Just recharging the battery for a minute. Promise.”

Beca bit her lip and tried not to fidget as she sat back on her knees and waited for Chloe to have enough energy to return the favor. It took long enough that Beca, quite torturously, watched the entirety of herself being fucked by Chloe last night. She thought she’d felt desperation then; it was nothing like she felt now. She bounced anxiously, the motion of which did nothing to help her ignore the need coursing through her.
“Oh, I missed the good part,” Chloe finally said with a tilt of her head toward the TV. “We’ll have to rewind it.”

“Next time,” Beca said, and she hoped her voice wasn’t too clipped and curt. She couldn’t suffer through that again; it would take far too long to get to what she needed because she knew Chloe would drag it out on purpose. “How are you doing?” She tried to make it sound casual.

“You’re so horny.” Chloe said with a grin and Beca wanted to scream, the hint of possible relief coming by way of Chloe managing to get herself upright again.

“You think?” she said with a smile that she was sure conveyed her disbelief. “I’ve been waiting all day. Please, just...just please.”

“Oh, wow, okay. Okay.” Chloe was serious now, actually up and moving until she was on her knees, too, in front of Beca. She seemed afraid to touch Beca as though doing so would set off a fuse. “Tell me what you want, baby. I’ll do anything.”

“I don’t know.” Beca shook her head. She was losing it, she felt delirious with need and she doesn’t remember ever feeling like that before. It wasn’t only physical, it was emotional, too, and raw and primal and deep and she needed Chloe to spoil her the way she’d been spoiled. But her body couldn’t withstand that, not now, not tonight. She needed it fast and rough and now.

“Just...anything. Something. Chloe. Please.”

Chloe was thinking, Beca could see it in her eyes. She wished that thinking came with the use of her hands or mouth or really any part of her body that would bring her sweet, sweet relief.

“God, you’d go wild sitting on my face right now.”

Beca felt her spine go weak. Chloe knew her as well as she knew Chloe. “I know we can’t,” she replied, trying not to sound frustrated.

“No, we can, just...modified. Come on.” Chloe’s hands were finally on her, and they felt like ice against her body which was in meltdown mode. “Lay down. On your side.”

Beca did as instructed and watched Chloe do the same, but a body length further down the bed where her head was even with Beca’s...well...exactly where Beca needed her to be.
“I need to taste you, baby. Get over here.” A hand on Beca’s thigh lifted it and with a few shifts and adjustments…

“Oh...shit!” Pure, utter relief the moment Chloe’s tongue moved between her legs. She reached down and clutched the back of her head, and while it wasn’t quite the same as having the leverage to ride her like she’d have preferred, it was still pretty damn great and she hooked her free leg over Chloe and used her for the leverage to rock her hips forward.

Chloe wasn’t being very precise; Beca didn’t need her to be and they both knew that. She was actually being fairly sloppy and something about that was even more sexy, that the desperation to make Beca feel good was as strongly felt as the desperation Beca was dealing with.

They hadn’t even found a rhythm yet when Beca came, a jumbled stream of curses falling from her lips as she pulled Chloe in closer. “Don’t stop. Please don’t stop.”

She heard a muffled sound of agreement and Chloe didn’t stop. Her hands roamed Beca, best they could with the odd position, but one of them had a firm grip on Beca’s ass, right where it was still sore from the spanking it had received last night, and she used her grip to pull Beca to her, again and again as she lapped at her and gave sweet, sweet attention to her clit that had been screaming at her all fucking day until she was coming again.

She felt Chloe back off once it had passed, cool air flowing between them. They were both taking stock of the situation, Beca knew, and she waited for Chloe to reach the same conclusion.

When the hand disappeared from her ass in exchange for fingers pushing into her, she knew they were on the same page.

And it was with that that she moved to roll onto her back, the need to be wild having ebbed, and Chloe moved with her and followed until she was smiling down at Beca as she kneeled between her legs, fingering her quite expertly. “You know I can’t go down on you from this angle anymore.” It’s true that Chloe’s pregnancy kept throwing wrenches into their trusty old positions, but the flip side of it was that they were learning to try new things like they’d just done.

Chloe moved up and laid down alongside Beca and Beca reached for her immediately to pull her into a kiss. It felt like it had been hours since they kissed, and maybe it had now that she thought about it. She kissed Chloe until she couldn’t breathe and then kissed her some more until she finally broke away and fell back with a groan.

She heard Chloe chuckle and shift a little next to her, playing with her angle until she found the perfect one, the one that had Beca writhing and rocking and bracing herself with a hand pressed into the headboard, until an unnecessary plea of, “Please, baby, fuck me,” filled the air around them.

“I am, baby, I am,” was Chloe’s response and everything became more - harder, faster. Wetter. Hotter.

Beca managed one last blurry look at Chloe and she whimpered some version of her name before it crashed over her again. The first one had been a firecracker. The second, the Macy’s 4th of July Spectacular.

The third...the third was a fucking atomic bomb. What she had wanted. What she had needed. What she had given, she thought, to Chloe. Not that she could really think, but that thought did zip through her mind with all the stars and darkness and light and flashes of red hair and blue eyes and the feeling of lips on her lips and cheeks and neck and words like “Beautiful” and “Love” and “Perfect.”

When she could think again a rather unseemly word drifted through her mind, one she hated and one she would never say - but judging by how wet the sheets were, one that had happened.

And she wasn’t even the first one to do it tonight. Or the first to do it first for the first time. Talk about some firsts!

“Fuck,” she finally managed as she cracked her eyes open.

“You swear so much when we have sex,” Chloe said with a coy smile, as though they hadn’t just fucked like wild animals.

“Well,” she reached up to rub a hand over her face. “Some things call for it more than others.” She felt Chloe nuzzling at her neck. “Did I…”
“Mhmm. That was hot.” Teeth grazed her skin and she shivered.

“So did you, you know.”

The teeth disappeared and a sudden jostle made her open her eyes for real to see Chloe sitting upright. “I did not!”

Beca managed a laugh. “I think I’d know.”

“You’re lying. I’ve never done that.”

“Why would I lie about that? And neither have I. Until now, I guess.”

She watched Chloe break out into a grin and then the girl was straddling her waist, hands pressing into the mattress on either side of Beca’s head, red hair a curtain around them. “I’m never letting you go, Beca Beale,” Chloe said before dropping down to kiss Beca and coax her into a brief make out.

“Good. I’m counting on that. Now let me up and help me change the sheets.”
It was still dark when Chloe woke up. She had to use the bathroom again since that increased frequency was a new norm for her.

When she returned, Beca was still fast asleep, face smushed up against her pillow where she’d crashed for the full night’s sleep after they dozed off wrapped in one another.

Now Chloe was wide awake - another new norm: completely messed up sleeping patterns.

She tried to climb back into bed with enough chaos to wake up Beca, but their drool-worthy mattress combined with Beca's general affinity for sleep rendered her efforts fruitless. So she stared out the glass door opposite the bed, taking in the lights of Los Angeles that spread out endlessly below their home. The view was breathtaking really, and in a moment that she knew was too corny even for her, glanced at Beca’s unflattering sleeping face and decided that the City of Angels had nothing on her wife.

She was still gazing dopily at Beca when she felt the fluttering in her stomach again, quick and soft like hummingbird wings, and she reached for Beca to wake her, only to stop short because she knew Beca wouldn’t be able to feel it. Instead, she watched Beca snore lightly until the fluttering ceased...and then she reached to brush a lock of hair away from Beca’s forehead and waited to see if that would be enough to stir her.

It didn’t.

“Beca,” she tried, barely above a whisper.

Nothing.

“Beca,” she tried again, louder this time.

She saw the twitch of her brow, always the first sign that Beca was waking up against her will. And then with a jerk and a gasp so unexpected it made Chloe gasp, too, Beca sat bolt upright.
“What? What’s wrong? Are you okay?” She was already half out of bed, stumbling because her foot was caught up in the sheets as she scrabbled for her phone on the nightstand.

“I’m fine. Beca, I’m okay!” she repeated when Beca didn’t seem to hear her the first time.

“Oh.” Beca looked frazzled and definitely wide awake now. “Okay. Did you...did you wake me up or was I having a nightmare?”

Chloe bit her lip, now feeling guilty at giving Beca such a fright but unable to not appreciate the way Beca had leaped to her attempted rescue. “Well...I might’ve. I didn’t mean to scare you, though. I couldn’t fall back asleep.”

“You gave me a fucking heart attack, dude.”

“I’m sorry,” Chloe offered with her best puppy eyes, hoping there was enough ambient light in the room for Beca to get the full effect of them. “Maybe we need a safe word? Or...a not-safe word so you know if it’s a baby thing?”

“Yeah, that’s...” Beca laid back down, but Chloe could still see the tension in her frame. “That’s probably a good idea.”

“I’m really sorry,” Chloe said with a touch of her hand to Beca's shoulder. She did feel bad, truly, but she was fighting a battle to not gush about how romantic she found it that Beca was ready to jump to her rescue at the mere suggestion that something was wrong. “What should our safe word be?”

“Well, you already picked ‘pineapple’ for our other safe word.”

Chloe felt her cheeks warm at the mention of the word and the memories of the encounter that warranted the need for its establishment, and all the times since then that made her need to decide whether or not to use it. “Not pineapple,” Chloe said with a smile.

“You’re the one who needs to remember to say it, so pick something that works for you.”
Chloe thought about it, and after three scenarios of why she might need to wake Beca up in the middle of the night flashed through her mind, she decided that having to remember a word wasn't going to work and she didn't want to keep thinking about having to act on such a thing. “How about, ‘Beca, it's the baby’?”

“Yeah? Okay, deal. Now tell me again why we’re awake? It’s...it’s 3:30 in the morning on a Monday.”

Chloe drummed her fingers on the taut bed sheet between them. Now she felt even worse for waking Beca up; just because she couldn’t sleep didn’t mean she should take Beca’s cherished rest from her. But Beca wasn’t making much of an effort to go back to sleep beyond getting back in bed fixing the covers she’d yanked off in her panic. She ended up setting closer to Chloe than her usual sleeping spot so Chloe scooted in, too, and felt Beca reel her in for a proper cuddle. She pressed a kiss to the hollow of Beca’s throat and got cozy.

“I’m awake because I had to pee. And you’re awake...because I got bored.”

She felt more than heard Beca’s quiet sound of amusement. “And what do you want to do now that we’re awake?”

Chloe knew neither of them had the energy for another round, but that didn’t stop her from running a teasing hand over Beca until she palmed a breast to squeeze it. Beca’s inhale stuttered and Chloe pressed another smiling kiss to her throat, letting her tongue glide over the skin there to make Beca shiver.

And then she relaxed again in Beca’s arms, taking pride in the way she could hear the change in the speed of Beca’s breathing. “Tell me how your meeting went? We kind of skipped that today.”

Beca sniffed and hummed and yawned, and Chloe felt her nod. “Was good. Basically got what I asked for.”

Chloe squeezed Beca in a hug. “Baby, that’s great! I knew you would, you’re too good for them to tell you that you aren’t worth it. But what do you mean by ‘basically’?”

“They’re giving me the eight grand and royalties.”
“And?”

“And released me from my contract.”

“What?!” Chloe almost jolted backward out of the embrace but Beca’s arm flexed to keep her in place.

Beca laughed, and Chloe frowned. That was no laughing matter. Not at all. “They’re terminating the contract that doesn’t let me work with artists outside the label to give me a new one. I just have to give them eight tracks a year and I can go do whatever I want.”

“You still have those albums lined up, though?”

“Yeah.”

Beca had indeed landed three new albums; they’d all come down the pike within the last month. She finally agreed to work with Tori Kelly, having gotten her need to launch a new artist sated by doing Emily’s album. In a version of “be careful what you wish for,” they’d given her another unknown artist, some barely-old-enough-to-grow-facial-hair boy discovered on YouTube that they both lamented would be marketed as the next Justin Bieber (even though Chloe loved Justin Bieber, even had a nasty fight with Beca over his music back in college, and Chloe had reminded Beca that she quite literally told Beca she would discover the next Justin Bieber before she was even signed), and thirdly, Katy Perry had come back to tap Beca for a follow up record.

It was a champagne problem to have, but all the new work made Chloe worry - again - about Beca’s time; when Beca was on an album, a big album, sometimes Chloe would go more than twenty-four hours without seeing her. She hadn't liked it then and she was going to like it even less once they had a baby.

But Beca had promised the schedules were flexible enough that she, too, could almost take the equivalent of maternity leave, and if Beca really got her rear in gear they could get the office converted into a studio before deadlines started piling up - even if its renovation ran past the one very hard deadline that actually mattered, happening on or around January 8th.

Twenty-four short weeks from now.
“And after those?”

“I give them eight tracks a year to whichever artists need them at my new rates, on a smaller retainer than I had before.”

“They’re paying you less?” Chloe didn’t like that one bit.

“Well, yes. And no. But yeah. Eight tracks a year at eight grand a pop -”

“Is only $64,000,” Chloe finished. “Beca, that -” wasn’t not a lot of money; it was more than Chloe made in a year, but even combined they would never be able to afford to keep the house they’d purchased. It was absurd to her that she had to think in the terms of hundreds of thousands of annual income to maintain the life they’d created for themselves, yet there they were. She would be just as happy living in a split-level condo and had no need for the luxuries Beca’s career in entertainment afforded them, but they were in pretty deep with the house and renovations and now they had a baby on the way to be planning and saving for his or her future. “That’s kind of a big pay cut?”

“But that’s if all I do are the eight songs. Then there’s everything new from Katy, Tori, and Mikey. Plus the residuals from the other records and a hundred grand for doing Capitol a solid and sticking around. Luke’s going to put something together so we have hard numbers on what to expect to come in this year. We’re going to be fine.” Beca’s hand started moving over Chloe’s arm, soothing her, because of course, Beca sensed that Chloe was worried about it. “And because they’re letting me work with whomever I want to from now on…” Beca drifted off expectantly and gave Chloe’s tricep a pinch.

Understanding hit her and Chloe tried to sit up in excitement but was kept close with a laughter-filled wrangling. “You’re taking the offer from The Weeknd?!”

The Weeknd. The. Weeknd.

Beca had asked Luke at least four times if it was a prank when he showed up on their doorstep insisting the news he bore was worthy of an in-person and not a phone call and made the announcement.

She asked him three more times after he left - one text and two phone calls, and Beca was serious if she made a phone call.
She asked Chloe if she thought it was a prank. Because why would he want to work with her? She’s done nothing but straight pop.

“It would be a random thing to do as a prank, wouldn’t it?” Chloe had offered.

“But I don’t do alt R&B sex music.”

“Since when do you think you can’t do a certain type of music? But he did say it’s co-producer, not lead, so that’s less pressure, right?”

“But it’s The Weeknd, Chloe!”

Beca grinned up at her. “I’m taking the offer from The Weeknd.”

Chloe fell onto her with a mess of squeals and hugs and kisses that had them both laughing. “You’re just now telling me this?!” she asked when she’d decided she’d smothered Beca enough for the time being.

Beca was still chuckling and got herself situated, folding one arm beneath her head. “The second I walked in you were freaking out about Aubrey seeing our sex tape. And, well…” Beca pointedly glanced down at their naked forms, now mostly uncovered thanks to Chloe’s excitement after Beca just having gotten them re-tucked into bed. “You distracted me.”

Chloe smacked her arm and scoffed. “That’s kind of a big deal!”

“Sorry?” Beca's apology didn't seem one bit sincere and Chloe leveled her best glare at her which served only to increase Beca's levity. “I just wanted to get acquainted first.”

That cut Chloe's annoyance. The last thing her libido needed was Beca to reference that man’s songbook which could rival her long-standing jam as being able to turn her on with little more than the opening chords. “Don't.”
“Baby you're no good…” Beca riffed with a smile. “Think I fell for you, I fell for you, I fell for you…”

Chloe’s elbow that supported her threatened to give out and she watched Beca smirk at the reaction. “Beca. Don’t.”

“What’s wrong, babe?” The hand that had been lying still against Chloe’s shoulder started drifting backward toward her neck to tickle at the sensitive spots there. “You got me putting time in, time in, nobody got me feeling this way…”

“Stop.” Chloe bit her lip to try to stop the smile that was forcing its way into place.

“You got me touching on your body…” As though to make her point, Beca bent her knee and shifted to slip it between Chloe’s and slid her fingers up to scratch at Chloe’s scalp until she closed her fist to create a delicious pull.

“Baby, it’s the middle of the -” Chloe’s voice failed her when Beca’s thigh pressed against her ever so gently. “Middle of the night.” God, what Beca's voice could do to her. Had always done to her.

“You woke me up,” Beca said with a wicked glint in her eye. “And now you’re tired?”

“I…” Chloe swallowed, trying to resist based on the sheer principle that Beca singing a few sexy lyrics shouldn’t make her as wet as she knows she is, especially after the level of release she had just hours earlier. She liked to think she had more control than that. But she didn't. “I didn’t say I was tired.”

“Then what’s wrong?” Beca flashed a smile and untucked her right arm from under her pillow to reach for Chloe’s hip and start pulling at it. “I know you'd rather be complacent.”

“Beca.” Chloe gave up fighting and let Beca’s hold pull her until she was on her hands and knees over Beca to straddle her raised thigh and fall into a slow rhythm that matched Beca's tempo.

“But girl, I'm so glad we’re acquainted.”
In what was a rare accomplishment, Beca was home before Chloe on a Wednesday afternoon. She'd been holed up at a recording studio going on ten hours a day, every day, for weeks, doing her best to get as much as possible in the can before she became a mother.

That was kind of fucking mindblowing: she was going to become a mother and she was making changes in her life to prepare for that impending arrival - working ahead and constantly negotiating about her winter and spring schedule, reading book after book about what to expect (including one that was intended specifically for expectant fathers and all the crazy shit their wife would be going through that as men they would never understand, written with such a thinly veiled misogynistic tone that it had taken every ounce of her patience to get through it because, despite that, it did have helpful information), researching preschools, and starting to get references for nannies from friends in the industry in case they decided to retain one.

Who the fuck was she and when did she become a so-called adult? A house and a career and a wife and a baby on the way - what?

But that is how she managed to get home on a weekday before Chloe: Stage 2 of baby preparation was underway as she met with a sound technician to work out what equipment she would need and want for what would be a new, albeit small, recording studio in their home. It wouldn't eliminate her need to go to studios for larger sessions with the musicians but it would be helpful for vocal sessions, mixing, and mastering, all things that took up far more time than they did space.

“Yeah, major soundproofing, don't half-ass it,” she answered as she looked through an online catalog with the technician.

“Don't want to wake up the missus?” he asked with a wink. Beca wasn’t sure how to interpret his comment; it sounded a lot like he was insinuating she would be getting up to questionable things behind soundproofed walls that one wouldn’t want their spouse to hear. A typical male response, really, especially for the music industry. The only questionable things she’d be getting up to behind that door would be taking place with Chloe. She rubbed the back of her neck at the thought of it; there was definitely something hot about imagining picking up Chloe to sit her on a mixing board and take her then and there. Not that Beca would ever actually do that - mixers are fucking expensive and it wouldn't even be comfortable with all those switches and sliders. But maybe on a chair next to the board. Definitely in the booth itself. Maybe while it records audio. She shook the fantasies away to refocus.

“I don’t want my kid’s tantrum to be Katy Perry’s backing vocals,” she answered pointedly to remind the guy that not only was she married, her wife was pregnant. She smiled at the imagined concept: Chloe wandering the house with their child in her arms or, after a few months, on her hip,
stopping by to wave together at Beca through the little window that would be installed in the soundproof door. She knew a screaming child would test her already thin patience, and she couldn’t wait.

She was still in the office hours later getting sucked into a dreaded conference call about issues with a guitarist who forgot to tell everyone he’d booked a concert tour and would be out of the country for the next two months.

The muted beep of the electronic lock on the front door told her Chloe was home and she talked her way off the call so she could finish a couple emails and touch up and save the hook she’d been toying with. She slipped her headphones on to finish it, keeping one ear free.

She felt more than saw Chloe walk in to find her, Chloe's energy always palpable to Beca.

“And how is the world’s most beautiful girl doing today?” Chloe finally asked after standing across from her for a solid minute without interrupting Beca's work.

Beca smiled to herself. “I don't know, Chlo. How are you doing?”

“Fine,” was the response, Chloe's voice cracking over the word.

Beca lifted her eyes from the screen just in time to catch the moment Chloe’s face shifted from giddy joy to tears as she broke down. “No, no, no,” Beca said quickly as she pulled off her headphones to get up and rush to her. “Why are we crying?” The spontaneous tears had all but ceased to be part of their life as Chloe was well into her second trimester, so a random bout of tears was a true cause for concern.

“I look so gross today,” Chloe said between sobs.

“Oh, babe…” She pulled Chloe into a hug and felt arms wrap around her waist like a vise. “I think you look beautiful today.” This was the first time Chloe had voiced any dissatisfaction with her changing appearance; definite uncharted waters for Beca to navigate.
Chloe shook her head and Beca moved one of her hands up to cradle the back of it so she would stop. “I’m fat and my chin keeps breaking out and my boobs are going to sag and I’m getting stretch marks and I’m never going to look cute in a bikini again!”

Beca kept her eyes on the ceiling as she let Chloe vent and cry, keeping her own mouth shut to weigh her response options: should she tell her none of those things are true (because honestly, Chloe’s still gorgeous even with the new curves and a rogue pimple on her usually flawless face) and invalidate her feelings? Tell her it’s a normal part of pregnancy, which Beca knows she already knows, and manage to both insult her intelligence and confirm her feelings that she looks gross? Every option dripped with the potential to come across as being insensitive when what Beca felt was the exact opposite: she wanted to drop to her knees and beg Chloe to understand that she was the most beautiful person to ever walk the Earth.

Instead, she held Chloe until she was quiet and the crying had reduced to the occasional sniffle and decided to break the silence with a soft, “I love you,” and a kiss to Chloe’s temple. “I'm sorry you don't feel great today.” It was as neutral a response as she could muster with her heart breaking over Chloe’s own heartache. “Is there anything I can do?”

She felt Chloe shake her head a little, sensed the way she was pulling herself together until she was no longer clinging to Beca to stand in comfortable closeness. Chloe’s stomach pressed into Beca’s but they weren’t quite close enough to easily kiss; it used to be that if they were that close they were able to kiss with a simple tilt of a chin. Now, though, Beca had to reach for it, just a little, and she gave Chloe a soft kiss before drying tears with the pads of her thumbs.

“I’m sorry,” Chloe said. She reached up to wipe the tears away more quickly and Beca could tell she felt sheepish about her outburst. “That was really sweet and it caught me off guard and I don’t know what happened.”

“Hey, it’s okay,” Beca said with a cautious smile. “Serves me right for trying to be cute.”

Chloe giggled at that and Beca relaxed. “You don’t have to try to be cute, Bec. You’re always cute.”

Beca put on her best grump. “I am not.”

“Yes, you are.” Chloe leaned in with clear intent to kiss but she startled a little and paused, a smile touching her lips. “Give me your hand.”
Beca offered it to her and Chloe guided it down to a spot on the lower left of her stomach. “Kicking?” Beca had yet to feel it, despite Chloe calling her over to try every time it happened. She lived in a perpetual state of anticipation waiting for her chance to experience it. However, she’d been waiting so long that the excitement had waned and she prepared herself for disappointment.

Only this time… “Oh my God!”

“Do you feel it?!” Chloe asked excitedly.

“Yeah! I...oh my God!” It was the strangest thing Beca had ever felt, a slow, erratic little pressing sensation under the palm of her hand. “That’s so fucking cool!”

She caught Chloe’s pointed look at her language and gave a shrug in reply and looked back down at her hand, but the movement stopped after a few more seconds.

“She’s been starting and stopping a lot this week; she’ll probably start back up soon.”

Beca looked up quickly. “Wait, she? What -” Beca’s mind spun. They had agreed to not find out the sex of their child in advance, and just last weekend at Chloe’s regular check-up they reaffirmed that decision when Dr. Merriweather asked if they’d changed their mind.

“Calm down,” Chloe said with a laugh. “I don’t actually know. I just...feel.”

“You think it’s a girl?” A hundred images of their life with a little girl flashed through her mind. Tea parties and tutus and skinned knees and cowboy hats and karate lessons and tap class and squealing on Christmas morning over whatever toy Santa brought. It was definitely getting really real.

“I think so. Something just tells me: girl.” She finished with a confident nod. “Or, you know, however they decide to identify when they’re old enough. But until then...girl.”

Beca smiled. “Wanna bet on it?”

Chloe scoffed in offense. “I will not bet on our child!”
“Not as sure as you think?” Beca teased. “There’s probably a pool online somewhere we could get in on, make a quick buck.”

“Beca.”

“We could zip out to Vegas, see what the stakes are?”

“Beca!”

“We could win her college fund. We might need to use someone else to place the bet, though - we’re probably barred from it. I bet Cynthia Rose knows a thing or two about -”

“Baby, stop!” Chloe said with a laugh as she clapped her hand over Beca’s mouth. “Stop.”

Beca grinned behind Chloe’s hand and pursed her lips to kiss the palm and get her to remove it. “So that’s a ‘no’ to a Vegas road trip?”

“No!” Chloe said with another giggle, and then her eyes lit up with an idea. “A Vegas road trip! Oh my gosh, Beca, can we go??”

“You…” Beca laughed, and then realized Chloe was serious. “You actually want to drive to Las Vegas?”

“Yes! Can we? We need a babymoon!”

A thousand reasons why they shouldn’t take a trip right now ran through Beca’s mind - her schedule, Chloe’s schedule, the work on the house, Chloe’s health even though she was certifiably perfect - but not one seemed good enough to contradict the look of giddy excitement on Chloe’s face.

“Come on, I have Columbus Day off. Let’s go!”
“Columbus Day is still a thing?”

“I guess? The point is that I have a three-day weekend coming! Pleaseeease?”

Beca let Chloe grab and swing her hands excitedly as she drew out her decision with a good deal of hemming and hawing, until, “No.”

Her hands were dropped and fell to her sides. “No?”

Beca shook her head. “You can still fly. Wanna hop a plane while you still can? And before we have a screaming infant?”

“Fly somewhere?”

“We could if you wanted to.”

“I don’t know if I want to be on a smelly, cramped plane right now…”

“Then we charter one.”

“A private jet? Beca…”

“I’ll ask Luke; he’ll find us a good deal.” Beca paused at Chloe’s hesitation, playing back the last few seconds of conversation in her mind and feeling like she’d somehow become a controlling jackass. “Or we can drive to Vegas! I’m sorry. I wasn’t trying to change your mind.”

“No, it’s okay. I just got excited, but it’s kind of dumb to drive when I can still fly. And dumber to take a vacation to the desert in the summer…”

Beca sought out Chloe’s hand to lead them out of the studio to the living room so they could both sit. “Hey, it’s not dumb. I think it’s a great idea! We’ve never been to Vegas together. Why don’t we save that for the end of the year, when you can’t fly and when it’s not quite so hot?”
“Las Vegas at nine months pregnant?”

“Fucking party time,” Beca said with a smile that finally made Chloe relax again. “They’ll probably waive the cover at every club we go to.”

Chloe laughed. “I feel like we should have taken our Vegas trip before I got pregnant.”

“What, you want to get wild and crazy there?”

“Isn’t that what you do in Vegas?”

Beca considered it, and considered the version of a Vegas vacation with a pregnant wife versus a not-pregnant wife… “Okay, how about this: we fly somewhere next weekend before you’re too far along to fly. We save Vegas for our first real trip some time next year when the baby’s old enough and we’re okay with leaving her alone with someone for more than a few hours.”

“Aubrey’s here now,” Chloe said a happy smile. “She’d take care of her.”

Beca exaggerated a forced smile. “That is certainly one option.” Only to immediately break it as soon as Chloe shoved her to make her take it back. “I’m sure she’d be fine. And then we could go as crazy as we want to in Vegas,” she continued with a wink, “and we do something relaxing for your three-day weekend. And if you still want to do the road trip thing, we can drive up the coast or something.”

“Ooh, can we go to Hearst Castle?!”

“If you’re up for it, sure.”

“Okay. Sold,” Chloe said with a giddy bounce on the couch before leaning in to kiss Beca. “So where are we going for Columbus Day?”

“Wherever your heart desires. Should we spin a globe and see where your finger lands?”
“We own a globe?” Chloe asked, looking confused as she searched her mind for where a globe might hide in their house, or when they bought one.

“Well, no. And maybe we should keep it domestic if it’s only three days. Wanna go visit your parents?”

Chloe gasped at the suggestion but then shook her head. “I know they’ll come here as soon as I have the baby. I can wait until then to see them. Do you want to go see your dad and Sheila? Or your mom?”

“Nah, they’ll visit us, too.”

“Good thing we have those extra rooms!”

Dread washed over Beca at the thought of not only her parents visiting, but her in-laws, and all at the same time and the chaos and stress that would come with that, on top of having a newborn. She desperately hoped their families would be agreeable to staggering their visits. Or at least being put up in hotels.

“Bec? Baby?”

“Huh-what?”

“You okay?” Chloe touched her cheek. “You’re white as a ghost and totally spaced out.”

“Oh. Ha. I, uh...yeah, I just imagined all our parents here at the same time debating Attachment parenting versus Babywise while she’s in a bassinet screaming and neither of us can get to her because they’re in an impenetrable circle around her…”

Chloe’s low whistle interrupted her thoughts. “None of that is going to happen. And I thought I was the dramatic one in this relationship…”
Beca laughed half-heartedly. “Shut up. Distract me. Where do you want to go?”

Chloe was quiet as she thought on the subject more, her head tilting side to side as she mentally weighed her options, until, “Can we go to New York?”

“New York? We’ve been there before. Are you sure?”

“I know, duh! It was our first big trip together. It will be fun.”

Beca held up her hands in defense. “Okay, okay! New York it is. I’ll text Luke about the jet. If you want tickets to anything, let me know and I’ll put in a request.”

Chloe lit up. “Ooh, can we see Hamilton ?!”

Beca groaned, regretting her earlier statement. She had nothing against Hamilton ; she wanted to see it, too. She just knew it was easier to book a ticket to the moon than that musical, especially short notice. She’d drop the cash on it if she absolutely had to, but spending thousands on a three hour show was a hard pill to swallow. Though she had little hesitation to spend thousands on a flight to get them there so...maybe she should just shut up and give Chloe what she wanted.

“I’ll see what I can do.”

She was hit with a squealing hug and a dozen “I love yous,” but when she pulled back, Chloe looked serious.

“You know we’re doing Attachment parenting though, right?”

“What! No, Chloe, she’ll turn into a spoiled brat who will scream if anyone puts her down for two seconds!”

“We are not going to let her lay there and cry for an hour. I will not let our daughter ‘cry it out,’” she added, with air quotes.
“My parents did and I turned out fine.”

The look Chloe gave her wasn’t subtle, a hundred sentiments rolled into one narrowing of the eyes. “And my parents did Attachment with my brother and me and we turned out fine, too.”

Beca worked to hold her tongue and hoped her face wasn’t as easy to read as Chloe’s had been, though the renewed look of challenge Chloe wore told her she was wrong. “Look, I don’t want to just ignore our kid and let them scream for hours, either. But I don’t want a kid who is spoiled the second they’re born. I get that we’re going to be their servants for like, the rest of our lives, but I want to at least pretend I’m the one in charge.”

Chloe’s lips pressed into a thin line but her eyes relaxed. “That’s fair. I’ll think about it.”

Beca held her tongue again. She knew Chloe would never use being pregnant as a trump card in a disagreement, but Beca sensed her desire to. “Just promise me you won’t be breastfeeding a six-year-old, okay? Because that’s just weird. To each their own, but...not my kid.”

“Our kid.” The correction came with a nudge to her knee.

“Our kid,” Beca said with an eyeroll. “You know I’m psyched about having this baby, right?”

“Yeah, I know you’re psyched,” Chloe giggled. “Why?”

“I just don’t want you to think that if I want to maintain some semblance of like...normalcy, like pre-baby, that it doesn’t mean I don’t want to do this.”

Chloe smiled and pulled Beca’s hand back to her stomach; the baby was kicking again. “Bec, it’s a little too late for me to think you don’t want to do this.”

“No, I know, I…” Beca drifted, distracted by the sensations under her palm. “Fuck, that’s really a tiny person in there!” She grinned at Chloe who was smiling at her reaction.

“Sure you don’t want to go all-in on the Attachment method?”
“I…” Beca hesitated. It wasn’t fair being able to actually feel her child and be asked whether or not she wanted to spend every waking and non-waking moment in contact with her because she felt like a jerk to say she didn’t, but at that very second, she couldn’t think of anything better. So she winked. “I just want to be able to roll over and fuck you in the middle of the night without worrying about squishing our baby.”

“Beca!” Chloe said with a peel of laughter. “Is that your biggest concern? Our sex life?”

Beca shrugged. “Not the biggest.”

“But you’ve thought about it?”

“You haven’t?” The teasing humor of the moment had passed; it was back to being a real conversation. A little lighthearted, but important nonetheless.

“Of course I have,” Chloe said, working to shift herself to sit on her knees on the couch to face Beca. “I think about it all the time. Every time you look at me now, I see myself how you must see me with my belly and the dang stretch marks and it’s really hard to feel sexy sometimes.”

“I think you are so sexy!” Beca rushed, feeling the need to defend or reassure, but Chloe held up a hand to stop her before she could keep going.

“I know you do. That doesn’t mean I feel sexy though. That’s new for me, and I think about how I might not feel that same way again for awhile and it’s scary. I want you to want to roll over and take me when you think about it. I love that you’re still doing that, that we haven’t really...slowed down.” She blushed the tiniest bit at the words and Beca wondered if Chloe was remembering a specific moment. “But I’m only going to get bigger, and I do think about it, that eventually you might not...well, that you might not find me attractive anymore.” Chloe’s vulnerability shone through vibrantly and while she wasn’t crying, Beca felt like she was back at that moment when she’d set Chloe off into tears with an off-hand compliment, unsure how to fix it.

“Chlo,” she started cautiously as she scooted closer to Chloe. “There’s not a second that’s gone by in five years that I haven’t been embarrassingly attracted to you. That’s not going to change.”

Chloe smiled a little at that. “No?”
Beca bit her lip. “I actually kind of find you pregnant like...super hot? Is that weird?”

Chloe laughed and shook her head. “If that’s how you feel, it’s not weird.”

Beca was relieved to see a happy Chloe still present, a successful attempt to veer her out of the path of tears and chanced a tease. “Well, okay. That’s not totally true. There’ve maybe been a few seconds when I wasn’t super attracted to you.”

Chloe gasped at that, mock offense. “What!”

“I mean, like the times you were so hammered you puked and I was cleaning it up. Or you up. I do have my limits.”

“Really?” Chloe said in a fit of giggles. “You didn’t wanna get with all this?” She ran her hands over herself and feigned gagging. It made Beca flinch and she only laughed harder.

“Oh, well, to be fair…” she hesitated for dramatic effect, “I was still attracted to you. I just didn’t want to pin you down and shove my tongue down your throat in that exact moment.” Chloe laughed again but somehow managed to purr and throw Beca a look that made her stomach clench a little. “More like I wanted to put you to bed and play with your hair and help you feel better.” She ran her fingers through Chloe’s hair with the comment and finished with a playful little tug.

“You did that more than once.”

Beca faked a grimace; so many years of restrained emotions and lust, and now it seemed absurd they had ever existed as “just friends.” She’d tried so hard for so long to do her best to keep Chloe at a literal and figurative arm’s length. But more often than not, regardless if one (or both) of them was drunk or having a bad day, they ended up sharing a bed, often with Beca playing with Chloe's hair. That specific aspect had been slower to develop, of course; a lot of bricks had to be removed from Beca's wall before she could do it freely. But one night of Chloe drunk crying over a rip in a new blouse had led to a comforting caress from Beca and it had calmed Chloe down so well that Beca couldn't help but keep doing it.

The bricks came off her wall a lot more quickly after that.
“Well, I figured out you like it, so.” She shrugged.

“I do.” Chloe smiled and suddenly she was laying on her side, head in Beca's lap with her hair carefully laid out.

“Subtle,” Beca said with a soft smile and sent her fingers into the ridiculously perfect waves to massage along Chloe’s hairline. She watched Chloe’s eyes flutter closed. “So, tell me what you want to do on this babymoon?”
“Wait, baby, get back down here!” Chloe kept her sandaled feet firmly on the tarmac at the bottom of the steps leading up to the gleaming white jet humming to life in front of her.

She watched Beca stop midway up the stairs and glance over her shoulder, then reach to set her shoulder bag at the top of the steps and make her way back down. “Oh, we’re doing this?”

“Obviously.” Chloe worked the angle of her phone to get both of them in the frame with the plane as Beca stood on her tiptoes behind Chloe wearing a super cheesy grin that Chloe mirrored as she took a selfie. “Wait, now: divas.” Chloe moved the aviator sunglasses from the top of her head down into place and Beca did the same with her Ray-Bans, ducking under Chloe’s arm to stand next to her instead, arms crossed, fingers at her jaw as though she couldn’t be bothered with a photo. Chloe tossed her hair and kept her chin held high and snapped the picture.

She still remembered when she’d have to wrangle Beca into a selfie, full of complaints and negotiations and Chloe’s fingers finding the ticklish spot on Beca’s stomach to get her to smile.

But today Beca snatched the phone out of Chloe’s hand, dropped to her knees in front of her, pointed at the obvious swell of Chloe’s stomach behind the white ribbed tank stretched over it that Chloe had worn for summer travel comfort and affected what Chloe would classify as a “proud surprised” expression to take a picture of herself and Chloe’s pregnant belly.

She kissed her stomach after, taking another picture, and then Chloe’s lips when she popped back up to return her phone. “Remember to use our hashtag or whatever. Post it to my Instagram, too?” She swatted Chloe’s rear playfully and by the time Chloe spun with a hop and a shriek, Beca was already waiting for her in the doorway of the jet. “You coming or what?” Beca shouted.

“Rebecca Ann Beale!”

Beca cocked a hip to illustrate her impatience and stuck out her tongue and Chloe started for the steps, smiling to herself. She loved when Beca was playful, and not that Beca was a stick in the mud - far from it nowadays - but sometimes she was down to be sillier than others, and apparently, today was one of those days.
“I’d offer to make mimosas, but..” Beca nodded at Chloe as she held up a bottle of what looked like expensive bubbly from where she crouched in front of a mini-fridge. She didn't pop it for herself either, instead returning with bottled waters for both of them and a few packets of nuts - fancy ones, not dusty commercial airline peanuts - and a banana, which she gave to Chloe.

“I can't say I don't miss it,” Chloe said as she cracked open her bottle. She hadn’t had a drink in more than six months and she could really, really go for anything that included tequila.

“I don’t blame you.” Beca plopped back into the plush tan leather seat facing Chloe, allowing Chloe’s feet to return to their spot on her lap and the impromptu massage they were receiving. They were three hours into the five-hour flight to New York City and had already watched the movie Chloe put on her computer specifically for the trip (Serendipity) and followed it with thirty minutes of light yoga to stretch and help keep the blood flowing. Beca had been paranoid the entire time, worried they would hit turbulence and Chloe would fall and she spent the entire time hovering within arm’s reach to be ready to catch her and not doing any yoga at all.

She didn’t fall, of course. But she did yawn now.

“You can sleep if you want,” Beca offered, still working her thumbs into the arch of Chloe’s right foot.

Chloe shook her head. “I’m not really tired. Maybe a little bored?”

“What do you want to do? We can see what movies they have on board if you want to watch another one.”

Chloe smiled at Beca’s easy willingness to sit through not one but potentially two movies back-to-back if that’s what Chloe wanted. “Maybe later. Do you remember our first trip to New York?”

Beca feigned being deep in thought for a few seconds. “Vaguely. Did we sing? I feel like we sang.”

Chloe wiggled her foot in silent protest of Beca’s teasing. “We might have sung a little.”

“Remember when we all took pictures in front of the fountain at Lincoln Center after we won?”

“We did that every year we went to the ICCAs.”

“But specifically the first time.”

“Okay.”

“Well...we were all taking pictures, and it was dark outside and the fountain and buildings were lit up so pretty and all I was thinking about was how much I wanted to pick you up and kiss you in front of that fountain.”

She watched Beca grimace and felt a little bad about starting them down the woulda-coulda-shoulda road. “Yeah...I maybe thought about that, too.”

“You know I’ll never ask you to apologize for being with Jesse,” Chloe said quickly when she could sense remorse settling into Beca’s features. “He’s a good guy, and you made a choice. I made a choice to not ask if you wanted another choice. I don’t want to live with regrets and that wasn’t why I was bringing it up.”

“Okay.” Beca’s shoulders relaxed a bit. “Then what’s up?”

Chloe smiled, hoping to will away the tension from the air. “Can I kiss you in front of the fountain at Lincoln Center this time?”

“That’s it?”

Chloe nodded.

“Yeah, you weirdo,” Beca said with a slanted smile. “You can kiss me in front of the fountain. I don’t think you should try to pick me up this time, though.”
She giggled. “Good. Can I kiss you on this private jet, too?”

“I thought you'd never ask,” Beca said with a bigger smirk as she moved to sit next to Chloe and fall into an easy kiss. Beca nipped a little too hard at her lip to be innocent and Chloe pulled back, heat streaking through her. Beca’s smirk returned. “My turn.”

“Your turn?” Chloe asked, not oblivious to the fact that Beca’s hand was making a slow but sure journey up her thigh.

“Mhmm. Remember when we flew to Copenhagen?”

“When I asked you to be my girlfriend?” Chloe swallowed hard and let her eyes fall closed when Beca leaned in to drop kisses along the length of her neck.

“When we joined the Mile High Club.”

Chloe shivered as Beca’s lips tugged at her earlobe. “Vaguely.”

Chloe remembered it clear as day: a few weeks after crossing that final boundary of their friendship, in the space between Beca breaking up with Jesse but before (minutes before) making things official with Chloe, Beca had whispered dirty things in her ear and under cover of a shared blanket, brought her to orgasm sitting on a jumbo jet with 300 strangers and her best friends.

And then Chloe had returned the favor.

“What do you think about renewing our membership?” The kisses kept traveling and the question asked was muffled against the swells of Chloe's breasts in her low-cut tank top. A tongue slid through her line of cleavage. “I think it’s expired.”

“How are you horny again already?” It had been Chloe who started it early that morning, a slow, lazy hour of lovemaking that was more about wanting to be close to Beca than it had been driven by lust. Now, though, she knew this was more about lust and she worked the elastic band out of Beca's hair in order to ruffle her fingers through it as the front of her tank was pulled down further and a second hand came into play to liberate a breast from her bra so it could be kissed as well.
“I’m not allowed to want you more than once in a day?” The words were separated by flicks of a tongue over hardened flesh.

“I didn’t say that.” Chloe bit her lip and glanced ahead at the door to the cockpit. “What’s the story on the pilot popping out unannounced?”

“Slim to none.” Beca made her way back up to recapture Chloe’s lips in a kiss that Chloe eagerly returned. “Is this okay?” Beca asked after a solid few minutes of heated kissing.

Chloe almost laughed at the question but was touched by it nonetheless. “You’re asking me if this is okay?”

Beca shrugged and pecked her lips again. “Just checking.”

Chloe reached up to frame her face with the hand not clutching the back of Beca’s neck. “Baby, I let you touch me on a plane full of people as friends. I’m not going to stop you from touching me on an empty plane as wives.”

“Okay.” Beca smiled. “So I can?”

“Yes, Bec, oh my gosh,” Chloe said with a laugh and an eye roll. “Is this actually a ploy to get me to beg you for it?”

“Why, is it working?” Beca’s smile shifted from innocent to dirty as her hand started roaming again, making Chloe more than aware that her left breast was just...hanging out.

“Maybe.”

Chloe let her thumb trace the line of Beca’s jaw and then her lower lip, tugging on it a little before leaning in only to stop just short of kissing her. “Please touch me.”
Chloe woke up to Beca’s voice, quiet and muted under the constant hum of the jet engines. She only caught a word here or there, but she could tell she was on the phone.

“Well can we land...arrange security?...I didn’t think…”

“What’s wrong?” Chloe asked, working to get herself sitting up. It took longer than she would have liked, and she didn’t realize she was still nude until she caught the way Beca was looking at her. She smiled and resituated herself to snuggle up with the blanket that had shown up while she was asleep.

“Paparazzi at JFK,” Beca answered as she angled the phone away from her mouth a little.

Chloe shrugged. “There’s always paparazzi at JFK.”

“You don’t care?”

“I mean, either they’ll catch us or they won’t. I kinda wish I had something to wear other than a tank top and yoga pants if we’re going to get paparazzied, but it’s whatever.”

Beca hesitated and then returned to her call. “Hey, Luke. Nevermind, we’ll be fine. Can you just have the driver meet us in the terminal in case they don’t keep their distance? Thanks. Bye.”

“Aww, baby,” Chloe started.

“No. Nope.” Beca quickly hid a smile and busied herself with checking her hair in a nearby mirror.

“You were worried about meeeeee,” Chloe sing-songed.

“No, I wasn’t.”

“Yes, you weeeeeeere.” Chloe gathered up her blanket and put it around her shoulders like a cloak to step across the aisle to where Beca was failing spectacularly at playing cold and unfeeling.
“Was not.” Beca bit down on a smile as Chloe sidled up behind her to wrap the blanket around both of them. She intentionally nudged at Beca’s back with her belly and reached up to poke at Beca’s cheek and Beca broke out into a grin. “Stop it.”

“Suddenly you’re too tough to admit you care?”

“Old time’s sake,” Beca said with a laugh before turning in Chloe’s embrace to kiss her.

“We’re going to land in half an hour. If you want to do your makeup or anything you should do it before it gets bumpy.”

Chloe narrowed a teasing glare at her but left the words unsaid; she knew Beca wasn’t insinuating that she needed makeup, only that Chloe may want it if photographers were likely to catch them. “Thanks,” she said with a peck to Beca’s lips before slipping out of the embrace to gather her things.

Her clothes - so hastily discarded earlier in the flight - were now draped flat over the back of a seat. Her carry-on bag, a brown Louis Vuitton bandoulière which embarrassingly cost more than one of her entire paychecks, had been moved from where she’d tucked it away in a narrow closet to the seat.

Yeah, Beca’s days of being too tough to care were long gone.

She dug through her bag and pulled out a few things - concealer, lipstick, deodorant - and set to touching up herself before slipping back into her comfy travel clothes. She could tell Beca had already done the same because she hadn’t bothered with eyeliner and mascara before they left the house that morning. “I don’t know why you bothered,” she said to Beca as she dealt with the zit on her chin that made her want to scream.

“With what?”

“You did your eyes.”

“Paparazzi, Chlo. Did you have that conversation with me in your sleep?”
“I know that,” Chloe said with a roll of her eyes. “I meant why’d you bother because you’re going to be wearing your sunglasses the whole time anyway.”

Beca scratched the side of her nose at that and shrugged. “Confidence.”

Chloe winked at her for being cute and tossed her toiletries back into the bag and reached for her shirt. “Well, don’t worry. I’ll be with you and answer their dumb questions so you don’t have to.” Chloe wasn’t scared of a few idiot photographers.

“You shouldn’t answer anything.” Beca sighed a little with the comment and slouched in her seat. “They’re vultures.”

“You know you have to play nice with them, baby. You look at them the wrong way once, they’ll label you a bitch for life.”

“Is that really so bad?” Beca was joking, though not completely, and it made Chloe a little sad. This was their life. More specifically, this was Beca’s life. She’d earned what she wanted and with it came the incessant requirement to please certain others lest she be labeled “difficult” or a “bitch.” Beca didn’t hesitate to be herself with certain audiences, but for press and paparazzi, she learned to put on a happy face from the beginning: sassy, but polite.

Chloe was just sitting down when the cockpit door opened, their pilot giving them an informal announcement about preparing to land, and that if they look out the left side of the plane, they would see the Manhattan skyline. Beca showed up in the seat next to her a second later to buckle her seatbelt and hand one of Chloe’s straps to her.

“I just realized I have no idea where we’re staying,” Chloe said as she peered through the window, having to put her right arm around Beca’s shoulders to accommodate her peering as well.

Beca reached across her and pointed to some non-specific spot. “There.”

“The Empire State Building? Amazing.”

“Lap of luxury, baby.”
Chloe nudged her for her dumb joke and she felt Beca sit back and rest her head on Chloe’s shoulder. Chloe sat back as well, watching the iconic skyline pass by slowly - the Freedom Tower, the Brooklyn Bridge, the Empire State and Chrysler Buildings, Times Square and Central Park - before the plane banked to the right and the view changed to endless housing units. Beca’s hand came to rest on her stomach and Chloe smiled.

“Come on. Just ignore them and walk.”

“Baby, I know.” Chloe watched Beca set her jaw and put on her sunglasses when the waiting photographers came into view as they rounded the corner to leave the secure area of the airport. They weren’t there specifically for Beca; they both knew that. Paparazzi liked to hang out at major airports, especially over weekends and holidays; there was always a celebrity coming or going. It was far from Chloe’s first encounter with them. They got snapped when they were out and about with relative frequency if they were at a notable public place - upscale restaurants, leaving the current hot nightclub, shopping at The Grove.

It took about five more steps until the weasels recognized Beca and the flashes started and stacks of prints from Beca’s publicity photo shoots seemed to appear out of nowhere, demanding autographs. They kept walking and the cameras followed them down the corridor toward the exit, dumb questions designed to bait a reaction starting to be tossed out, intermixed with inane ones to try to lull them into complacent answering.

“How was your flight?”

“When is your wife due?”

“What brings you to New York?”

“What do you think about Taylor Swift’s new haircut?”

“Is it true your brother got you pregnant? Isn’t that incest?”

Chloe stopped in her tracks but Beca grabbed her hand to keep her moving. “Fuck off,” Beca
snapped at the snake who’d asked the question. Of course, the flashes only intensified and Chloe didn’t know if she wanted to scream or cry or punch the guy, but the fact that she could tell at least one of them was filming everything made her check herself.

Suddenly the walk from the tarmac to the SUV curbside felt like the longest walk of Chloe’s life, but they were almost there, and a pair of large men in suits waiting near the vehicle intercepted them and made for human shields as she climbed into the back seat of the vehicle, followed by Beca.

The moment the door slammed closed she broke down crying. “Is that what people are saying about me?”

“No. Damn it.” She felt Beca’s hand on her knee and her shoulder and her hair and fuck these captain’s chairs not letting her slide over and curl up in Beca’s lap. “You know that’s not what people think. They’re just the scum of the earth who get paid to make people react.”

“How did he even know? We didn’t say anything about Chris in the press.” She looked up when she felt Beca trying to push tissues into her hands and took them to try to compose herself.

“I don’t know, babe. People know Chris helped us. The people who matter, anyway. And they know it’s not fucking incest. I really don’t think anyone thinks that - he just took the information he had and twisted it to piss us off.”

“Well, it worked.” She blew her nose and wiped her tears and considered angrily throwing the used tissues at the driver, only to think better of it when she remembered he and his partner had actually been there to help. “Welcome to New York, huh?” She finally glanced at Beca who, quite obviously, had been staring at her in concern since they sat down.

Beca offered a tight smile and then leaned across the space between their seats to kiss her. “I’m sorry, Chlo. I’m declaring a New York do-over. Our babymoon starts right now.”

Chloe had to laugh, because dang it if that wasn’t cute. She nodded and kissed her back. Beca was smiling when they parted and she moved back to sit properly in her seat. “So are you going to tell me where we’re really staying?”

Beca just smiled and shrugged.
When the SUV pulled to the curb to park, Chloe was confused. She’d been keeping her eye out for one of the iconic luxury hotels of New York City - the Ritz, the Plaza, the Waldorf, but instead, they’d rolled up outside a massive brick building that looked more like a college from the late 1800s than a fancy hotel.

“What’s this?”

“The High Line. It looked cool. And I didn’t want to stay in the middle of Times Square or something like that.”

Chloe knew The High Line - on more than one occasion, she and the Bellas had walked the elevated strip of a park that ran along the west side of Manhattan. It was one of her favorite places to take pictures with its many juxtapositions of greenery and concrete, modern art and ghost paintings on the sides of buildings advertising the booming businesses of decades past, rail yards and piers and edgy futuristic architecture. She and Beca had laid on one of the massive oversized wooden lounge chairs to take in the Spring sunshine and Beca had been the one to volunteer a selfie.

“But -” Chloe stepped out of the SUV to join Beca on the sidewalk, the driver offering his hand as he held the door and worked on getting her bearings and there across the street from the hotel was The High Line she knew so well. “Oh. Oh! Oh, baby, this is perfect!”

Beca smiled at her. “I thought you might like it. You dragged us over here every trip.” She nodded at the park across and above the street.

“I do. So much.” Chloe kissed Beca excitedly and started for the entrance. “Come on, let's check in. I want to see our room and get ready for tonight.”

Chapter End Notes

Y'all. This story just hit its 2nd Anniversary.

CRAZINESS. Thanks for sticking with this saga of a story for so long!! You're all the absolute best.
In New York

Chapter Notes

Surprise, I'm still alive! (Barely.) Thanks for your patience; my life's going through a bit of a crazy upheaval as of late. I haven't abandoned this, please do not worry. I've just had very little time to devote to it!

Chloe loved New York.

She loved it before she’d ever visited it; in seventh grade, she’d begged her father to buy a black and white print of the Manhattan skyline for her to hang above her bed. She’d had to wait until her birthday but he’d given it to her, framed and everything, and helped her make sure it was hung level on her wall.

New York equated happy memories. It was childhood dreams of visiting Central Park and hot dogs from street vendors and unexpectedly talented buskers singing in the subway. It was a high school Spring Break trip with her three best friends when she was 18. It was her first a cappella national championship, and while the competition itself was not a happy memory, she and Aubrey had had the best time together in the city.

It was returning with Beca the next year - and winning. It was running around the city, this time with Beca, to show her all her favorite places she’d discovered and taken her to new ones she read about online. It was lying together in a park on the grass to watch the clouds, the distinctive towers of the San Remo at the edge of her line of sight. It was shopping in SoHo and making Beca be the judge of everything she tried on because she wanted to wear things Beca liked. It was sharing a hotel room with her and always talking her way into sharing a bed even though they each had their own. It was holding Beca’s hand so they wouldn’t lose each other in a crowd and “forgetting” to let go when they got where they were going and Beca not letting go either.

It was a bubble for them because even though Jesse was there, too, with the Trebles, Beca stuck with Chloe and the Bellas citing team loyalty over a romantic relationship. Chloe had thought a lot about that at the time, what it meant if it meant anything at all.

She knew now it did mean something, all the somethings she’d hoped it to mean.
“That was amazing!” she said as she walked hand-in-hand with Beca along 46th Street toward Times Square. “I’m totes going to learn all those songs.”

“I will literally pay to hear you rapping about the American Revolution,” Beca said with a bright laugh. “But something tells me I’m going to regret that offer.”

“You love my rapping! I have mad skills. Do you want me to bust out my Coolio again?”

“No, no, please no,” Beca said, laughing harder as she leaned into Chloe’s shoulder.

Chloe squeezed her hand as they stepped into Times Square. It was packed, a Saturday night at 11:00 pm when 40 Broadway shows have let out plus the masses of even more tourists there to take selfies and Snapchats and Facetime with their kids or parents or partners so they, too, could see the center of the universe.

“Come on,” she said, guiding Beca toward the glowing red staircase in the heart of it all. It, too, was packed with people, but she was determined and used her feminine charm and pregnancy pass to claim a spot at the very top so they could have their own tourist moment. “Excuse me,” she asked the girl standing next to them. “Would you take a picture for us?”

“Sure.” The girl shoved her own phone away to take Chloe’s and she and Beca posed, arms around one another, with the iconic tower of illuminated billboards behind them. “Congratulations, by the way,” the girl said when she returned the phone with a gesture toward Chloe.

Chloe squeezed Beca with the arm she still had around her waist. “Oh, thanks!”

“You, too,” the girl added with a nod at Beca. “That last record was a bop. Enjoy the city.”

With zero fanfare the girl departed, leaving Chloe to laugh at the somewhat dumbfounded look on Beca’s face. “What’s wrong?” she finally asked.

“Nothing. That was just...she was cool. Not asking for a selfie. I didn’t know she recognized me until she said something.” Beca shrugged and turned around to lean against the railing at the top of the stairs.
Chloe turned as well and tried to not be too obvious that she was staring at Beca rather than the lights of the city, but it was hard not to look. Beca seemed a little lost in a personal moment, wearing a small smile as she gazed up at the pillar of video billboards towering above them.

“You’re staring,” Beca finally said with a wider smile.

Chloe giggled. “Busted. Whatcha thinking about?”

Beca shook her head. “Just thinking about how I can’t believe this is my life. Sometimes I forget, you know?”

As if on cue, Chloe felt their baby starting to move and roll in her belly as if to give her a reason to take pause as well. “Yeah, I know.” She smiled at Beca for a moment and then pushed away from the railing to emphasize her next point. “It’s so nice tonight; walk me to Lincoln Center?”

If New York equated happy memories, Lincoln Center was the dreamlike utopia version. Every April for three years she walked out its front doors carrying a trophy as tall she. And every April for three years she and the rest of her Bellas posed in front of the iconic fountain for both silly and serious group photos and selfies, and every April for three years she wanted to grab Beca and lift her up and spin around and kiss her breathless.

She felt oddly nervous as they ascended the wide steps leading up to the plaza from the sidewalk. Maybe it was some form of lingering fear or paranoia that she would lose control and mess up and cross a boundary and lose Beca forever.

But before she’d finished figuring out why she was nervous, Beca had reached over to slip her hand into Chloe’s and squeeze it and she realized she had literally no reason to be nervous.

There was no control to lose.

There was nothing to mess up.

There was no more boundary line.
Beca was hers forever.

“Alright, where do you want me?” Beca asked with a cheeky smile and a swinging of their clasped hands.

“Is that a trick question?” she answered with a wink. “But there, come on,” she said as she pointed to the massive circular fountain illuminated from within and backed by the towering symphony and ballet halls dramatically lit to match.

There were a fair number of people milling about - it was just past midnight which was relatively early by New York standards, perhaps passersby like themselves or ballet- or symphony-goers who were enjoying the early autumn air. They made their way to the fountain and Chloe gave the black granite ring encircling it a pat. “Up you go.”

“I could probably pick you up instead,” Beca said as she turned and backed up. “If that’s what you’re wanting.”

Chloe shook her head. “And worry the whole time about being dropped? No, I’d rather enjoy this, thank you.”

Beca shrugged, unoffended. “Suit yourself.” She sat down on the ring, feet dangling a solid foot off the ground. “So what’s the fantasy? Do we need to pretend we just won the ICCAs? Want me to bust out my ‘Blurred Lines’ verse?” She started clapping and working her shoulders to the beat, feet kicking out as she added a dip of her head or two. “I feel so lucky - you wanna hug me - what rhymes with hug me? What rhymes with ‘hug me,’ Chlo? Hmm?”

Chloe was almost in tears from laughter when she felt herself get reeled in to stand between Beca’s knees. She sobered quickly at the way Beca was looking up at her, all mirth and contentment and comfort and she felt legs wrap around her own just above the knee.

“We can pretend you picked me up,” Beca said with a smile as she reached to loop her arms around Chloe’s neck. “What else? Do we need to wait for this thing to go off like a geyser or something like that so it’s extra dramatic? Do you want me to play some ‘Clair de Lune’ on my phone?”

Beca was looking up at her with bright eyes and her most honest, sincere smiles, the one that was reserved almost exclusively for Chloe. She still remembers the first time it was gifted to her: it
wasn’t anything out of the ordinary, just an afternoon sitting across from one another in the living room of the Bellas’ house studying and Chloe had asked if Beca wanted to order pizza and Beca had looked up and smiled at her in a way that had stopped Chloe’s heart because she could tell it wasn’t about the pizza; it was just pure, honest-to-goodness appreciation for Chloe’s consideration for her comfort.

“No,” she said with a light shake of her head. “This is perfect.” She took a breath, smiling a little, too, to let on to the fact that she was leaning into the fantasy now. “I have a confession,” she whispered.

“And what is that?” Beca whispered back.

She paused for effect and bit her lip, noticing Beca’s eyes flickering down before locking back on Chloe’s. “I’m...I’m in love with you, Beca Mitchell.”

Beca’s smile brightened and then relaxed until she was looking up at Chloe with feigned, overdramatic shyness. “You are?”

She nodded.

Beca’s shoulders slumped with relief. “Thank God, because I’m in love with you, too, and I don’t know how much longer I could’ve pretended like I’m not.”

Chloe slipped her arms around Beca’s waist and laughed; she was appreciative Beca was giving her her little moment.

“You can kiss me now, by the way,” Beca said. “If you want, I mean,” she added with a fake-embarrassed shrug.

She let her fingers play in Beca’s hair until she had one hand on the back of her neck to guide her forward just the slightest. Chloe hesitated before kissing her, hovering millimeters from her lips to appreciate the way Beca’s eyes had fallen closed and the happiness that was still evident in her features and the soothing sound of the falling water and the sounds of the city around them and for that moment it was like those years of waiting and pining were erased. She was 24 again, a Super Senior who’s just won her third national championship with the girl of her dreams at her side who’s just confessed her undying love to her.
With a quick breath, she brought their lips together and she felt Beca react, her legs tightening around Chloe’s, the arms around her neck doing the same to pull her in closer. Her intent had been to keep the kiss as light and relatively innocent as if this moment had been their first kiss (not that their actual first kiss had been innocent whatsoever). But, perhaps just like that first actual kiss, the innocence lost out to passion and she felt Beca’s fingers give a gentle tug on her hair, just enough to make her gasp which Beca capitalized upon and suddenly they were making out in the middle of the Lincoln Center Plaza not caring that they weren’t alone.

They parted after a minute or two, Beca’s hand lingering on Chloe’s cheek as they caught their breath, eyes closed. Her eyes were still closed when she felt Beca’s hand drop away and show up a second later on her stomach, cradling the curve of it in the gentle way she always did. Chloe felt her baby move just then, and she knew Beca did, too, from the little sound of surprise she made. Chloe just smiled, feeling Beca feel their baby.

“Man,” Beca finally said after a long moment.

Chloe had to blink a few times to bring her focus back. “Hmm?”

“I work fast, that’s all.”

Chloe tilted her head, confused. “What do you mean?”

“I mean,” Beca swirled her hand around Chloe’s belly again, “our first kiss and bam! I already got you knocked up.”

“You are such a dork!” Chloe said with a laughing groan as she tried and failed to lean out of Beca’s reach thanks to Beca grabbing her.

“I’m the smoothest motherfucker around,” she went on, wearing a cocky grin.

Chloe rolled her eyes playfully at the obvious set-up. “And why is that?”

“Bam!” Beca said, flipping their entwined hands so the back of Chloe’s left hand was in her own face. “Already hitched, too!”
Chloe was laughing hard enough that she had to wrestle her hands away from Beca to wipe away the tears. “What has gotten into you today? You’ve been squirrely all day!”

Beca just shrugged happily and kicked her dangling feet like a child. “I’m on my babymoon with my super hot wife in one of the coolest cities. Is it not okay?”

“Of course it’s okay!” Chloe said quickly as she rushed to give her hands back to Beca to give her something to do, and instantly their arms were swinging out and in and back and forth, and if Beca had been standing instead of sitting, they’d be dancing. “I love it. And I love you!”

“I love you, too.” Beca let go of Chloe’s hands to loop her arms around Chloe’s waist. “I’m not going to be able to do this much longer,” she teased, making a show of having to stretch to reach.

If Chloe had been in a sour mood or had a bad day, the comment might have made her cry, but today she felt amazing and happy and glowing and never prouder to be a mommy-to-be. So she just smiled and ran her hands along Beca’s arms until they rested on her shoulders. “It’s not going to be this baby’s fault if you are too small to reach.”

Beca’s mouth fell open at that and Chloe took pride in catching a punchy Beca off-guard with a well-placed short joke. “Did you - I - fuck you, dude!” she finally managed through a laugh.

A peck on the nose is how Chloe “apologized” and then she was pulling Beca off the fountain and back to her feet. Their kiss was still swimming around in her memory and she wanted to see how tonight’s silly Beca would translate in the bedroom. “Let’s go back to the hotel.”

“Tired?”

“Not exactly.”

How it translated, Chloe discovered, seemed to be a direct one-to-one ratio of silly-to-sexy. While Beca was conscientious about being gentle in the necessary moments - she didn’t slam Chloe too hard against the door and she didn’t surprise her too much when she pushed her onto the bed - she was demanding and dominating, right up until the point she pulled the belt out of her discarded jeans, gave it to Chloe, and held up her wrists as her final demand before surrender.
There wasn’t anything to tie her to, though, but Beca seemed more than content with her hands simply being bound. She tried to restrain herself as though she was tied to the bed but gave up around the time Chloe’s teeth tugged on her nipple, and there was something erotically beautiful about Beca’s hands, black leather belt wrapped around her wrists, reaching to frame Chloe’s face and urge her back up for a kiss.

Chloe always loved that they still had this, that Beca was still as turned on by her as she was that very first time, arguably at times even more so.

She worked her way lower, licking at the faint lines of abs visible with Beca's writhing until she'd run out of body to lick, kneeling on the floor at the foot of the bed.

A groaned, “Fuck, baby, please,” filled the otherwise quiet air around them and Chloe leaned in, teasing Beca with wet kisses to her inner thigh until she couldn't resist her pleas any longer.

She watched Beca fall apart, and then again, and a third time that took a little more effort than she'd planned when teasing Beca with the possibility of that third time and her bicep was burning by the time she climbed back onto the bed to work on unwinding the hastily tied knot of leather around her wrists.

“What’s wrong?” Beca asked, still panting.

Chloe smiled at her though tilted her head in curiosity. “What do you mean?”

“You’re shaking.” She nodded at Chloe’s hands and Chloe noticed her right was trembling.

She laughed. “I’m fine. Arm’s just worn out.”

“Sorry.” Beca took a deep breath and yawned. “Not sorry.”

“Didn’t think you would be.” Chloe tossed aside the belt and sighed when Beca immediately, albeit laboriously, rolled over to face her and snuggle herself against Chloe, head tucked under her chin. They laid together peacefully for a few minutes, Chloe replaying the events of the very recent past in her mind until it made her squirmy again. She could tell Beca was still awake. “Baby?”
Beca yawned and gave Chloe’s lower back a little light scratch. “Hmm?”

“I know you’re sleepy but…” She hesitated, feeling a little guilty when she knew Beca was exhausted.

“But?”

“But...maybe I’m still a little rarin’ to go after…”

Beca’s laugh was a breathy one; she didn’t put the effort in to put any actual volume to it. “You’re horny again?”

“Again? Still?” Chloe shrugged and let her fingers trail along Beca’s side until she was tracing patterns on her backside. “Who can say?”

Beca huffed another laugh and then Chloe felt her move, the hand at her back dragging around until it was nudging at Chloe’s thigh. “Lemme in, then.”

Chloe giggled and lifted her knee just enough to let Beca fit her hand between her thighs. “My hero.” Beca’s touch was soft but precise and Chloe sighed her gratitude.

She felt a wet kiss at the hollow of her throat and another at her collarbone, and another high on the swell of her breast, and Beca’s skillful fingers had her tumbling into an orgasm with unsurprising swiftness.

“Better?” rumbled against her chest and she knew Beca would be able to hear her heart thumping from the release. “Or you want another one?” She sounded smug with her follow-up question which told her Beca wasn’t quite as near sleep as she had been a few minutes ago.

“I mean if you’re offering…” Chloe said with an unsubtle tilt of her hips.

Beca laughed against her and Chloe felt her fingers start pressing in slow circles again. She also felt
her moving and suddenly they were kissing again and Chloe was shifting a little so Beca had a better angle and it felt like she’d had no release at all that evening. She moaned and Beca’s soft slowness started getting a little dirtier, which made her moan again which encouraged Beca further until Beca was holding herself up on one locked elbow over Chloe telling her to keep her eyes open and look at her as she pulled Chloe into bliss again.

“God, I love doing that.”

Chloe forced her eyes open to see Beca still hovering over her, face flushed with exertion and excitement and eyes bright with joy. “Well, thank goodness for that.” Chloe stretched and yawned and Beca settled next to her, arms intertwined.

She was tired but not quite sleepy, gears in her mind starting to turn about all the things they still needed to do before the baby arrived. “Go shopping with me when we get home?”

“Shopping? What do we need?”

“Beca.” Chloe levered herself back onto her side to look at her wife. “We don't have nearly enough clothes for the baby yet. And I want to get more books to read to her. And we need to start a registry for the baby shower because I know any second Aubrey is going to announce one. And we really need to start researching nannies for when I go back to work, and preschools, and get on waiting lists for elementaries in case we don't want her going to my school except that feels weird to not do because why wouldn't we want our daughter going to my school -”

“Whoa, breathe for a second. We have time, but yes we can go shopping, and I didn't realize we'd decided to go down the nanny route. I mean, that was my preference to putting her in a daycare with 10 other babies. So I'm glad we agree on that. I can ask around for some referrals and I'm sure plenty of your teacher friends know people.”

“Okay.” Chloe exhaled her sudden energy. “You're right. And yes. Nanny. Not for always just when we're both super busy.”

“Right. I can't believe she's not even here yet and we’re talking about where she's going to go to kindergarten.” She watched Beca rub her hand over her face. “This is fucking crazy, dude. Like, we’re going to have a kid.”

“If you're just realizing this now, baby, I think we have more important things to talk about.” She
felt Beca slap her lightly on her thigh.

“You know what I mean. A baby, yeah, but then she'll be walking and taking swimming lessons and learning to ride a bike and dressing up for Halloween as her favorite character, which better be Wonder Woman at least once, and people breaking her heart which I will murder them for doing and graduating from high school and moving away for college…”

“Whoa, whoa, whoa,” Chloe said with a quiet laugh as she rested her hand on Beca's stomach to calm her down. “It's your turn to breathe, baby. We’ll get through all those things together and it's going to be so scary and so beautiful.”

She heard Beca take a deep breath and saw her nod. “You're right. Sorry.”

“Don't apologize; it's okay. I know it's kind of scary to think about. Already being afraid of her getting hurt or having to let her go.”

Beca tilted her head to look over at her. “It's kind of crazy how much I already love her.” Her hand showed up with the comment to rest against the spot on Chloe's stomach getting the most “action” lately.

Chloe felt tears prick her eyes and she covered Beca's hand with hers. “I know. Me, too.”
Partners

Chapter Summary

Someone sent me a note that they appreciate that this story doesn't avoid "the potentially gross real life things." That happens in this chapter because what is discussed are real, legitimate things and I don't want to shy away from them.

“Well, Chloe, things are looking great!” Dr. Merriweather smiled as she reviewed Chloe’s data on the computer screen alongside today’s sonogram. “Your baby’s developing just as it should be. Top percentiles across the board.”

“Overachiever already,” Beca said with a smile down at her. “Like her mom. I’m not surprised.”

“You mean you?”

“No, you weirdo.”

“Oh, did Jacqueline talk to you about your baby’s sex?” the doctor interjected.

“Oh, no no,” Chloe said; the ultrasound technician knew better than to offer up that piece of information. After all, she’d been Chloe’s ultrasound tech for nearly every check-up. “I just have a feeling it’s a girl.”

Dr. Merriweather smiled and seemed to exit out of Chloe’s file on the system after sending an image of the ultrasound to the printer for them to take home. “Ah. Mother’s intuition is rarely wrong.”

Chloe shrugged and let Beca help her to sit up more fully. “I don’t want to be right. I just want her to be healthy.”

“There’s no reason to think otherwise. Now, have you been thinking about birthing plans? If
you’re thinking about scheduling delivery, we should look at getting you on our calendar.”

“I don’t think I’ve decided yet.” Chloe smiled a little guiltily; she had been putting off the conversation only because she didn’t know what she wanted and as excited as she was about everything, the actual birth itself was terrifying if she was honest with herself. She was quickly running out of time to avoid thinking about it, however.

“Then you have some homework to do before I see you next month. I’d like you to come prepared with what you’d like to do; Karen at the front desk will be glad to connect you with plenty of resources and references, answer any questions you might have.”

“Thanks. We’ll get it figured out,” Beca offered when she’d been silent a beat too long.

“Right. Thank you, Doctor.”

“Good. We’ll see you again in four weeks.”

“Well? What have you been thinking?” Beca asked as she held open the passenger door of her Corvette and held Chloe’s hand as she sat down.

“I’ve been thinking this car is too low for me to have to get in and out of.” She grunted as she took a seat and gathered the skirt of her dress so it wouldn’t get closed in the door.

Beca showed up in the driver’s seat a few seconds later and they were pulling out of the parking lot to head home. “I know you’re not implying the ‘vette needs to go.”

“I might be implying we should start using my car instead.”

“Good. That’s fine. And I’ll probably get something a little more family and a little less mid-life crisis before the baby, but this baby isn’t going anywhere.” Beca reached across the console and touched Chloe. “This baby, however...is definitely going somewhere kind of soonish. You’re avoiding the topic. What’s up?”
Chloe frowned and looked out the window. “I know. I’m just...scared. It’s scary.”

“Hey. Hey,” Beca repeated and fumbled half-blindly to hold Chloe’s hand as she drove. “I know it’s scary. But you’re a fucking tough rock star and you’re going to be amazing, and it’s your body so however you want to do this - it’s up to you.”

Chloe took, held, and released a deep breath. “You know, it’s funny. My whole life I just assumed I’d do a 100% natural childbirth. No drugs. Maybe even at home. Get really zen about it, maybe a water birth.”

“And now?”

“I still want that. But…” She felt tears sneaking up on her. She’s seen innumerable childbirth videos - natural, Caesarean, the zen hippie things she was interested in like the water births and the home births and the girl who gave birth in a stream in her backyard, but now that it was going to be her doing it... “Beca, I’m really scared.”

She felt Beca re-grasp her hand to hold it more firmly, this time intertwining their arms, too. “You couldn’t wait until we weren’t going 80 on the freeway to tell me this?” She was trying humor help and while Chloe appreciated it, it wasn’t effective and Beca could tell immediately. “Tell me what you’re thinking.”

“It’s going to hurt. A lot.”

“Well...yeah…” Beca squeezed her hand.

“My body’s going to be different.”

Beca didn’t say anything, only stroked her thumb along the back of her hand.

“I could die.”
The car swerved and Beca jerked it back into her lane. “Oh my God, you are not going to die!”

“But I could! It happens. Things go wrong.”

“You won’t. Jesus, Chloe!”

“You asked me what I’m thinking about - this is what I’m thinking about!”

“Okay, okay!” Beca said. “You’re not going to die,” was added under her breath.

“I’ll poop in front of everyone.”

She heard Beca trying not to laugh and when she whipped her head around to chastise her, Beca was red-faced and trying hard to avoid Chloe seeing her, best she could while still keeping her eyes on the road.

“It’s not funny! Would you want to go in front of a bunch of people?!”

“Well, no!” A bark of laughter escaped Beca and she fought to reel it in. “But you know it’s just part of the whole beautiful process. No one’s going to care. It happens all the time.”

“I don’t want you to see that.”

Beca rolled her eyes. “Chloe. Do we need to pull the Everybody Poops book off the nursery bookshelf for you? I don’t care.”

“It’s the exact opposite of sexy. You're not going to find me sexy at all after this.”

“I’ve lived with you for five years; believe it or not, babe, I know you go to the bathroom just like me.”
“Not the same.”

“I’ve been all up in your business,” she tried to wave their clasped hands toward Chloe’s lap, “plenty. And how many times have I sat with you while you puked? Hungover, food poisoning, nerves, morning sickness. If you think about it, it’s really the last great mystery between us.”

Chloe couldn’t help but groan a laugh at that.

“And need I really remind you of the time I was the one with food poisoning and you didn’t understand my need for you to get the fuck out of the bathroom? Or did you so thoughtfully block that shining moment of mine from your memory?”

Chloe gasped; she’d forgotten about that. Beca was sick - so, so sick - but she didn’t know at the time because Beca was asleep when she’d gotten home from class to get ready for her date with...with someone whose name she could no longer remember. She’d taken her time showering and was doing her makeup when Beca started pounding on the bathroom door begging to let her in. She’d told Beca to just go use one of the bathrooms downstairs but Beca had instead burst in and yelled at her to get out but she’d been so surprised and confused she’d just stood there, lipstick still poised in her hand, half-watching Beca be mortified via the mirror while trying to hide behind the shower curtain from her seat on the toilet.

“Oh my gosh, I completely forgot about that!”

“Yeah, well, you’re welcome,” Beca said through a clenched jaw but her grip on Chloe’s hand was still soft. “And apparently you were somehow still attracted to me after that. So it happening while you’re giving birth to our baby? Pretty low on my list of things that would make me find you unattractive.”

“There’s a list? What is on this list?” She was grateful their conversation had managed to turn toward the sillier side of things.


“You love Mariah Carey!”
“Playing anything post-*Butterfly.*”

“Fine.”

They were quiet for a long moment until Beca exited toward their neighborhood and asked softly, “Why have you been thinking about that?”

Chloe shrugged and adjusted her sunglasses, knowing Beca wasn't referring to her bathroom paranoia. “Things can go wrong.”

“Nothing is going to go wrong.”

“You don't know that. No one does.”

“And you don't know that something will.”

“Beca.”

“I'm sorry. I -” She heard Beca take a shaky breath. “I don't want to think about that. How long has that been on your mind?”

“A while.”

“And you didn't tell me?”

“What could you have done?”

“Be there for you!”

“You can't make the worry go away.”
“But I can worry with you.”

“And what good does that do either of us?”

“We’re partners, Chloe. Sickness and health. For better or worse. If you're going through something, I'm going through it with you.”

Chloe couldn't help but lift their clasped hands to her lips and kiss Beca's. The whole concept of complications had been haunting her for weeks but she’d been shoving it down under the excitement of planning and their little trip and the business of doing her best to get ahead with her new students to set them up for success when she went on leave for two months, but she’d been running out of ways to distract herself from it. It wasn't that she thought something would go wrong - just that something could go wrong, and that was enough to scare her.

“And I can try to make you feel better about it. We can do research together or just talk about it or if you feel like you need to…” Beca's voice caught. “To make a plan or something. If that helps you. We can do that together.”

Chloe just nodded. The last thing she wanted to do was talk about it, but, “Maybe that would help me stop thinking about it.”

“Okay. We’ll do that. But you have to tell me when you want to talk about it. I'm not going to ask you about it every five minutes. I don't think either of us would like that very much.”

“No, I know.” She kissed Beca's hand again as they pulled into their garage. “Thank you.”

It was clear the moment they stepped through the door that even though Beca said she wouldn’t ask Chloe about “it” every five minutes, it was still very much at the forefront of Beca’s mind.

It felt a bit like those first days after the successful visit to the fertility clinic when Chloe was all but on bed rest and Beca doted on her without question. And though Beca’s chivalry hadn’t dissipated when Chloe was back on her feet, it had shifted to other things like making dinner more often and going to the grocery store the days Chloe was too tired to and giving her scalp and
shoulder and foot massages and letting Chloe control the house thermostat all summer despite Beca being cold most of the time.

That original version was back with a vengeance, however, after Chloe’s admission. Beca ran around all evening fetching anything and everything Chloe even hinted about wanting or needing. She made chocolate chip pancakes for dinner and won a battle with the blender to make Chloe’s latest favorite fruit smoothie (mango-banana-kale) to go with them, and when Chloe answered, “Can we maybe just watch a movie?” to her question of what she’d like to do, Beca just said, “Totally,” and got up to gather snacks and turn the couch into a pillow paradise and pop Bridesmaids into the Blu-ray and insisted on giving Chloe a massage.

“Ughhh, that feels so good,” she groaned when Beca worked her thumbs under her shoulder blades. Her back being sore was starting to be part of daily life, and “You are a goddess.”

“Mm, don’t stop, tell me more,” Beca said with a kiss to the shell of Chloe’s ear.

She smiled and dropped her chin to encourage Beca’s hands to find their way along her neck, which they did. And maybe it was her level of relaxation or the unexpected relief that came with admitting to Beca what she could barely admit to herself, but she found herself re-entering the daunting conversation from their trip home from the clinic.

“If something goes wrong, I want you to know it’s okay for you to meet someone else.”

She felt Beca’s hands freeze where they were on her neck before resuming slowly.

“I mean, you better wait at least, like, a year before you actually date anyone and five before you get remarried. But it’s okay.”

Beca remained quiet but Chloe knew she was still with her.

“But whoever it is, they better be good enough for you and our baby. Don’t you dare settle; I have extremely high standards for you.”

“Chlo, this is a weird conversation to -”
“Let me have it.”

“Sorry.”

“Let her get a puppy if she wants a puppy. But don’t spoil her too much; she needs to eat her vegetables to have dessert and she can’t get a new toy every single time you take her to the store. Try to set some boundaries for her, okay?”

“Okay.”

She took a breath, already feeling the weight of her world off her shoulders, and she lifted her head to push Beca’s fingers up through her hair. “Okay.”

“Okay?” Beca sounded unsure.

“Yeah. Okay.” She rolled her shoulders and shook her hair out to keep Beca scratching at her head. “So I think we should have this baby at the hospital.”

She could sense Beca’s tension begin to lessen with the way she started playing with her hair. “Okay.”

“And we need to get signed up for Lamaze classes. They fill up quickly.”

“They gave us some referrals today.”

“Good. And I’m going to try to do it without drugs. And I don’t want you to let me talk you into letting me have them in the moment unless you know that I’m being sane about it.”

Beca laughed at that and gave a playful tug on her hair. “I feel like you’re going to threaten me with divorce if I tell you that you didn’t want the drugs, and probably break my hand squeezing it.”

Chloe shrugged. “Probably.”
“I’ll have to remember to only let you have my right hand.”

“Just remember I don’t mean it.”

“Thanks. That makes it so much better. I can’t wait to try to change a diaper one-handed,” Beca said snidely.

But she felt Beca go still behind her and she knew Beca had just thought about what she’d said - not about having a broken hand, but the diaper changing. She reached back and found Beca’s hand in her hair to grab it for a second.

She didn’t say anything and neither did Beca, but she knew they were both thinking the same thing.

This was really real.
Hey, friends! My sincerest apologies that this took me awhile to update. A lot's been going on in my life and I pretty much lost my muse and my mojo. I'll be going on a disconnected vacation in a couple weeks and I'm hoping that will help me recenter myself and return to start cranking this out more frequently.

Until then, here's some domestic filler.

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**November 5, 2017**

“Do you still want to go out tonight? It’s totally fine if you want to hang at home instead.”

“Beca. It's your birthday. We are not spending it at home on the couch.” She let her eyes fall closed as Beca brought the pencil up to trace Chloe's lash line. The second she'd commented on it being too hard to lean in to get closer to the mirror, Beca had sat her down on the armchair in their room to pick up where Chloe had left off with her makeup. It had interrupted Beca's own application and her eyes were completely uneven and it made Chloe giggle.

“What?”

“You look like a before and after YouTube tutorial.”

Beca quirked a smile and gave her best attempt at a wink with the eye she knew wasn't yet finished being made up.

“Are you ever going to learn to wink the right way?” Chloe said with a giggle at Beca’s one-and-a-half-eyed wink.

“You once told me you find my method charming.”
“I do. But consider this.” Chloe gave Beca one of her flirtiest winks when Beca lifted the pencil and watched her cheeks color the tiniest bit. “See?”

“It’s been 23 - well, I guess now 24 years. Don’t get your hopes up. Close them?” She resumed her work on Chloe’s eyes. “So when do I get to open my present?”

Chloe heard her rifling through the pencils, tubes, and shadows they'd brought to the other room and kept her eyes closed. “Pretty sure you opened something already today. Not sure why you're complaining.” She smiled at the memory of waking Beca that morning for indulgent - and completely selfless - lovemaking (not that Beca hadn't returned the favor anyway), and reached out to let her fingers wander over Beca’s bare legs in front of her. She teasingly grazed between her thighs over thin satin, not more than a ghost of a touch, and heard Beca's breath catch.

“That's true. That was a pretty great present.”

“Then you can wait for your real present until I'm ready to give it to you.”

“Mm. That still sounds suggestive.”

“I guess you'll have to wait and see.”

“Stop teasing me and shush.”

She smiled as Beca ran a liner along her lips and hoped - and trusted - Beca would like her birthday present.

November 14, 2017

“If I recall, I gave you a homework assignment at your last appointment.”
“Of course,” Chloe nodded and handed Dr. Merriweather the file containing the birth plan she and Beca had spent the better part of the past month putting together. “I’m usually the one giving homework, you know.”

The doctor smiled and flipped through the pages, giving them a quick glance indicative of someone who’s done it a few hundred times. “Foregoing an epidural, I see.”

“I’m going to try.”

“She’s a badass,” Beca chimed in next to her and gave her knee a squeeze.

“That’s fine. I trust you’re looking into methods to work through the contractions? Practicing them if necessary? I can certainly recommend a number of positions and techniques.”

“Yes. I’m always open to more information though, so by all means.”

“Good. They'll have that for you up front when you check out. You'll be seeing me every two weeks now. Did you have any other questions for me today?”

She exchanged looks with Beca to check with her before shaking her head. She was still nervous, but no longer scared. Letting Beca into the dark part of her thoughts hadn’t been the easiest thing to do, but Beca had helped her work through the fears together. “No, I think we’re good.”

“And excited!” Beca added, making Chloe smile.

“Yes, and excited,” she laughed, leaning into the cheek kiss Beca gave her.

November 23, 2017

“Did you remember to rub butter on it?” Chloe watched Beca from her seat at the island. She’d tasked herself with peeling potatoes since she could sit to do that. Beca, meanwhile, had been on
her feet for an hour dealing with the turkey.

“What’s it look like?” Beca turned around from the counter at which she was working and held up two very greasy hands and made a threatening move forward with them to make Chloe flinch and squeal for her to keep away.

“Just making sure you were paying attention in last week’s class,” she said, still laughing as Beca scratched her nose with her butter-free forearm.

“Of course I was!”

She’d enrolled Beca in a year-long cooking program as her birthday gift made up if mix-and-match specialized courses she could choose to attend, some of them taught by the top chefs in the city. They’d gone to a special Thanksgiving one, Beca wanting to really own the holiday this year as last year’s was pretty low-key.

This year’s was going to be a step up - one level closer, Beca had said, to a “real, grown-up Thanksgiving.” Whereas last year it was the two of them opting to stay in Los Angeles in light of having a new house in the middle of all kinds of disarray and renovation, this year they had a complete home with Beca’s finished mini-studio and a nursery awaiting its occupant arriving in roughly 10 weeks, and they were hosting dinner.

But not their families; neither of them felt ready for that knowing they would be descended upon come the new year and the baby. No, they were graduating from Thanksgiving at parents’ homes to Thanksgiving alone to hosting Thanksgiving with Aubrey and her fiancé: a bit of a Friendsgiving.

Next year they would be somewhere - home, or Miami, or Portland - for their daughter’s first Thanksgiving.

“Hey. I’m not checking in on your potato situation,” Beca said with a flick of her wrist that sent a melting dollop of butter flying in Chloe’s direction, only to land a few inches short on the counter. There was a beat, and then, “How’s your potato situation? Do you need help?”

“I’m fine, baby,” she said with a rolling of her eyes. Beca had been a little on-edge with her all week, hovering somewhere around a DEFCON 3 ever since her first lovely experience with Braxton Hicks contractions Saturday night that had Beca obviously struggling to stay calm and talk
Chloe through them and that they were no big deal while also trying to keep herself from hauling Chloe to the hospital in a panic.

“Okay. Take a break if you need to.” Beca watched her next few swipes with the peeler as though evaluating her performance and potential fatigue until, seemingly satisfied, she turned back to deal with turkey preparation.

“Oh my God, Chloe, you're absolutely glowing!” was how Aubrey greeted her when Chloe opened the front door. “That was cliche, I'm sorry. But you are. And that dress is so cute on you!”

“It's okay, I don’t mind.” Chloe ran a hand over her stomach, unsure if she was acknowledging Aubrey’s comment about the glow or her navy and white-patterned dress. “And thank you. C’mon in!” She hugged Aubrey and Eric with a friendly, “Hey, you,” and stepped aside to let them pass. “Beca, they're here!” she called toward the kitchen.

“I know, I heard the doorbell, too!” floated back followed by a loud clang of metal on metal.

Aubrey looked toward the sound with concern but Chloe waved it off knowing Beca was fine and nodded at the covered serving dish poised in Aubrey’s hands. “Hot or cold? I can’t remember what you said you were going to bring.”

Aubrey gave her dish a little wiggle. “Hot. Sweet potatoes.”

“Right! Sorry. Pregnancy brain.” She led the couple through the house toward the kitchen. “Last week I couldn’t find my keys for two hours. Gave up and took an Uber to work; Beca found them in the dishwasher when she was unloading it the next day.”

“Beca was unloading the dishwasher?” Aubrey teased loud enough for Beca to hear as they approached. “I’m shocked.”

“Hilarious.” Beca threw a glare at Aubrey and then smiled. “Hey, Posen. Sweet potatoes, right? You can put them in the bottom oven to keep warm. ‘Sup, Eric? Double-fisting it?”
Aubrey’s fiance held up the two bottles and laughed. “Going hard tonight. Don’t worry, Chlo; one of these is sparkling cider.”

Chloe kissed the young man on the cheek and relieved him of the bottles to tuck them in the door of the refrigerator for the time being. “Thank you.”

“It smells so good in here, Beca,” Aubrey said with a deep breath as she took a seat at the island which was covered in serving dishes, most of them still waiting to be filled.

“Thanks. But no, no no no.” Beca pointed with the knife she was wielding over a pile of fresh green beans. “You’re our guests. Out of the kitchen.”

Aubrey protested but moved back to her feet. “Are you sure you don’t need any help?”

“Yeah, I’m happy to pitch in,” Eric said, already moving toward the sink to wash his hands. “I can carve the turkey.”

“Just because you’re the only man here doesn’t mean you’re carving the turkey,” Aubrey said pointedly as Chloe touched her elbow to work on ushering her out to the living room where she had laid out a few finger food appetizers. She could hear Beca and Eric’s playful banter behind them.

“You are not touching my fucking turkey, dude.”

“Fine, but let me do something. Aubrey never lets me do anything because she thinks I’ll mess it up.”

“Here. Mash the potatoes, you big strong man.”

Chloe heard Aubrey take a breath to respond to his comment about her but Chloe shushed her before she could. “They’re bonding over their wives. Or, I guess, soon-to-be wives. Let them. You owe me a wedding planning gossip sesh, by the way.”
“Okay, nerds. Dinner is served!” Beca called from the dining room.

“Yay!” Chloe said with a clap and allowed Eric to help her off her spot on the couch with a quick tug on her hand and the two of them made their way to the table where Beca was standing proudly behind one of the chairs, practically bouncing on her feet.

“Ta-da!” Beca said with a presentation reminiscent of Vanna White. She had freshened up, Chloe noticed, sometime between their departing the kitchen and their summoning to the table. Her flour- and-grease stained tee and sweats were gone and she’d let her hair down and changed into a nice burgundy button-down with the sleeves rolled up and a pair of black jeans, though her feet were still bare.

It had been a slow form of torture living in that house all day with a roasting turkey and baking pumpkin pie and the bread that Chloe still hadn’t figured out when Beca had time to make. She’d been forcing herself to live on the carrot and celery sticks and ranch dip she’d set out for Aubrey and Eric, and it was about as unsatisfying as could be.

But now dinner was ready and their dining table had a spread on it worthy of a Martha Stewart Living feature. Each place setting was perfect but not overdone with simply folded cloth napkins resting on the plates paired with glasses already filled with ice water and wine glasses waiting to be filled by the bottles Chloe had heard come uncorked a bit ago, now resting one on each end of the table. And fit in between the place settings was the ridiculously delicious-looking spread Beca had pulled together in a matter of hours.

There were bowls of mashed potatoes and steamed green beans and asparagus, and Aubrey’s yams, and slices of fresh bread, homemade gravy, and a bowl of cranberry sauce - the one thing Chloe knew Beca had cheated on and used the canned kind. And in the middle of it all, a perfectly golden brown turkey dressed and ready for carving.

“Baby, this looks amazing!”

Beca grinned. “I know. Someone needs to take my picture with it.”

“Really?” Chloe said with a laugh, already rounding the table to retrieve Beca’s phone that she knew would be in her back pocket. “Who are you?”

“Someone who just made Thanksgiving her bitch and is going to brag about it; that’s who.”
Chloe shook her head and waited for Beca to decide how and where she wanted to pose, but after the first picture, Beca stopped her. “No. This isn't right. Eric, will you take one of Chloe and me? And then we need one with Aubrey. And then we need to figure out how to get one with all four of us.”

“Truly. What have you done with Beca Mitchell?” Aubrey said, shaking her head in mock disbelief as she moved in to pose with them.

“That’s my fault.” Chloe nuzzled at Beca’s cheek until she laughed and shied away from it just in time for the photo. “She turned into a Beale. Now how are we going to take one of all four of us without it being a selfie?”

“Easy.” Aubrey plucked Beca's phone from Eric’s hand and spent a minute or two playing with stacking a few coffee table books she fetched from the other room to get the phone propped higher on the dining table. She'd had to move one of Beca's carefully staged side dishes to accomplish it which came with more than a little protesting from its creator, but she was successful in propping it up at the right angle to get a photo of the four of them at the table with the timer setting on Beca’s phone.

“Thanks,” Beca said as she made to fix everything Aubrey had moved, but Chloe watched Aubrey shoo her away. Chloe took her designated seat, content to watch the two of them interact while exchanging knowing looks with Eric.

“Post your picture. I am capable of putting things back the way you had them.”

“Are you, though?” Beca retorted. Chloe watched her move to sit but as soon as Aubrey was out of the room she dashed back to restore her masterpiece. Beca was just taking her seat when Aubrey returned.

“Really?” she said, voice high in annoyance and amusement. “I would have done it correctly if you let me try.”

Eric leaned to stage-whisper to Chloe, “Why does that sound familiar?”

“I heard that,” Aubrey snapped, though her tone was still light.
He smiled at her. “I meant you to.”

Chloe couldn't help it and let herself squeal in happiness and clap her hands to clasp them under her chin and look adoringly between Eric and Aubrey, who was taking her seat at the table. “You two are so perfect for each other. I can't stand it.” Eric wasn't afraid of Aubrey, nor was he offended by her natural desire for control; in fact, he seemed to enjoy giving her a hard time about demanding it.

“Well I hope so,” Beca said. “Since they're getting married and all.”

“Yes, you are!” Chloe clapped again and she was about to open her mouth to talk more about wedding plans when Beca interrupted.

“Pause for a second. I can't even believe I'm going to be the cheesy one right now, but I want to eat, so can we go around and say what we're thankful for before we start talking about indoor versus outdoor wedding locations?”

“Sorry,” Chloe said with a guilty smile. “And that's a great idea. Do you want to start? I know what mine is.”

Beca waved her hand toward Chloe. “You start. I'll pour.” Beca reached to lift the bottle of sparkling cider and fill Chloe's glass, following suit with white wine for the rest of them.

“Okay!” She looked around at the others at the table, making sure she made eye contact with each of them and smiled. “I am thankful for this wonderful family. I am so, so lucky to have you all in my life. Aubrey, we went through heck together and came out the other side still friends. And now you're here in LA with us! And it's like we were never apart, and you are and will always be my lifelong best friend and I'll never be able to thank you enough for meddling with Beca and me.

“Eric, you are a really special guy and I can't wait for you to officially be part of our family. I know you and Bree are going to be so good for each other.

“And Beca. My love.” She saw Beca roll her eyes a little but she was still smiling. “I'm thankful for you. Because you changed my life in ways I never thought possible. And we've made something together,” she continued, taking Beca's hand as she rested her other on her round stomach, “and it's a miracle, and I couldn't be more thankful that it's you I'm sharing this with.” She knew she was
tearing up and brushed one away with a knuckle as she smiled at Beca and then the rest of them.

Beca blew out a breath that read of emotional impact like she was unsure how to respond, and she squeezed Chloe's hand. “Damn, babe. Okay, now I have to follow that?” She took another deep breath before starting. “You kind of stole all the good things to say so I'm going to come back to you. Aubrey...we know we had our differences in college, but I'm really proud to call you my friend. You're...well, you're like a sister to me and I've never had a sister and it's pretty awesome.

“And Eric…” Chloe watched Beca level her stare at him. “You're cool, but if you ever hurt her, I will hunt you down and murder you.” Everyone laughed, Eric included, but he seemed to squirm a little in his seat. He seemed apprehensive about what might come next but Beca had moved on and was smiling softly at Chloe. “As for you...I can't believe I'm actually going to be a mom, and I'm pretty sure I'm going to fuck up that kid, so I'm thankful I have you to help me try not to do that and fix it when I do.”

Chloe felt herself getting choked up and swallowed thickly, offering a smile as Beca scratched her nose and the back of her neck before continuing. “And I’m just thankful I have you, and I'm thankful that we all met. I'm thankful that you never gave up on me, Chlo.”

“Never for a second.”

Beca took a breath and faked a forced smile, though Chloe knew it was all genuine. “And that’s me. Aubrey?”

Chloe tried to lean over to kiss Beca’s cheek but couldn’t quite reach, instead settling for bringing her hand up to kiss her knuckles. “I love you,” she whispered.

Beca easily leaned over to give Chloe a quick but soft kiss. “I love you, too.”

“Sorry,” Chloe said, meeting Aubrey’s eye and feeling a little like they’d just made the moment all about them when it was Aubrey’s turn.

But Aubrey waved off the apology as unwarranted. “I know it's not easy being friends with me -”

“Aubrey, that's not -” Beca interrupted but Aubrey interrupted right back.
“So I want to say how thankful I am for friends like the two of you who've taught me how to relax a little about life.”

Chloe saw Eric open his mouth to say something, then think better of it and snap it closed.

“You also showed me how a family should be - loving and supporting and understanding. And without that lesson, I'm not sure I'd be here with you today. I probably would never have decided to see Eric again,” her attention was on him now, “and I probably wouldn't have found someone who isn't afraid to be my equal, whom I also want to be with. And if I hadn't, I wouldn't be here in California ready to start the next chapter of my life with the man I love and my best friends.”

“Here, here!” Beca called as she lifted her wine glass to prompt a cheers.

“Wait, I don’t get a turn?” It was Eric, staring at the three women with their raised glasses, and Chloe laughed as Beca offered an over-dramatic apology that Chloe recognized as something she would do to her own brother. She smiled listening to them playfully jab at one another until Beca finally shut up and let him share his sentiments until the four of them toasted to the holiday.

Beca was out of her seat as soon as her glass was down. “Can I carve my turkey now?”
I have returned from a week-long vacation renewed and rejuvenated - during which, I was able to get plenty of writing done!

We're getting to the home stretch, my friends...

December 6, 2017

Chloe woke with a start early Wednesday morning. That was nothing new; she'd been jolted awake on a near nightly basis for several weeks now. Only this time, it wasn't a tiny fist or foot wedging itself under her ribs. This time it was Beca's phone ringing. And chiming. And ringing. And chiming.

Chloe threw an arm out, hand fumbling about until it found some part of Beca which she pushed at as she grumbled, “Baby. Phone.”

She heard Beca protest and she shoved her again as the phone kept ringing. “Baby,” she said it louder, wanting desperately to be as asleep as her wife was at the moment. The dim light in the room told her it was only beginning to inch toward dawn and she had at least one more hour before she had to be awake to get ready for work.

It was Beca's turn to wake with a start as, apparently, Chloe's voice processed for her. “What? Baby? Is it time? Just breathe! Remember to breathe!” Beca was half out of bed before Chloe could catch her. “You're doing great. Let me get my phone, how far apart are the contractions? I'll time them.”

“Beca, shh. I meant baby you , not, ‘It's time for the baby.’” She pointed, trying not to laugh at the way Beca looked as though she'd stuck her finger in an electrical socket. “Your phone won't stop ringing.”

“What? Oh…” She stared at the device in her hand for a moment as though unfamiliar with it and then relaxed as she realized it was not, in fact, time to rush to the hospital.
“I appreciate the preparedness, baby, but you're going to give yourself an ulcer sleeping on a hair trigger like that,” she said with a shake of her head as she called Beca back to bed with a pat of a hand to the mattress. “Now sit down and check your phone because something is going on.”

“Yeah.” Beca nodded and sat down heavily as she thumbed at her phone. It was quiet for a second and Chloe watched her in the gray morning light.

All at once her back straightened.

“What? What is it?”

“Grammy noms.”

Grammy nominations! Chloe had lost track of time, at least in some ways, over the past month or two. Her life had become a race toward a countdown - weekly visits to her doctor, scrambling to have her lesson plans completed and ready for the substitute teacher who would be covering her classroom for her eight weeks of maternity leave, and doing as much as she could - with plenty of Beca's help - to finish the baby-proofing and -prepping around the house. Time was flying by and she'd missed the note she'd jotted in her calendar before she was even pregnant that the 2018 Grammy Award nominations were today at the crack of dawn.

“Well?!” she said excitedly, truly awake now as she started to sit up and then thought better of it. “They're calling you so you must have gotten one!”

Beca was still facing away from her, sitting on the edge of the bed so she reached over and swiped at her lower back; if Beca was wearing clothes, she would have snagged the back of her shirt and tugged on it. Instead, she settled with nails scratching the spot that always made Beca's back arch.

It worked, and Beca turned to look at her.

“I got six.”

“Six?!” Her heart leaped and she forced herself to sit up, which required scooting out of bed and carefully half-jumping back onto it to sit on her knees, arms wrapped around Beca from the side.
“Baby, that's amazing!! For what??”

Beca seemed a little stunned, or maybe still not quite awake, as she read off her phone, “I mean, I officially got three: Album, Record, and Producer of the Year with Katy. And then Tori and Demi got Song of the Year. And Legacy got Best New Artist.”

“So you’re telling me literally everything you produced this year got nominated?! And Emily, too?!”

Chloe's heart soared; she'd never been more proud of Beca. Her wife had worked her tail off for the last year and a half, often at the expense of spending time together, both for this moment of recognition and for the financial security and stability of their soon-to-be little family. This was what Beca dreamt of; this was what the stubborn 18-year-old young woman Chloe met in college had wanted. They weren't her first nominations; she did receive one - and won it - last year, but six? Six! (Well, three.) And she'd have to remember to call Emily later.

“Mikey didn’t get anything.” Beca sounded disappointed; leave it to her to be disappointed that ‘only’ four of her five artists received industry recognition, though Chloe knew working on Mikey Harrison’s debut album had been a pet project of hers. The album hadn't blown up as had been predicted - her one flop.

“It was a good album, baby. They can only nominate five, so...wait, how did Em get Best New Artist? She put ‘Flashlight’ out more than a year ago. She’s still new?”

“Grammy rules are weird on who they decide qualifies as a new artist.” Beca was still quiet, not quite out of the fog, so she tackled her, in the slow-motion way most of her activities took place now thanks to the tiny person inside her all but ready to greet the world. Whereas she would have normally pinned Beca down to sit astride her waist, now she had to make do with leaning uncomfortably over her from a weird side angle. She could still do it if she tried, but it was a fair amount of work with little reward since she couldn't then lean down nor could Beca sit up to kiss one another.

But from this angle, she could cover her face with kisses. “I'm so proud of you!”

It got Beca to show signs of proper life and first she smiled, then grinned, then full-out laughed as Chloe peppered her with kisses until she was squealing - Beca was squealing - with laughter as the kisses turned into tickles along her ribs and stomach in the spots that made Beca shriek and beg for mercy.
Chloe wasn't quite paying attention to her hands, mostly focused on doing everything she could to keep them on Beca and keep her laughing, and as she leaned back in to drop more kisses along Beca's neck, her scrabbling fingers dipped low and suddenly Beca's laugh came out as a stuttered moan.

It took Chloe's mind a second to catch up, fixated as she was on her objective, to the fact that her hand had moved between Beca's legs, and her lips had landed high on her neck, neither action intentional but so natural that she didn't even have to think about it.

One second she was tickle-torturing Beca and the next she was making love to her, a seamless transition that sent lust flooding through her veins as she pressed herself closer, wanting to feel her body against hers as it rolled slowly with the rhythm she'd set with her fingers. Her tongue ran along the length of Beca's neck to the special spot just below her ear and she felt her shiver and then heard her moan as she tilted her head away from Chloe, a wordless plea for more.

And Chloe was never one to deny Beca things she wanted, so she repeated the motion and then zeroed in on one spot - two spots, actually - and sucked hard as her fingers pressed in tight circles that had Beca's hips lifting off the bed in search of more and more and more until Chloe didn't have a rhythm any longer. It was fast and sloppy and Beca came with a gasp and a moan that made Chloe so wet she could feel it as her thighs shifted to press closer still to Beca as her body jerked and rolled with pleasure. She moaned with Beca, both in contentment that Beca was feeling so good and from her own arousal, unexpectedly high despite the sudden onset of the moment.

“You feel so good,” she moaned in Beca's ear, nipping at it as she dragged her fingers through the wetness she'd helped to generate in the few short minutes.

Beca nodded dumbly and sighed, hips still twitching every time Chloe's fingers rolled over her just right.

“Give me your hand,” Chloe whispered with another lick at her ear. She took Beca's hand before she'd really offered it and guided it down to press it between her legs with a moan.

“Fuck,” Beca exhaled and Chloe felt her take control, sliding her fingers down and into and then back up over Chloe. “Fuck, you're so wet.”

Chloe whimpered as Beca teased. “I need you.”
“Yeah, you do,” Beca said with another sigh as she reached further, this time sliding into her with two fingers instead of one, only to curl them and drag them back out.

It sent a shudder through her and she let her own hand fall still, opting instead to only think about the way Beca was touching her.

She loved it, their unexpected and almost-but-not-quite lazy lovemaking and she sank into Beca as Beca sank into her, over and again until Chloe's teeth sank into Beca's shoulder as she came with a muffled cry.

Once it passed she heaved a breath and scooted away from Beca just an inch or two to let their heated bodies cool, though she kept one ankle over Beca's and a hand tracing patterns over her flat stomach that Chloe was maybe a teensy bit jealous of, though she knew she'd have hers back in a couple more months. She was just four weeks from her due date, and a month or so after that she'd be well on her way to getting back her pre-baby body.

“God damn, I love you, woman,” Beca said with a deep sigh before elongating her slight frame into a back-popping stretch with a yawn.

“I love you, too,” she replied with an amused giggle at Beca's intense level of contentment. “Congratulations, baby.”

“Hmm?” Beca looked at her for a second in confusion, and then, “Oh! Yeah. Thanks. I kind of can't believe it.”

As if on cue, Beca's phone began ringing again and Chloe wondered how many missed calls came in when they were wrapped up in their burst of lust; she didn't remember hearing it ring but she had a feeling it probably had. “You should answer that.”

“I know,” Beca said with another yawn as she felt around her side of the bed to locate her phone, lost and forgotten in their moment of desire. “It’s Luke. Hello?”

Chloe could hear the distinct cadence of his accent, though she couldn't make out what he was saying. He was speaking quickly and she assumed it was a mix of exasperation at Beca ignoring his calls and excitement, based on Beca's repeated apologies and excuses that she didn't hear her phone until just now. She listened to the one-sided phone call, deducing what was occurring. First,
it was Luke telling her what he had already relayed via text. That was followed by Beca approving the statement he'd written for her to give the press with two changes: “I am honored” had to be changed to, “I'm so psyched” and it had to finish with her being “appreciative of this honor.”

Then came her complaining that she hadn't even had her coffee yet but agreeing to be connected to Ryan Seacrest for a pre-recorded mini-interview that would be played later that morning with all the other Grammy nominees. It was while she was giving that interview that she disappeared into Chloe's closet to reemerge a second later wearing one of her green Barden hoodies, barely long enough to cover her naked rear end, to roll her eyes at Chloe as though the conversation was such a chore before heading out of the bedroom and downstairs to, she assumed, make a much-needed cup of coffee.

Chloe figured it was going to be more of the same for Beca this morning and let herself doze in the early morning light until her own alarm would chime, content to listen to the muffled sounds of Beca's voice - usually talking, sometimes laughing - as cabinet doors clacked and the smell of coffee drifted upstairs.

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December 17, 2017

“So why is this shower the week before Christmas?” Beca asked as she drove them to Aubrey's house.

“Bree said some of the girls couldn't get here when she'd have liked them to, so she had to push it later.”

“Ah. Amy too busy galavanting around the Mediterranean to come to your baby shower. I see how it is.”

Chloe laughed at Beca's light joke. “I guess so. But I don't mind, as long as they could all be here.”

Beca agreed with the sentiment as they pulled into Aubrey’s driveway. It was a two-car drive but it was made obvious where to park by a large rectangle drawn on the concrete in brightly colored chalk with a RESERVED FOR MOTHERS-TO-BE sign affixed to the garage door with pastel shades of multicolored balloons taped to it.
“Aww!” Chloe said with her hands clasped under her chin. “This is going to be so much fun!”

They were, apparently, the last to arrive and certainly the guests of honor - more specifically Chloe - and cheers and whistles broke out the moment Aubrey greeted them at the front door.

As soon as the cheers of greeting passed she was bum-rushed by her long-time friends. A few of them cried when they took in Chloe's very, very pregnant belly and asked if they could feel it (of course they could) - this was Jessica, Ashley, Stacie, and Emily. Cynthia Rose gave her a warm hug and high-fived Beca. Lilly kissed her hand like a gentleman and then traced some type of pattern over her stomach that Chloe assumed - hoped - was a type of symbolic something. Flo did something similar, though she explained that because of this and that and the way Chloe was carrying the baby, it was clearly a girl. Which Chloe knew instinctually already but appreciated the holistic confirmation.

Amy had indeed made it back from the Mediterranean and her greeting came with a request for someone to take her photo with Chloe as they both proudly showed off their round stomachs in the same pose.

Aubrey flitted about, ensuring the girls’ champagne glasses never dipped too low and Chloe let herself be led to a comfortable seat on Aubrey's couch and handed a flute of sparkling cider.

One by one the girls took their turn with her, catching up on each other’s lives and fawning over her pregnancy and what it was like. She watched Beca across the room, drinking and laughing with their friends, and felt warm and content, as though this was exactly the way her life was supposed to play out.

They were wrapping up their third baby shower activity - everyone contributing pages to what would become an alphabet book by drawing things that represented the letters; Chloe was more than a little concerned at the way Amy kept laughing to herself as she worked on hers (Lilly grabbing crayons and running away wasn’t particularly reassuring either) - when Chloe leaned over to whisper to Beca that she was hungry and ask if she’d be so kind as to grab her something off the snack table.

It wasn't missed by her best friend and Aubrey abruptly declared it time for dinner, shooing everyone out of the living room and into the backyard where Eric - who Chloe didn't know was
even home - was manning the barbecue grill. It was covered with steaks and burgers and what looked like foil-wrapped corn on the cob and skewers of veggies. He acknowledged her with a salute of his tongs and went back to turning kabobs. She was reminded of the fact that she’d need to start doing Matron of Honor duties soon - planning a bridal shower as Aubrey had done for her baby, and a bachelorette party, and start coordinating things like bridesmaid dress shopping and mani-pedi outings and -

“Babe?”

She felt a hand on her lower back. “I'm sorry. What?”

“I asked if you want me to make you a plate?”

“Oh! Yes, please. Thanks!” She felt Beca's fingers fiddle with her own for a second and then she was gone, chatting with Eric at the grill as he set a burger and a steak on one of her plates and two kabobs on the other.

“What's it like?” She felt Emily's arm drape around her shoulders as she sat next to Chloe at the patio table. “Having a baby inside you?”

“It's…” She smiled as she felt her baby kick just then, more a constant pressure than a sudden burst of movement. There wasn't much room for her to move around anymore and she imagined her baby trying to stretch her little arms or legs. “...weird?” she finished, still not quite sure how to put it into words despite being asked that same question almost weekly for the past 36. They both laughed and she guided Emily’s hand to her stomach so she could feel the movement. “Awesome. And amazing. And crazy. And incredible.”

She smiled at the wonder on Emily's face as her baby wiggled in its cramped quarters.

“Stop feeling up my wife, Legacy.”

Emily jumped so hard she landed a solid four inches away. “I wasn't! She let me do it!”

“Chill, Em. I was joking.”
Chloe smiled up at Beca as she sat down to her left. “Be nice.”

“I'm nice,” Beca said with a potato chip in her mouth as she cut the steak on one of the plates in two before propping half onto the plate with the vegetable kabobs and fruit salad and pushing it in front of Chloe. Her own plate held a cheeseburger, the other half of the steak, a stack of chips and a mountain of potato salad. “I brought you food.”

“It's fine, Chloe. I know she was joking.” Emily laughed awkwardly and Chloe couldn't help but look at her with a level of endearment. Emily wasn't the barely-18-year-old anymore; the open bottle of Corona Light in her hand reminded Chloe of that. Though she knew that her young innocence was starting to fade thanks to captaining the Bellas since Beca’s and her departure, her impending college graduation, and life in general, Chloe knew there was still that streak of bubbling naïveté under the surface.

“Why are you crying? Chlo?”

She felt Beca’s hand on her arm and she blinked; she hadn't even realized she was crying and she shook her head as she dabbed at her eyes with a napkin.

“Are you okay?”

“Fine,” she said with a smile.

“You gonna tell me what happened?” Beca said in a low voice, leaning close so only she would hear.

She shook her head and reached for her knife and fork. “I thought about Emily growing up and that made me think about our baby growing up and going away to college.”

Beca’s hand squeezed her arm and then patted her thigh as she took up her own cutlery. “One thing at a time. Let’s just work on bringing her home first, okay?”

She nodded and smiled an apology to Emily who apologized in return for nothing in particular.
“What's up, aca-moms?” Amy announced more than asked as she claimed a chair. “How many centimeters are ya dilated today?”

“How are you still going?” Beca asked from the rocking chair in the corner of the nursery. They'd been opening boxes and cutting off tags and running tiny articles of clothing through the laundry and assembling not one but two strollers (a jogging stroller and one more compact and streamlined) and practicing installing and reinstalling the car seat in Chloe's Mazda and figuring out how a Diaper Genie works.

They'd returned from her baby shower with a trunk and back seat full of gifts from their friends and they'd been unloading and unpacking for hours.

She had to figure things out like organizing and reorganizing the way the supplies of the changing table were set up. And Chloe couldn't decide if she wanted onesies in the top drawer of the dresser or the middle because maybe the top should be for all the little accessories like headbands and bows and hats and extra pacifiers and clips so the pacifiers didn't fall to the floor when inevitably spit out.

“It's called nesting,” she said with a shrug as she folded the latest basket of freshly washed brand new baby clothes. “I have all kinds of energy.”

“You should share it,” Beca said with a yawn as she worked on folding tiny blankets and tiny burp cloths. “I'm exhausted after dealing with those girls all day. I don't know how you handled entertaining them for so long.”

“They're our friends, Bec. It's not like we see them every day now.” She moved the folded onesies from the left side of the drawer to the right and closed it to turn and look at her. “It's not a chore to hang out with them.” She kept her tone light, not wanting to come across as though she was criticizing Beca for being worn out by their loud, happy, and at times obnoxious friends. She smiled, feeling warm down to her toes watching Beca in the rocking chair, a tower of neat square blankets on one knee and burp cloths on the other as she reached with caution (so as to not tip them) into the basket on the floor to grab another.

“Remind me why that is again?” Beca teased with sleepy eyes.

Chloe just shook her head and smiled and gave herself a push to get moving and cross the few steps
from the dresser to the rocker where she scooped up what Beca had folded to deposit them into their appropriate drawers and return, this time to reach for Beca.

“Come on. Let's get you to bed.”

Beca tried to stifle a yawn as she let Chloe guide her to her feet (though they went through the motions, Chloe didn't really exert any effort to pull her out of the chair). “You're coming, too, right? It's getting late.”

Chloe glanced at the clock on the wall and noted it was creeping toward midnight and they both had to go to work in the morning. Beca had a full day ahead of her - she was holding a kick-off with The Weeknd to get a jumpstart on the new album - and she had an end-of-unit Math test to administer, followed by after school rehearsal for the winter pageant.

“I'll be up in a few. I just want to do one more thing.”

Beca nodded and kissed her before she headed to bed and Chloe followed her to the nursery door where she hovered and watched Beca drag her sleepy feet toward their bedroom. When she was out of sight, Chloe clicked off the bright overhead light and turned on the lamp situated on the little end table that sat next to the rocking chair and eased herself into it. Hands clasped and resting on the high swell of her stomach, she rocked slowly in the nursery that would soon be home to endless sleepless nights, and laughter, and tears, and messes, and love.

The nursery that her wife, her Beca, built for her to be perfect in the house that Beca worked hard for so she would be happy living the life that Beca spends every day bringing light and joy to - into which Beca helped bring a whole new life that would be joining them any day now.
Beca was still in bed on a chilly Sunday morning. Or rather, she was in bed again, this time with a cup of coffee. They'd slept in and other than Beca venturing out for the cup of coffee and to make a few slices of toast for breakfast, they'd been contentedly lying in bed together all morning, snoozing on and off as a football game on TV offered white noise in the background. Their plan was to rest all day so they could stay awake long enough to ring in the new year together from the peace and quiet of home.

But around an hour ago Chloe started getting restless, sitting up in bed to lean against the headboard as often as getting up to walk - she was waddling but Beca would never, ever use that word out loud - around the room.

Like now, as she paced slow circles around the bedroom.

“Chloe, you're making me anxious. Come sit down.”

“I feel weird.”

That got her attention and she sat up. “Weird how?”

“I don't know. Just weird.”

She kept her eyes on her wife who was walking and stopping and walking and complaining she was hot and stepping out onto the balcony to look out over the pool and city below to get some air.

Chloe never ‘felt weird’ unless something was up and every one of Beca's Spidey-senses prickled to life, heart starting to race.

“Any better?” she asked when Chloe came back inside and sat down on the edge of the bed.
Chloe shook her head and stood up to walk again.

Chloe also was never short on words and she was being eerily quiet.

Beca felt her palms starting to sweat and she set aside her coffee to watch Chloe like a hawk. She paced the room again and once again sat down on the bed as though she wanted to lay down but couldn't.

“Can I do anything?” she offered. She had to work to keep her voice steady so she didn't alarm her by sounding worried.

“No,” was all Chloe answered before standing again. “I'm hot. I'm going to take a cold shower.”

“Okay. Holler if you need anything.”

She watched Chloe disappear into the bathroom and partially close the door and then she was up and moving. Something was off; Chloe was acting funny and feeling weird, and Beca was willing to bet that something was going to happen today. Exactly one week earlier than estimated.

And she was more than a little nervous to put it into words because...well, yeah.

She went through the motions she'd rehearsed in her head hundreds of times: she pulled out the shoulder bag in which they'd already packed a couple changes of clothes and made sure what they'd packed in August was still weather-appropriate. She made a pit stop in the nursery and grabbed the diaper bag they'd had way too much fun organizing on Christmas Eve.

Then she ran downstairs, nervous to be out of earshot of Chloe but needing to make sure the car seat was still locked in place after their last practice session a few days ago.

By the time she made it back upstairs she felt like she'd run a marathon - she was breathless and sweating and she was grateful Chloe was still in the shower so she wouldn't see her worked up into such a state. She had to be a rock for Chloe when the time came, and it definitely felt like the time was today.
When she had her breathing under control again she popped her head into the bathroom and spoke up to be heard over the noise of the shower. “Everything okay?”

“Will you come in here?” echoed back to her and she stepped in. Now Chloe's voice sounded off, but that was surely just her mind playing tricks with the acoustics of the bathroom.

“I'm here,” she said when she'd stepped into the room fully. She could see Chloe sitting on the bench that ran along one if the walls of the shower, eyes closed.

“In here,” Chloe repeated, this time waving her hand to tell Beca she wanted her to join her in the shower.

So Beca stripped off the tee and yoga pants she'd put on when she'd gone down to make coffee and stepped into the shower - warm, not cold. Chloe reached for her immediately and pulled her down by the hand to sit, and then she pressed that hand to her stomach.

It was rock hard under her hand - not at all how it usually felt. It was always firm (pregnant or otherwise) but now it was tense. She looked up at Chloe's face to ask her but her eyes were closed tightly, brow furrowed and jaw set tight as she held her breath and then exhaled long and slow as the tension over her belly eased.

“Was that -”

“Yeah,” Chloe said with a careful breath as she sat up a little straighter.

“Oh, wow.” Beca felt her mind go into panic mode but she kept her ass rooted to the bench instead of leaping up like she wanted to. She tried to focus on stats and process instead. “How many -”

“Two. That was the second one.”

“Since you got in the shower?”

Chloe nodded and leaned back until her head rested against the shower wall.
Beca wished she'd made note of the time she got in the shower. She had no real idea how long it had been and thus she had no idea how far apart the two contractions were. She squinted through the foggy glass to make out the digits on the clock on the bathroom counter and remember it: 11:13.

“Are you okay?” she asked and immediately felt dumb to ask it. “I mean -”

“I’m okay.”

“Is this...is this the real thing?”

“Pretty sure.” Chloe was speaking through semi-clenched teeth and Beca wondered just how much pain she felt, even during what seemed to be a break.

So Beca took up her hand again and kissed it and then let her hold it if she wanted to hold it - she did - and she sat with her in the relative silence to wait.

And wait.

And wait.

It was with a quiet grunt that she knew it was happening again, and she felt Chloe's hand squeeze hers - hard, but not hard enough to hurt. She rocked forward, then back, then forward again and Beca heard her breathing through it in long, steady beats. She didn't know what to do other than wait either for it to pass or for Chloe to tell her she needed something.

She checked the time: 11:29.

“Okay, so, that was 16 minutes.” Every bone in her body screamed at her to grab Chloe, put her in the car, and speed to the hospital.

Of course, if she did that, they very well could be sent home for showing up too early. As she read
all the *What to Expect*... books, she'd been surprised to learn that labor didn't necessarily happen like it does in movies. Waters don't always break while strolling the aisles of a grocery store as the first sign of active labor and you don't speed to the hospital when it happens as though the baby is seconds from birth.

Instead, they'd be at home for what would - at least hopefully - be the lengthier segment of the whole process. And despite the preparation and education, that was a weird thing to wrap her mind around.

“Do you want to stay in here for awhile?” she asked when Chloe released her hand to rub at her eyes.

“Yeah. The steam feels good. You aren't going to leave are you?!”

The sudden panic in Chloe's voice made Beca want to wrap her up and hold her but the crazy energy Chloe was giving off was reading *I Need Space* and she knew better than to force physical contact when Chloe was - extraordinarily rarely - not wanting it.

“No, I'll stay. Should I take a shower since we're in here and I might not have a chance later?”

“Of course!” Chloe sounded normal again, as though a switch was flipped and she was smiling. “I’m going to have this baby today! And it’s New Year’s Eve! Oh my gosh, Beca, what if she’s the first baby born in 2018?”

It made the tension melt from Beca and she took a much-needed deep breath. “That would be pretty cool. But for your sake, I hope it’s over before then.” She leaned over and kissed Chloe's cheek and stood up to step under the spray and take a quicker than usual shower, driven by nervous energy. She was rinsing off when she heard Chloe call her and she was back at Chloe's side in a second, letting her hand be squeezed as Chloe breathed through it again.

She glanced at the time: 11:45. “Okay, 16 again,” she said when Chloe relaxed. “Want me to wash your hair? You won't have to get up.”

“I would *love* that,” Chloe said with so much gratitude Beca thought she might have offered to establish world peace.
She laughed and leaned down to kiss Chloe's forehead before excusing herself to grab a cup from the sink so Chloe wouldn't have to stand to rinse her hair.

“You know,” Chloe said as Beca stood next to her to start shampooing her hair, “the first time we kissed, you crept up on me and washed my hair before you said anything.”

“I did not creep up on you.” Beca knew full well she'd crept up on Chloe, having crawled like a perv under the divider between their showers at Aubrey's retreat.

“You totally crept up on me, you creeper. And you got all handsy with me before we even kissed.” Chloe ran her fingers up Beca's sides as though she needed a reminder of the first time she touched a naked and wet Chloe.

To this day she didn’t know where she’d gotten the courage to do it. Finding out Chloe was interested in her helped, but she’d never done something like that before nor since. She worked her fingers into Chloe's scalp to massage it and she heard an appreciative sigh. “I know we always say it, but what is it with us and showers? You recruited me to your cult in a shower. I came on to you in a shower. We cry together in them. We screw in them.”

“Beca!” Chloe said with a laugh.

“Well, we do,” she said with a shrug as she filled the cup with water to tilt Chloe's head back and start rinsing it.

“My point,” Chloe said, “was that we keep having all these life moments in them. At Barden, the retreat. Now I'm in labor with our baby in one.”

“I guess we’re both clean people.”

Chloe laughed but it cut off abruptly as she flinched and then frowned.

“Again?” Beca looked at the clock again. 14 minutes. There was no real way to judge if things were moving quickly or not - Chloe could stay at 14 minutes for three more hours for all she could predict.
Chloe nodded and Beca sat down next to her and let her hold her hand again until it passed.

“As I was saying,” Chloe said after taking a moment to catch her breath, “is that this keeps happening.”

Beca stood to resume rinsing Chloe's hair, taking care to shield her eyes from any running shampoo bubbles. “There's something, like...disarming? about being in the shower. You know? Like, we’re both naked. No makeup. We can't hide. And I know I do my best thinking in here.”

“Me, too. And it's warm and comfy. Except for this seat,” Chloe said with a knock on it with her knuckles. “Not comfortable. Needs cushions.”

“I'll remember that next time we’re at Home Depot. And you know...you proposed to me on New Year’s. Pretty cool that we're here now.” She smiled at Chloe and then, “We’re going to be moms today.”

“Yeah, we are,” Chloe said with a beaming smile before her face crumpled into tears.

“Another one?! It had only been a few minutes and Beca panicked all over again, but Chloe shook her head.

“I'm just so happy,” she said through a sob as she reached for Beca's waist to pull her close and cling to her as she cried into Beca's chest.

“Oh my God,” Beca said with a laugh of relief as she looped her arms around Chloe's neck to run her hands over her shoulders and back. “I'm happy, too.”

An hour later they'd managed to get dressed and make it downstairs and Chloe was rocking on a yoga ball in the living room humming a pained version of “The Shoop Shoop Song” because she couldn't get it out of her head as she breathed through another contraction. Beca was on the couch trying to read and keep her nerves settled but it was all but impossible as she clocked Chloe's contractions to be creeping closer and closer to the five-minute spread mark.
The second they came under six minutes she was up. “Okay, I think it's time to head to the hospital.” She smiled as she said it but she knew she sounded anxious.

Chloe nodded and held out her hand for Beca to help her to her feet. “Is it really real yet?” she asked with a smile that made Beca’s heart warm. Despite the ordeal she was going through - and she was taking it like a champ so far - Chloe still had it in her to tease Beca to try to make her feel better.

“It’s pretty fucking real,” Beca grinned and leaned in to kiss her before ushering her out to the car.

Despite the mountain of paperwork they’d filled out at one of Chloe’s recent check-ups to pre-register, Beca was handed another clipboard with a dozen forms attached to it once they were shown to a room.

As she sat in the recliner in the corner - which felt odd to have in a hospital room but she figured she might be grateful for it later - filling out the forms she kept an eye on Chloe as a pair of nurses hooked her up to all sorts of monitors. She was barely sitting down on the edge of her bed when Dr. Merriweather strolled in, today wearing blue scrubs under her white coat rather than the business attire Beca was used to seeing.

“And who do we have here today?” she said cheerfully. “My two favorite mommies!”

“I bet you say that to all the girls,” Chloe said with half a smile before her eyes closed and she grit her teeth through another contraction.

“Spirits are high?” the doctor directed at Beca and she nodded. “What time did your contractions start?”

“Around 11:00,” Beca answered. She was annoyed she still wasn't finished with the paperwork and now she was interrupted; she wanted to be helping Chloe.

“And how far apart are we now?”
“Five-ish.”

“Water breakage yet?”

“1:32.”

“Are you still intending to forego an epidural?”

Beca had to let Chloe answer that one.

“Yeah. It's not so bad.” She was a little red in the face but other than that, you'd never know she'd been in labor for going on five hours.

Dr. Merriweather glanced at Beca as though she was surprised and all Beca could do was shrug. Chloe might be an emotional teddy bear but she could be hard as nails when it came to things she cared about. “That's good to hear. We'll ask again before you're past the point of effectiveness but otherwise, that's the last you'll hear of it. I'll let the nurses here finish checking your vitals and dilation and come check on you again in a bit. But they'll call me if I'm needed; I won't be far, don't worry.”

Chloe nodded and held out her hand, eyes closed, so Beca set aside the clipboard and hustled over to grab it and let her squeeze it.

The doctor waited, watching the lines on the bedside monitor bounce until it passed and then looked at Beca again, a bit of surprise on her face and Beca knew what she meant. Chloe was barely making a sound and from the lines on the monitor, the contraction had to have been a significant one.

“Good job, Chloe,” Dr. Merriweather said as she touched her shoulder. “You'll be home with your little one in no time.”

“I can't wait,” Chloe said with a deep breath.

The doctor took her leave and Beca was kindly asked to step out of the way so the nurses could
help her onto the bed fully and lay back, heels in stirrups.

“So flattering,” she joked to Beca as a nurse examined her.

“I've never been more attracted to you,” Beca joked back as she leaned down to kiss her. But the thing was...it wasn't a joke. Chloe was more beautiful than ever to her, even in the hospital gown with her slightly frizzy hair that had gone sans product after their shower, the wisps of it starting to stick to her forehead.

“Okay, Chloe,” the nurse said as she wheeled back on her stool to toss her latex gloves into a nearby bin. “You're at four centimeters. We’ll check again in an hour.”

“Six more to go,” Beca said once they were finally alone after what had felt like hours. She hovered, unsure where she should be. Chloe was on the bed, and there wasn't really extra room without worrying she was going to unplug something by accident. The recliner seemed like it was miles away in the corner of the room. But she really didn't want to be standing the entire day either. Nor did she want to leave Chloe's side.

“You can sit down, baby. I'm fine,” Chloe said with a wave of her hand toward the chair. Reading Beca's mind, per usual, despite her ongoing state of discomfort.

Beca inched back to reach for the forms she'd set aside. “I'm just going to finish filling all this out. I'll be right here if you need me.”

“I'm fine, Bec,” Chloe said with a smile that somehow lit up the room.

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Eight hours in and Beca needed a nap. She had no idea how Chloe was still able to pace around the room and grind her way through contraction after contraction. Beca's feet were tired from walking with her for physical and/or moral support, her hand was starting to ache thanks to Chloe's grip increasing in strength by the minute, and she was starving, not having eaten since their breakfast toast.

“You need to eat,” Chloe said as she let Beca help lower her down onto the yoga ball Beca had carried in from the car (with maybe the tiniest hint of embarrassment through the halls of the hospital) an hour ago at Chloe's request.
“How do you do that?”

“Do what?” Chloe blew out a long breath and closed her eyes. “Will you re-tie my hair? It feels loose.”

Beca worked the elastic out of Chloe's hair and let it fall wild around her shoulders for a moment to scratch at her scalp before twisting it back up into a bun. “How do you always know what I need?”

Chloe shrugged and then she folded in on herself, her quiet grunts of the last several hours starting to turn into louder groans that managed to stir up fear inside Beca. She didn't like Chloe hurting and she was obviously really hurting even if she was wearing it with pride and taking it in stride.

“You're doing so good, babe,” she said as she rubbed Chloe's back, helpless to do much else.

Chloe nodded as it started to ease. “Go eat.”

“I don't have to eat.”

“Beca, I don't want you passing out. Please go eat. I'll be okay by myself for a little bit. And the nurses are in here all the time anyway checking on my lady business.”

Beca bounced on the balls of her feet for a second, chewing on her thumbnail. She wanted nothing less than to leave Chloe right now, but she was already getting lightheaded and nauseous and things were only going to get more intense before they got better. “Okay. Fine. 15 minutes, max.”

“Take 20. And will you let my parents know? I totes forgot to text them but if I do it now they’ll want a whole convo I can’t have. But hand me my phone, I want to text Bree.”

“No problem. 15, promise.” She stopped to kiss Chloe and handed her her iPhone. “I love you. You're amazing.”

“I love you, too. Now go before I change my mind.”
Beca kissed her one more time and then sped out of the room before she changed her own mind about it. She power walked down the halls, trying not to run and cause some kind of panic. When she finally made it to the cafeteria she grabbed a turkey sandwich and Doritos and a Coke and sat at a corner table away from other diners. Some of them looked pensive and somber. Others, light and laughing. She needed to be alone with her myriad emotions as she called Chloe's mom.

She was nervous as the phone rang; she'd never had to deliver this type of news to someone.

“Beca! Hi!”

“Uh, hi, Marie.”

“You sound upset. Is everything okay?” Leave it to Chloe's mom to be able to clock her mood at a distance of 3,000 miles.

“We’re uh, in the hospital. I mean, Chloe's okay! Everything is okay. She's in labor. Everything's going okay.”

She rattled off answers to Chloe's mother, her energy practically leaping through the phone: answers about the contractions, the hospital, the doctor and nurses, and the sandwich she was eating. She had to talk her out of getting on a plane from Miami right that second and remind her that they already had a trip planned to visit them in February.

“I'm sorry to cut this short, but I need to get back. We'll call you when we have news.” ‘When we have a baby' is of course what she meant, but suddenly she felt like anything could be a jinx so she kept it vague.

Chloe’s mother had kept her on the phone almost the entire 15 minutes of absence she promised to not exceed and now she had no time to call her mom or dad or Sheila. She hated to do it, but she sent off a text to them as she walked through the hospital to let them know what was going on, that she couldn't talk right now, but would call them when she could.

When she pushed through the doors into the obstetrics ward, she heard Chloe long before she saw her.
But to her relief, it wasn't screams of pain. Chloe was singing. Lorde’s “Green Light,” to be specific.

Of course she was singing. Beca laughed to herself and picked up her pace.

She entered Chloe's room to find two nurses with her, helping her back to her feet from the bed after another presumed exam.

“She likes to sing?” one of them asked with an awkward smile, as though of all the things she's experienced during a delivery, a pregnant woman singing had never been one of them.

“Loves it,” Beca said as she ducked under Chloe's arm to help her the rest of the way. “How far are you?”

“Ten. How's Mom?”

Beca let Chloe lead them in a slow circle around the room. “Probably on a plane on her way here right now. Wait, ten?”

“She'll be ready to push soon,” one of the nurses supplied from where she was making notes on Chloe's chart. “I know you want to, Chloe, but you need to wait a little longer. Baby’s not quite in position.”

“I know, I know,” Chloe said right before she froze in place and almost crushed Beca's hand with her own.

Beca bit her cheek to keep from yelping. Chloe wasn't messing around anymore; or rather, their baby wasn't.

It took a solid minute-plus before Chloe started walking again, making it only a few steps - and a few lyrics - before it happening again.

“Okay, let's get you back in bed,” a hovering nurse said as she gently guided Chloe around to make her way back to it. The other nurse picked up a phone and Beca knew what it all meant.
It meant it was time.

“Oh my God. Okay,” she said out loud with a hop in place before she remembered to keep her nervous outbursts to herself.

“It's okay, Bec,” Chloe barely managed to say as she groaned through another and then sat down to let the nurse help her lay back and bring her feet up. “I'm just going to have a baby,” she said with a smile once she was relaxed again.

“Yeah, you are.” Beca smiled down at her and grabbed the damp washcloth that had shown up at some point during her absence and patted it over Chloe's forehead, neck, and chest. “My baby,” she added with a smirk she was proud of being able to generate in the intensity of the situation.

“Wouldn't want it to be anyone else's,” was all Chloe managed before she was crushing Beca's hand again.

Beca heard the door open and then, “I hear someone's ready to deliver a baby?” Dr. Merriweather strode in, this time her white coat gone and she let a nurse put a gown over her scrubs and snap gloves onto her hands.

“So ready,” Chloe exhaled before being immediately hit again.

“Then let's get the show on the road!” the doctor said as she took a seat on the stool at the foot of the bed.

Time seemed to slow to a crawl for Beca then. She saw a nurse preparing the bassinet on wheels that her baby would be placed into to be weighed and measured. She saw one set down yet another clipboard, and Beca could see that a birth certificate was affixed to it, ready to be filled out. Two more were doting over Chloe, checking her readings and talking to her about what she should do.

She was half-aware that the doctor was talking to her, telling her she was welcome to be where she liked and not to worry about being in the way. That she could film the birth if she'd like to.

Chloe had been adamant that that would not be happening so Beca shook her head and kept her
eyes on Chloe's face, now red and sweating, and let her crush her hand as they counted while Chloe pushed.

And pushed.

And pushed.

“Beca? Take a step down here,” Dr. Merriweather said when Chloe was resting for a brief moment. “You don’t want to miss this.”

“I don’t…” Beca didn't know what to do; she didn't want to leave Chloe, not now, but when the doctor tells you to do something...she took a hesitant sidestep and leaned to look.

She knew Chloe was worried Beca wouldn't find her attractive again after seeing her go through childbirth, but Beca had never seen something so beautiful. Icky, yes, but beautiful. So she leaned and heard the doctor encouraging Chloe to give it her all and with the one and only scream Chloe let out the entire time, Beca watched her son be born.

“Oh my God. Oh my God.” She didn't know what to do. What was she supposed to do?! Was she supposed to say something? Do something? She watched Chloe collapse back, exhausted. “Oh my God, Chlo,” she said, this time being the one to squeeze Chloe's hand.

“Congratulations,” Dr. Merriweather said as Beca saw her stand in slow motion, a tiny shivering, wrinkly, squawking person in her arms that she gently passed to Chloe to hold on her chest. “It's a boy. 9:17 pm.”

“A boy?” Chloe sounded as surprised as Beca felt. For all her talk about maternal instinct, Chloe had been flat out wrong. “Oh my gosh, Bec, we have a son!” she said before bursting into tears which made Beca burst into tears.

She watched Chloe gather him up like he was the most delicate thing in the world and touch her lips to his little head, a mass of dark hair covering it.

“Would you like to do the honors?” the doctor asked, holding out a pair of surgical scissors toward her.
“I…” Beca just nodded, still feeling like she'd been launched onto another planet as she snipped the umbilical cord.

“We’ll have him back to you soon,” one of the neonatal nurses said as she eased their newborn son from Chloe to lay him in the bassinet.

Beca almost couldn't watch the way her new son was poked and prodded and wiped down and wrapped up. It all felt too rough and careless and she had to remind herself that these were professionals that did this multiple times per day. She distracted herself from her worry by leaning down over Chloe to kiss her tired lips.

“You're a fucking rock star,” she whispered when they parted. “I love you so much.”

“I love you, too,” Chloe said with a weak smile before she closed her eyes and took and released a deep breath.

“Mom?”

She saw Chloe's lips twitch a smile, looking past Beca. “She's talking to you, Bec.”

“What?” She'd just been called ‘Mom’ and her brain was really not processing that. She turned and saw one nurse holding their baby, another with a gown.

“Slip this on and you can hold him while we finish up with Chloe.”

She nodded dumbly and let the nurse guide her arms into the blue smock, leaving it hanging loosely over her shoulders, and suddenly she was holding a baby.

Her baby.

Her son.
“Oh my God,” she said, tearing up again as she started rocking side to side as he wriggled in her arms, wrapped up like a burrito. His tiny black hair stuck up all over the place and his big blue eyes stared unfocused up at her and his tiny nose was adorable and his tiny lips were pink and his tiny eyelashes and tiny everything… “He’s so perfect.” She wanted to see his tiny fingers and tiny toes but they’d wrapped him up so tightly - for his own comfort, she knew - she’d have to wait.

She felt someone hovering but ignored them and instead turned to Chloe to smile at her, lifting him a little so Chloe could see him better, and Chloe smiled back, tears still falling freely down her cheeks.

“Mrs. Beale?”

Beca felt a hand touch her shoulder and she finally acknowledged the hovering nurse.

“I'm going to take him to the nursery while they clear everything out of here. I'll bring him back as soon as they’re finished. Okay?”

Beca didn't want her to take him; it felt like kidnapping. He was hers, and anyone wanting to take him from her could fuck off - unless it was Chloe.

But she nodded and passed him back, watching him be placed in the bassinet and wheeled out of sight.

With him gone, everyone descended on Chloe, all kinds of things going on - dressings being thrown away and bedding replaced and someone was giving her a sponge bath and the monitor she'd had to wear around her middle was removed, only the one on her middle finger remaining, and she was helped into a new gown and the bed was somehow converted like a Transformer into a normal hospital bed.

Beca watched from the sidelines, wholly feeling in the way.

Finally, the army left and only their doctor remained.

“You did wonderfully, Chloe.”
Chloe breathed a, "Thanks," and closed her eyes.

“I'll have them bring Baby Beale back in a few minutes. The two of you will need to fill out the birth certificate if you’ve chosen a name, and I'll sign off on it. And I'd like you to try breastfeeding today if you are up for it.”

“I am,” she said thickly and tried to sit up but was instantly urged back by the doctor, who offered a few more words of reassurance and then departed.

Beca looked at her wife, alone together for the first time almost since they left home that morning, and started to cry. Again. Dammit.

“Oh no, baby, why are you crying?” Chloe said, reaching for her until Beca had managed to wedge herself oh so carefully on her side next to Chloe in bed, now clear of all the wires that were in the way.

“I’m just so happy. And relieved. And tired,” she said between hiccups. “Oh my God, why am I bitching?” She sat up and climbed off the bed, instantly feeling guilty for her moment of weakness. “You...you need to rest. I can’t...oh my God I can’t believe you did that! That was...that was incredible. You are incredible. You...I...where is he? When are they bringing him back?”

As if on cue there was a knock on the door and then it opened, a nurse wheeling their son back into the room.

“Okay, Mama Chloe. Let’s see if this little guy is hungry.”

“I got him,” Beca said, cutting off the nurse to beat her to pick him up, still wriggly, still squawking. The corner of his blanket had come loose so she capitalized, tugging it a free knowing she could always wrap him up again, but she needed to see him, to find his tiny hands and slip her pinky finger into one and feel his fingers wrap around hers.

She was in awe. Literal awe. She’d never fallen in love so quickly, and she loved him with every ounce of her being.

She carried him to Chloe with slow, careful steps until she was sitting on the side of Chloe’s bed again so they could both see him.
“So. What do you think?” she asked, smiling at Chloe and then her son.

“He’s beautiful.”

Beca chuckled and shook her head. “Yeah, but that’s not what I meant.”

“I know.” Chloe reached up and ran a finger along his wrinkled brow, dark hair now covered with the tiniest knit hat. “Presley.”

“Presley?”

She saw Chloe nod. “Presley Mitchell Beale.”

Beca wiggled her pinky, his whole tiny arm moving with it as she leaned down to kiss him. “Happy New Year, Presley.”
If someone had told Chloe a year ago that it was possible to fit any more love into her body than that which she held for Beca, she'd have told them they were off their rocker.

Yet somehow, the moment her newborn son was placed onto her chest and into her arms, she felt a whole new part of herself open and fill with an almost suffocating level of love she could never have imagined.

She wept openly, the tiniest human she'd ever seen offering his best attempt at his own first tears as she held him close to keep him warm and let him feel her heartbeat, still racing from the effort of bringing him into the world. When she could finally tear her eyes away from him, Beca, her wife, the love of her life - new son notwithstanding, though he was a new, different kind of love of her life - wept openly, too, glancing between their new child and Chloe and appearing as bewildered as she did elated.

When she was set up for recovery and a nurse brought her son back to her and Beca snatched him up protectively without a moment’s hesitation to carry him to her with all the care and caution and adoration Chloe could fathom, she wept again.

She was exhausted - never had she been so physically worn out in her life - but emotionally she had never felt more alive. Beca held him so they could both look at his precious little face, still red from his own ordeal, wisps of dark hair peeking out from his little cap and she wondered if it came from Beca's side and if it would stay dark or if, in a year or two, it would start to lighten to something closer to the red of her family’s.

She watched Beca untuck him to slip her pinky finger into his palm for his tiny hand to grip and Chloe rested her hand under Beca's other, holding him together.

“So. What do you think?” Beca asked her.

“He's beautiful.”

“Yeah, but that's not what I meant.”

“I know.” She reached with her other hand to trace the tip of her finger along his brow, gazing
down into his dark blue eyes. Definitely Beca’s eyes.

Over the months, together (and separately) they’d put together lists of names they liked. Most were gender neutral, intent on being able to narrow it down to a very short list without knowing for certain the sex of their baby while not necessarily wanting a gender-specific name anyway - though Chloe was so, so certain it would be a girl, and now here she was, sitting with her son. It had been Chloe who added the name to the list; Beca had almost stricken it because of its connection to Elvis, but Chloe insisted. She loved the name, she did, and if people connected it to Elvis, the King of Rock and Roll? Fine. Presley’s parents lived and breathed and created music. “Presley.”

“Presley?”

She nodded. “Presley Mitchell Beale.” No hyphens, no deciding whose father’s name to give as his middle name; Beca’s name, which she so readily gave up to be one with Chloe, would live on.

Beca wiggled her pinky, his whole tiny arm moving with it as she leaned down to kiss him. “Happy New Year, Presley.” She turned and kissed Chloe as well.

“Happy New Year, baby,” Chloe replied to Beca, and then whispered toward her child, “Happy New Year, baby.”

Chloe couldn't have anticipated the outpouring of love from their families when they set to sharing the news.

Their parents were first, Facetiming Chloe’s, then Beca’s, then Chloe's brother, which had them all crying in gratitude. It was dawn in Miami, but no one minded the phone calls.

Obviously.

Beca's dad and Sheila were next, and Chloe could tell Beca was a little embarrassed by the way her father was saying he was so proud of her and happy for her, yet proud herself, blushing and shrugging and looking at Presley and smiling again. Next came Beca's mother, who managed to negotiate her way into being the first relative to plan a trip to LA and meet her grandson in person.
When Chloe’s energy finally ran out, Beca helped her get ready for bed until a nurse popped in to assist her with some of the not-so-attractive aspects of post-labor recovery. Though now, she didn’t really care what Beca saw or knew. Now she thought it absurd she was ever worried about Beca seeing the icky parts of giving birth. They were married. It was their child. Beca loved her. Let Chloe all but break her hand during labor because Chloe knows it had to have hurt with how hard she squeezed it to help get through her own pain. Asked the nurses follow-up questions about taking care of her at home, questions about afterpains and bleeding and breastfeeding and how long should she take it easy before it was okay to start doing more physical activity than walking, and yes, how long until they could have sex again.

(Probably four or five weeks.)

So she didn’t care that Beca hovered within earshot of her conversation with the nurse in the bathroom about how things felt and flowed and looked.

Screw it - sickness/health/better/worse. Beca was her partner in life and wanted to make sure she was and would be okay and healthy and needed to know about that stuff.

So she allowed her to know about it.

There was a recliner in the corner of her room that, Chloe discovered, folded out into a cot. She desperately wanted Beca in her bed, but other than some cautious cuddling it wasn't a good idea yet. So another nurse helped set it up for Beca once Chloe was resettled in bed, her son in her arms, now quiet after a bout of crying that felt too long and made her worry something was terribly wrong.

But he was only hungry.

“You’re so far away,” she said to Beca who was at her cot changing into a pair of shorts and a tee Chloe recognized as her own. “We haven't slept in the same room but not the same bed in…”

“A long-ass time,” Beca finished.

“Bec!” she admonished, glancing down at their son. “Language.”
Beca flinched. “Sorry.”

“We should set up a swear jar now. His college tuition will be paid for by the time he starts kindergarten.”

Beca smiled at her and crossed the room, fuzzy slippers (also stolen from Chloe) flopping against the hard floor of the hospital room, to sit on the edge of the bed in what had become her designated spot. “What type of fine are we talking? A quarter? A dollar?”

“Pretty sure it should be a dollar.”

“Fine. Remind me when we get home.” She smiled at Chloe again and then looked down at the bundle in her arms. “This is so crazy, dude.”

“Is it really real yet?” Chloe whispered with a wink.

“Pretty fucking real.” Before Chloe could tsk again, Beca said, “I know, I know.”

They sat quietly after that, both sleepy and watching their son until he started drifting to sleep, too, and Beca eased him out of her arms, already with a cloth over her shoulder that Chloe didn't notice her having, to rub and pat his back that was barely the size of her hand as she paced slowly around the room. She was murmuring things in his ear that Chloe couldn't hear, but she didn't need to.

She smiled, feeling tears welling again as she watched Beca with their son, so natural and calm after all her confessed fears that she wouldn't be a good mom and would inevitably mess up.

They were only a few hours into this parenting thing, but she thought they were doing pretty well so far.

“He's almost out,” Beca said quietly as she made her way back to Chloe. “Wanna say goodnight?”

“Of course,” she said just as quietly, leaning in to kiss his forehead when Beca held him close enough. She watched him react, little more than a flinch, and then he was still. “Sweet dreams, Presley.”
“Please don't keep us up all night,” Beca added in a whisper with a kiss of her own as she turned to place him in the bassinet near Chloe's bed. “I'll get up for him tonight, don't worry,” Beca said as she sat next to Chloe again. “You need your rest.”

“I can't exactly sleep through it,” she started, knowing her implication that she was now a human milk truck was clear. “But I appreciate the teamwork.”

Beca laughed and leaned against her, shoulder to shoulder, and intertwined their fingers with a sigh. “I can't believe how much I love you. And him.”

Chloe nodded, feeling more tears threatening. “I'm so happy.”

“Me, too,” Beca said as she turned Chloe's face to hers with a knuckle against her chin to kiss her. It was a warm, thorough kiss, one they hadn't been able to share since what was now yesterday. Before they had become mothers.

They parted after a minute or two and Beca pecked her lips one more time before standing. “Get some sleep. Wake me if you need anything. I mean it.”

“Thanks, baby,” she said with a yawn and watched Beca pad to the door and turn off the light and make her way to her cot. “We get to tell the girls tomorrow.”

“Don't remind me.” Beca was joking and Chloe just huffed so Beca would know she knew. “Let's sleep as late as he lets us first.”

“Deal.”

As it turned out, their new little man let them sleep a few solid hours before they were woken. Chloe knew that wouldn't last, though. For now, she wouldn't complain. She’d barely slept, consciously dozing more than anything as she listened for every peep and hiccup so she’d be ready to react.
There was something particularly special being “woken” by him for the first time nonetheless.

“What time is it?” she asked as she shifted to check on him while Beca made her way over, room just bright enough to see with the morning light sneaking in around the edges of the heavily curtained window.

“7-ish,” Beca said with a yawn. “You got him? How are you feeling?”

“I'm okay. And of course, I got him,” Chloe said with a smile as she lifted him out of the bassinet. She didn't feel great, but she wasn't in labor anymore and compared to that, she felt like a million bucks. “You can go back to sleep, Bec. It's okay.”

“No, I can stay up.”

“I love the solidarity, baby, but we can't both be exhausted all the time. Go lie down. I'll be fine.”

“Can you get up by yourself? I mean, I don't want you hurting...something.” Beca gestured at her and Chloe knew what she meant: her internal self was a mess in need of weeks of healing.

“I'll be super careful. Promise.”

She watched Beca hesitate and finally relent and return to her cot where she fiddled with her phone for a few minutes before putting it away and closing her eyes. However, Chloe could feel herself being watched as she fed her son (like, what an amazing thing by the way? It was weird and tingly and...weird and amazing and wow, bonding??) before setting him back in his hospital crib to get herself out of bed - an ordeal that was different than when she was pregnant but nonetheless troublesome as she tried to move with caution - so she could pick him up again to shuffle around the room with him for a bit until she set to changing his tiny, tiny diaper.

The diapers she had for her dolls as a little girl were bigger than his!

“You okay?” came Beca's sleepy voice at the sound of the little Velcro strips of his extra fancy hospital-issued diaper.
“Perfect,” she said with a smile down at him. She’d changed dozens of diapers in her life - relatives and kids she babysat for in high school - but she was changing her son’s diaper for the first time and that was just...awes. He squawked and wriggled and she marveled at his tiny perfect self, finally able to see him properly after the controlled chaos of his delivery.

He had ten perfect fingers and ten perfect toes and a small round birthmark over his collarbone, and his hair, now dry and sticking up everywhere as his cap slipped off when she laid him down, wasn’t as dark as she had thought it to be, now more an auburn shade of brown. It was hard to say whose nose he might have; it was little more than a cute button of a thing, but she’d known immediately he had Beca’s eyes and now that she could think better, it was even more obvious. His round little tummy was the cutest thing she’d ever seen and she couldn’t wait for his navel to heal up so she could blow raspberries on it. Instead, she settled for bending to kiss it and then she set to wrapping him back up snugly and wiggled the little cap back into place.

She was about to set to getting herself back into bed with the intent to just hold him for a while when, as though they were signaled she was awake, a pair of nurses, two she hadn’t met yet (must be a new shift) knocked quietly and entered, and while Chloe’s bathroom habits hadn’t been monitored or controlled since she was being potty trained, there she was, being sent to do as instructed.

She was grateful though.

Certain things were...not fun right now.

But when they offered her a shower, she almost cried. Well, she did cry, she just waited until she was in the shower to do it silently so the nurse sitting outside the curtain wouldn’t think something was wrong.

The warm water felt so good. Her muscles were starting to ache and she realized she’d literally had the workout of her life last night and it was no wonder she was sore everywhere.

It was also the first time she’d had a chance to look at herself, finally alone, no gown, no teams of medical professionals poking and prodding her most delicate places with straps and wires and monitors. She’d grown so used to looking down and seeing the taut, overwhelming roundness of her belly it was almost a shock to see it...not. It kind of looked like she was back to being six months pregnant. She knew she’d work to regain her pre-baby body in time, but for now, it felt a bit like a badge of honor.

She smiled as she rinsed her hair - it smelled like home, and she was grateful Beca had gone so far
as to insist on packing a toiletry kit with all her favorite soaps and lotions for this moment just as they would do for a vacation.

Home. She was excited to go home. Being in the hospital felt like a false experience. She wanted to be in her house with her wife and their son in their bed and in his nursery.

The thought of it energized her and she rushed, best she could, through the rest of her shower and she almost cried again when it was Beca who was waiting outside the curtain with their overnight bag at her feet instead of the nurse (though she knew the nurse wouldn’t be far).

“You should be asleep,” she said as reached for the towel Beca was holding, only for Beca to shake her head and step forward and set to drying her off herself, managing to wrap her in a hug as she did so.

“I’ll take a nap later. I had to check on Pres, you know.” She shrugged a smile at Chloe. “He’s sleeping, by the way.”

Chloe smiled back, enjoying that Beca had already shifted to using a nickname. “Good. All the more reason for us both to be sleeping. Except I kind of feel like I could climb a mountain right now? I’m tired but...not?”

“Adrenaline? Let’s get you in something comfier than that scratchy gown and maybe you’ll calm down, okay? And they brought us breakfast.”

Chloe thought about the heavy knee-length cardigan and multitude of yoga pants she’d packed in that duffel and she couldn’t wait to get cozy. And she hoped there was a big plate of scrambled eggs waiting for her. “Yes, please!”

Chloe managed to negotiate her way out of Beca forcing her to lay down to sleep after breakfast (eggs!) with surprising ease, and she was glad; she just wanted to sit and hold Presley for awhile. She hadn’t had much opportunity other than what she’d managed to do that morning, and she was in serious need of mommy-baby bonding time.

Beca didn’t go back to sleep either; instead, she disappeared into the bathroom and came back fresh-faced and wearing a pair of loose-fitting jeans (for once) and a worn-out hoodie sweatshirt,
hair thrown into a sloppy ponytail. She joined Chloe in bed, now a little more able to cuddle both Chloe and their son without fear of hurting something while asleep.

Beca plucked her phone out of her pocket and held it up. “Picture time?”

Now Chloe was even more grateful she'd been able to shower and put on real clothes. She was makeupless and surely looked tired, but at least her hair looked decent with Beca remembering to pack her mousse. “Oh my gosh, yes!” She sat up a little to adjust Presley in her arms to hold him higher as Beca raised her arm, poised to take a selfie of the three of them.

“Saaay…” Beca hesitated as she searched for a word other than ‘cheese.’ “Say, ‘holy shit we’re mommies’!”

Chloe laughed as she said it and she saw Beca snap few photos in a row and then bring her phone back in so they could look at them until they agreed first on one to send to their families and yet-to-be-informed friends, and another that she and Beca would post to Instagram as their public announcement in a day or two, once they were home and settled. And when they'd both drop a dollar into the swear jar.

They were in the middle of gawking at their sleeping child - they made a person! - when another knock on her door made her groan. “Please, no more nurses!”

Beca only smiled at her and stood to open the door instead of waiting for them to enter. Chloe couldn't see from her angle but she heard the quick whispers of greeting and then her best friend was standing in front of her, flowers and balloons and tears.

“Ohhh my Goddddd!” Aubrey squeal-groaned, and then immediately checked her volume and whispered, “Oh my God!”

“Bree!” Chloe said excitedly, voice above a whisper but still quiet. “You're here! Wait, how are you here?” Chloe sort of remembered maybe texting her last night, but...

“I texted her this morning,” Beca said as she relieved Aubrey of the bouquets to set them up on a corner table. “Thought she was due the courtesy of being the first to know before the rest of the misfits.”
“Wise choice,” Aubrey said, still obvious in her attempts to be quiet. She rushed to Chloe and wrapped her up in a side hug, cautious of the baby in Chloe’s arms.

“You don't have to whisper. I don't want to live on eggshells around him, so -”

“It’s a boy?!” It wasn't as if Aubrey had stopped crying since she walked in the door, but the tears did seem to renew at the information.

Chloe had wrongly assumed Beca had imparted all relevant facts already, so she backed up her conversation, excited to share the news herself. “Bree, this is Presley…” she shifted the still-sleeping bundle to be able to pass him to Aubrey’s waiting arms. “This is your Auntie Bree.”

Aubrey gazed down at him with as much wonder and awe as Chloe first felt - and still felt. “I...I don’t know what to say,” Aubrey stuttered as she looked between Chloe and Beca and then back at Presley. “He’s so…” She didn’t finish her sentence, instead opting to smile at him, and rock him, and lift him to kiss his forehead.

“Perfect?” Beca supplied.

“Perfect,” Aubrey nodded.

“Babe, lean in?” Beca said to break the moment of silence and she looked up to see her holding her phone up to take a photo of them.

“I can’t believe you have a baby,” Aubrey said as she kept her eyes on him, smiling nonstop.

Beca sat at the foot of the bed and rested her hand over Chloe’s ankle. “He’s pretty awesome. I think we’ll keep him.”

Aubrey giggled and finally looked up again. “I will babysit anytime you want. Literally. Anytime.”

“Are you free June 17th?” Chloe asked with a smile.
“Yes! Wait...no, Chloe you know that's my wedding day!”

“Ohhh, darn. I guess we’ll have to bring him with us.”

“You better! Oh my God, is he going to wear a tiny tuxedo?”

Chloe bit her lip at the thought and how dang adorable that would be. When she glanced at Beca, she caught her trying to be smooth about pushing away a tear as she blinked at the ceiling. No doubt she had just pictured the same thing.

“Don’t worry; we’ll totes get him one to match the rest of the guys.”

Beca nodded and added, “But I make zero promises that he won’t start crying and interrupt your ceremony.”

“This is silly. I can walk perfectly well on my own,” Chloe said to the nurse’s aide who insisted she sit in a wheelchair to leave the hospital. “I’ve been walking around here for two days and no one put me in a wheelchair any of those times.”

“It’s the protocol, ma’am,” the young woman said.

“Okay,” she said, trying not to sound rude. “I understand.” She wanted to go home and it had taken a full three hours to get through the discharge paperwork. But the time had come and Beca was out pulling Chloe’s car around from the parking garage to the hospital wing’s main entrance, so she allowed herself to be helped into the wheelchair in the middle of the room she and Beca spent two-and-a-half days in and wait for Beca to return to leave together.

“Are we ready?” Beca asked when she popped her head back into the room.

“We’re super ready!” she answered and watched helplessly as Beca picked up the last of their belongings - first handing Chloe’s purse to her, then lifting their most precious belonging of all, strapped into his car seat, to carry him out to the car.

“Ladies first,” Beca said with a smile as she opened the car’s passenger door and then offered Chloe her hand to help her out of the wheelchair and into the car.

Chloe giggled a thank you and let Beca close her door before turning best she could in her seat to watch Beca open the rear passenger door and set the car seat on its base to work it into place.

“You’re giving me performance anxiety,” Beca grumble-teased as she struggled.

“You need to slide it -” A loud click interrupted her and Beca made a sound of satisfaction. There had been a bit of teamwork involved back in the hospital room to get Presley strapped into his car seat. It wasn’t like he was big enough to make it difficult for them, but they were both nervous and Chloe found comfort in the fact that Beca’s fingers were trembling a little as she struggled to work the clip on the harness straps to tighten them against his little chest. “Good job, baby.”

Beca tossed her a smile before closing the door and circling the car to take her seat behind the wheel. “Home?”
“Yes, please.” She reached to take Beca’s hand as she always did when they drove but Beca dropped it after a few seconds as they stopped at the hospital exit to wait for traffic. “I can’t hold your hand?”

“Um…” Beca chewed on her lip for a second, glancing in her rearview mirror, then at Chloe, and then past her out the window to check for oncoming traffic before easing onto the street. “I just...I think I should drive with both hands, you know?”

Chloe’s wounded pride healed immediately; Beca wanted to be extra careful chauffeuring their precious cargo for the first time.

And she was extra careful. Chloe couldn’t remember the last time Beca drove the speed limit. They were that slow car in the right lane that others in the right lane passed in annoyance, but Chloe didn’t mind. And it was kind of cute the way that Beca was white-knuckling the steering wheel the whole way.

They weren’t even on the freeway. The route from Cedars-Sinai to their house was all residential roads. Beca had been so strong and sure in the hospital - so much so that it had surprised Chloe. This was a little more like she expected, but she had a feeling it would be short-lived and Beca would find her self-confidence again soon.

When they turned onto Canyon Drive, Beca finally relaxed and let her right hand slide off the steering wheel to slip into Chloe’s. “You ready for this?”

“It’s a little late to have second thoughts, baby,” Chloe said with a squeeze of her hand.

“I’m not having second thoughts,” Beca said quickly. “I just meant -”

“I know what you meant.” Chloe lifted their hands to kiss the back of Beca’s. “And I’m so ready to do this with you.”

Beca nodded and drove them through the gate and into their neighborhood - toward their family home.
“I don’t want to wake him up.”

“Then let him sleep, babe.”

“But I want to hold him.”

Presley had fallen asleep during the car ride home; Beca carried him inside, still strapped in the car seat bucket like she was walking on eggshells despite Chloe’s repeated insistence to “just walk normally” and not worry about making noise or bumping it too hard when she set it down on the coffee table in their living room.

And that’s where they still sat, side by side on the couch staring at him sleeping peacefully in his car seat.

Chloe isn’t quite sure what she pictured in regards to bringing her newborn home for the first time - she’d envisioned scenarios that included walking into a surprise party with friends or sweeping in, holding her bundle of joy and Mary Poppins-dancing around the nursery to introduce him to his room.

Instead they’d returned to an empty house (though there were flowers and balloons there, at least a dozen deliveries that she suspected Aubrey had helped to get in the house), just the three of them, in silence to sit on the couch and stare at him for what was now going on half an hour.

Beca’s hand squeezed hers. “Let him sleep, Chlo.”

Chloe’s knee bounced until the need vibrated through her too strong to ignore. “I can’t.” She dropped Beca’s hand and leaned forward to pop the buckle of his harness and scoop him out of the seat until she was meandering around the living room holding her son in her arms.

“My sleeping pattern hates you.”

He didn’t wake up fully, not at first anyway, just kind of gurgling and flailing at the sudden motion. She spoke to him like he was awake, though. “This is your new home, Presley! This is the living room.” She spun slowly to give him a 360° view - not that he was paying attention. “This is
where we relaaax and watch moviiiiies and have cuddle partiiiiiiies.” She smiled at Beca when their turn brought her into view again - because Beca had her phone out and Chloe could tell she was recording them. “This is our Christmas tree.” She reached out with one hand to run her fingers along the pine needles of the tree and Beca had picked out the week after they’d hosted Thanksgiving. It was their second tree together and it had been as special an event as the first, full of laughs and carols that Chloe noticed didn’t require nearly as much begging as last year to get Beca to join in with.

“Christmas is my fave holiday. You just missed it, though! So you’ll have to wait a whole year until your first Christmas. But you’ll be old enough to enjoy it by then, so that’s okay. We leave presents for each other under the tree and Santa Claus visits on Christmas Eve if you’ve been a good boy and brings you something extra special, and we open them on Christmas morning. Your mommy gave me a First Edition copy of *Anna Karenina* this year because she thinks she’s funny.”

“I’m fucking hilarious,” Beca said from behind her. “I know, I know. One dollar.”

“A real Kate McKinnon.”

“I will take that as a compliment.”

“Kate McKinnon is a funny lady,” she went on teasingly pretending like Beca wasn’t there. “And a lesbian. That means she’s a girl who loves girls like I love your mommy. But we’re not lesbians. We’re...well, your mommy’s bi and I am, too, though I would probably label myself more as pan, but a lot of people don’t understand what…” She shook her head. “Nevermind. We’ll cover all that when you’re older and start asking questions. But we like lesbians. They’re great. You remember that.”

She kept walking, a slow, rocking pace. “And this is the kitcheeeeen. Here we eat all the yummy things.” Beca had followed them, still filming, and Chloe caught her eye and winked. “Well, almost all the yummy things.”

Beca shook in silent laughter in her attempt to be a steady cameraman with the tiniest hint of a blush on her cheeks borne of amusement. She looked at Chloe expectantly so she resumed her tour through the unexciting dining room and outside.

“This is the patio. We have barbecues out here and go swimming in the pool - don’t worry, you’ll take lessons and learn how to swim as soon as you’re old enough, but you are never, ever allowed out here by yourself.” They’d had the pool child-proofed months ago - an extra lock on every door that led to it, plus a fence installed around it to keep him out. And they’d extended their home
security system to cover the pool area, just in case. “But it’s super fun and we will go swimming in a few months when it’s warmer. And out there,” she gestured toward the horizon, “is Los Angeles. That’s the name of the city where we live. Over there,” she pointed, “is Mama’s school. I’m a teacher and teach little kids like you how to read and write and make music.” She pointed again. “Your mommy’s in that area a lot. There’s a lot of recording studios there. Your mommy makes music, too. But she makes grown-up music and you’ll hear it on the radio and see her on TV because she’s so good at it.”

She felt a hand on the small of her back, a quiet acknowledgment of her compliment without interrupting her documentary. She smiled and turned to re-enter the house.

“But Mommy won’t be gone too much. She built a recording studio here so she could stay with you, see?” Chloe knocked quietly on the door to the studio to indicate it but didn’t enter; she wanted to let Beca have that first moment with Presley. “And if we go upstairs…” She climbed slowly, body still recovering in a number of ways until they were at the door of the nursery. “…this is your room! It’s pretty awes and your mommy did a really good job making it for you.”

She walked him around its perimeter, introducing him to his changing table, the large window of the room, a few of the animals painted on the walls, the bookcase which was now pretty decently filled with children’s books, and pointed out the Big Dipper in the night sky painted on the ceiling. She put more gusto into her narration as she went on - it was fun and kind of felt like she was performing not only for her [sleeping] son but also Beca and her camera.

When she’d thoroughly described every detail of the nursery she made her way to the rocking chair in the corner. She’d sat in it countless times already, imagining this moment of easing into it with her baby in her arms to rock him to sleep, or feed him, or read to him. The change in motion was enough to do the opposite though and he woke - she saw it coming, a slow scrunching of his round face, arms flailing enough for one to work its way out of the loosely wrapped blanket, and then he was crying.

Loudly.

“So he saved his real voice until he got home?” Beca said with a laughing wince as she put her phone in her back pocket and crossed the room to hover next to her. “Yikes.”

Chloe shushed him and sent the rocker into motion with a bend of her knee but he didn’t let up, very obviously unhappy. “He’s probably hungry; it’s been a couple hours.” She shifted him, trying to figure out how to hold him and mess with her shirt at the same time, only to grow frustrated after a few seconds.
“Need help?”

“No, I...I need to be able to do this.” She struggled with it until she realized she was sitting on the hem; once that was free, it was much easier but this was Round One with a nursing bra. The fact that Presley was only crying louder - truth be told, he wasn’t that loud at all, but there was a lot of sound coming out of a tiny, tiny body and it was stress-inducing - wasn’t helping with her irritation at her lack of skill.

“I can take him for a second while you -”

“I got it,” she said firmly. Her determination finally won out and with a few more adjustments and nudges, he was quiet and content.

She saw Beca step around to crouch in front of her, hands on Chloe’s knees for balance. “That’s really fu- freaking cool, you know. That you can do that.”

“What, breastfeed?” Chloe said with a quiet laugh.

“Yeah. I mean, like obviously cows do it. And dogs and cats and everything but I kind of forget we’re animals, too? And then you’re nursing our baby and, like...it’s cool.”

Chloe smiled at her and then down at the child in her arms. “It is pretty cool.”

They sat in silence together watching him until Beca started getting restless and wobbly in her crouch. “I’m realizing I should have more than one chair in here.”

Chloe lit up at the thought. “We should get a chaise, too, so we can sleep in here when we need to.”

“I thought he was sleeping in our bed? What happened to attachment parenting?” Beca said with a quirk of a smile. Chloe knew she’d somewhat intentionally not brought up the topic in weeks.

She hesitated; she didn’t like to backtrack on things, especially things she’d previously been ready to fight for, but… “I did a lot of reading and...and maybe it’s not the best method. That’s why I
don’t want us to tiptoe around him when he sleeps. I want him to be...resilient and be able to tolerate a little noise or separation from us. I mean, I literally never want to put him down,” she added with a giggle, “but I’m trying to be realistic. I want other people to be able to take care of him, too, without it being an issue for him. I don’t want him having a tantrum on his first day of pre-school because we’re leaving him like I did on mine.”

Beca squeezed her knees and straightened. “I think that’s a good idea.”

“But he’s sleeping next to our bed until I say so.”

“I’m good with that.”

“Is he okay?”

“He’s fine, Chloe. He’s sleeping.”

Chloe hovered in the bathroom doorway, clinging to the frame to stop herself from leaving it. She’d been working on getting ready for bed for the last several minutes but her paranoia that she needed to check on him was suffocating. “Are you sure? Can you tell that he’s breathing?”

“He’s breathing.” Beca’s response was far too quick.

“You didn’t even look!”

“I know what breathing looks like!” came a whisper-shout and then she heard Beca approaching. Her face was serious when she stopped short in front of Chloe, not quite expecting her to be in the doorway. “He’s fine. Please, get ready for bed. I am exhausted and I know you are, too, and we need to sleep when he’s sleeping. So please. Finish and come to bed. I’m not going to let anything happen to him; he’s my baby, too, you know.”

“Oh, no, Bec, I’m sorry,” she rushed. “I didn’t mean to make it seem like I don’t trust you with him!”
“I know you didn’t. Just...look: this is scary for me, too, and neither of us knows what the hell we’re doing. You have to trust me with him, and I have to trust you, too. And I do.”

“I trust you, baby, I’m sorry,” Chloe said as she wrapped up Beca in a hug. “I really didn’t mean to make it sound like I didn’t.” She felt Beca hug her back and relaxed in relief.

“It’s okay. Finish and then we’ll trade off so we can try to get some sleep.”

Chloe nodded and backed out of the embrace to hurriedly brush her teeth and wash her face. She was filled with nervous anxiety facing their first night alone with their child; it was exciting and terrifying all at the same time.

When she reemerged from the bathroom she found Beca sitting on the edge of the bed, her foot on the rail of the cradle to help it rock a little, staring at the peaceful bundle sleeping in it. Chloe felt bad for being compelled to question Beca’s attentiveness; it had been instinctual and now she knew why Beca was so quick to assure his safety: because she had been watching him the entire time.

She looked up at Chloe’s return and smiled. “Still sleeping. I’ll be super fast.”

True to her word Beca was speedier than ever; Chloe was still working on figuring how best to sleep so she could be comfortable and somehow still keep one eye on Presley when Beca was crawling into bed. Chloe had settled on her side facing the cradle so she could watch him and she felt Beca wrap an arm around her middle and press herself close to her back.

“I can reach again,” Beca said with a kiss to Chloe’s shoulder and a cautious squeeze.

Chloe chuckled and rested her hand over Beca’s forearm. “Are we sleeping with the lights on?” She felt Beca hesitate and smiled as she sat up a little to reach for her reading lamp. “I’ll turn on my lamp.”

“Good idea.” She felt Beca disappear and then saw her round the foot of the bed to slap the switch on the wall and kill the main lights. Beca was back a second later molded to Chloe’s back where she’d been a moment earlier.
Chloe reached out and hooked a finger around one of the cradle’s ornately carved dowels. “I can’t believe we have a baby.”

“Me, neither. It’s so crazy, dude.”

She felt another kiss on her shoulder, and then her hair being lifted for a kiss on the back of her neck, and a third along her jaw. It made her fingertips tingle and she wriggled a little. “Bec, you know I can’t -”

Beca’s forehead pressed against the back of her head and she heard her trying not to laugh. “I’m not trying to start something with our son sleeping three feet away. I’m just kissing you.”

Chloe reached back to catch Beca’s hip with her hand and let her fingers crawl around until she was lovingly scratching her lower back. “Then kiss away. But I thought we’re supposed to be sleeping when he’s sleeping?”

She felt Beca shrug as lips landed on her neck again paired with fingers walking up and down her ribs. “Can’t help it if you’re a MILF now.”

Chloe pressed her face into her pillow to muffle her squeal of laughter, made worse by teeth sinking into her shoulder playfully followed by a wet smack of a kiss to her jaw that was an obvious ending to Beca’s attack of physical affection. When she had her laughter under control again she rolled back a little so she could look up at Beca, still pressed close as she sat up a little at Chloe’s movement.

Beca’s eyes were sparkling and Chloe understood what Beca meant with her MILF comment; sharing this with Beca - becoming parents together, bringing their baby into this world, was somehow so, so sexy. And though she was exhausted, and though her body needed time to heal, she wanted one thing she could have. “What?”

Chloe reached for her, hand at the back of her neck to pull her down. “Come kiss me.”
Date Night

Chapter Notes

This is my little reminder that I strive for as much realism with this story as I can without completely breaking the experience of fiction. There are very real post-partum scenarios discussed here (not depression, just other not-so-heavy things) that many couples deal with when they have a baby.

With that in mind - enjoy!

Chloe reckoned she’d been asleep roughly 17 minutes when she was yanked awake by the piercing cry of her son.

She knew it was her own fault - not being woken by him, of course; he was a baby in need of care - for ignoring common sense and staying up to make out with her wife for an hour instead of sleeping.

It had been so long since she’d been able to have Beca lay on top of her and it felt so good to be close to her and release the myriad pent-up emotions of the past several days. She needed a dose of Beca.

She groaned as she sat up; it wasn’t like the first two nights in the hospital where she was on high alert, hopping out of bed like a firecracker. She almost laid back down after a second only to be reminded by the determined cry of her son demanding attention. She stood up and stretched and scooped him up to make her way down the hall to the nursery to the changing table and set him down.

They were so meticulous about setting up the nursery that the reality of Presley spending the first several weeks, if not longer, in their room instead of his own never dawned on them. They were going to need to relocate or buy duplicates of some of the necessities. It now seemed silly, as she fumbled a little in her sleepiness and still-newness, to not have diapers and wipes and burp cloths and extra onesies in their bedroom. She changed him and bundled him up again to make her way back to their room; he wasn’t crying anymore, but she knew he wasn’t happy and that it was only a matter of time until he started again, so she eased them into the armchair in the corner and with less difficulty than she’d had earlier in the rocker, managed to get him suckling.
She waited in the silence, nothing but his tiny sounds and the periodic heavy exhales coming from Beca who was sleeping soundly.

She smiled, closing her eyes to listen and appreciate it all, until -

“Ow - ow!”

She was still hissing in pain when Beca sat up at the outburst. “What? What’s wrong?”

“He bit me!”

She was too tired to get mad at Beca for laughing, but tomorrow would be a new day.

Chloe liked to think they were good at being parents.

Presley was three weeks old and in those three weeks they’d figured out a schedule that, for the most part, worked for all of them. Chloe was perpetually tired nonetheless, but she got enough sleep to be mostly functional and Beca was doing as much as she could to relieve Chloe of the thing only Chloe was able to do.

Presley hadn’t been very happy about the bottle and a silicone nipple, but Chloe sure was grateful that he eventually accepted it.

Not that she wanted to give up breastfeeding (not even close), but she did want to try to sleep for more than three uninterrupted hours now and then. And she really wanted Beca to be able to feed him as well, and the look of joy and contentment on Beca’s face every time she sat down with him and a bottle was a fair trade.

She liked to think they were good at being parents.

She had no idea there were so many things they could, and apparently were, doing wrong until Beca’s mother arrived.
“Beca, you aren’t supporting his head, you need to support it.”

“I’m supporting it.”

“No, look at the way he’s sitting. He’s going to get gas bubbles. Here, let me -”

“Mom, stop.”

Chloe sighed and leaned against the kitchen counter; she loved Beca’s mother as much as one could love their mother-in-law. She had an inkling that Beca might love Chloe’s mother more than she loved Beca’s, but she tried not to feel guilty about that.

She couldn’t help it if her mother was a ball of warm fuzzy love and Beca’s was...some version of a neurotic armadillo.

Until she met Beca’s mother she always wondered why Beca was “the way she was.”

And then she understood. She also understood the rarity that was Beca going to visit her.

Deborah Mitchell - she hadn’t gotten around to reverting back to her maiden name, despite the divorce being nearly a decade ago - was...a lot.

“Stop - Mom, stop it, I know how to hold my kid!”

Presley’s cry of annoyance was Chloe’s last straw and she intervened, plucking him from Beca’s arms with an apologetic smile. “He’s overstimulated; I’ll take him upstairs and let him finish eating and maybe he’ll go down for a nap.”

She could feel the ire rolling off Beca in waves as she walked away and the moment she gave Beca the courtesy of closing the door to the nursery, she heard the muffled, raised voice of Beca telling her mother to stop treating her like an idiot, that she knows what she’s doing, that she’s a mother now, too, and that deserves respect.
When the dust settled, and when Presley did indeed fall asleep after she let him finish his snack she emerged with caution, Presley still in her arms. She heard them in the kitchen, the conversation no longer about what Debbie thought Beca was doing wrong but instead about...her.

She hesitated on the stairs to eavesdrop with a smile.

“She’s amazing, Mom.”

“Chloe’s always been a lovely girl.”

“No, but like...I know this is so queerballs, but it’s like I fell in love with her again when Pres was born? I don’t mean that I fell out and then back in, but I was already here, and now I’m way down here -”

Chloe peered over the railing into the kitchen to see Beca crouching in front of the open refrigerator. She was digging for something with one hand but waving her other hand at the floor. She bit her lip to stop the giggle threatening to give away her position and Beca straightened, a head of cabbage in her hand which she tossed onto the counter.

“So you’re happy?”

Beca smiled. “I’m really fucking happy.” She watched her roll her eyes as soon as she said it and cross the room to her purse at the front door to pull a five dollar bill out of her wallet and drop it in the unicorn cookie jar that held their swearing penalties. It’s not like he heard her, but she did it anyway. “And Pres - I mean, like, I love Chloe and I didn’t think I could love anyone as much as I love her. No offense.”

Debbie waved off her comment and started chopping the cabbage Beca had retrieved.

“But he’s just...he’s the best thing I’ve ever...done. Had. Made. Whatever, you know what I mean.”

“Now you know how I felt when you were born.”
Silence fell between them and Chloe’s fun-guilty eavesdropping felt a little real-guilty and while she’d been ready to prance into the kitchen and tease Beca for being so sappy, she instead stood fast and wondered how she got so lucky.

“Shut up,” Beca said after a moment and Chloe heard the tell-tale emotion in her voice. “What else goes into this? Potatoes, right?”

“And carrots and tomatoes.”

Chloe waited until to make sure their conversation was only about the soup her mother was making and then continued on her way to place Presley in the cradle in the living room before returning to the kitchen. “It smells amazing in here!”

“Just you wait ‘til it’s been cooking a few hours,” Debbie said with a smile at Chloe’s entrance.

Beca smiled, too, and Chloe had an inkling that she knew she’d been listening. “He go down okay?”

“Yeah, totes. We’ll see how long he’s out, though. What can I help with?”

Chloe liked to think they were good at being parents.

But after four hours of non-stop crying, after two tiny loads of laundry and two baths thanks to two diaper blow-outs, after trying a bottle, and the boob, and the other boob, and a different bottle, and checking for a fever and reading and singing and rocking and silence and a drive around the neighborhood all in the middle of the night, Chloe finally broke down.

“I don’t know what I’m doing wrong!” she said with a sob as she placed Presley back in his car seat on the dining room table. He’d been fighting being held and he seemed to fight not being held just as much as he flailed and screamed with all the anger and frustration Chloe felt, too.
“You’re not doing anything wrong,” Beca said from her spot at the table. Her face was in her hands, as frustrated as Chloe. “He’s just being a baby. Please don’t cry, too.”

“I’m his mother and I don’t even know why he’s crying!” She crumpled to the floor at Beca’s feet and leaned against her. “Do you think he’s okay? Should we take him to the emergency room? What if he has an intestinal blockage?!”

“Did you not see what I cleaned up? Because nothing is blocking that boy’s intestines.”

She felt a hand fall heavily on her head and then fingers were combing through her hair to scratch at her scalp. “I don’t know what else to do.”

“I think we need to…”

“Please don’t say it.”

“…let him cry it out.”

They’d made it four weeks. Four weeks of scoffing that babies weren’t as difficult as their parents made them out to be. Four weeks of feeling like she was a SuperMom and four weeks of being impressed that Beca seemed to be a Presley-whisperer with her ability to put him to sleep and four weeks of never once having to run to the store in the middle of the night because they forgot to buy diapers.

So he cried, and Chloe cried with him as she tried to cover her ears so she wouldn’t have to hear his voice that seemed to be telling her over and over again that she had failed him.

She remembered the moment of surrender and breaking down, but she doesn’t remember when Beca ended up on the floor with her. She was wrapped up in Beca’s arms and she knew Beca was crying, too.

She cried until she had a headache and she finally got her hiccuping sobs to subside. She was still in Beca’s arms being rocked side to side and she could hear Beca shushing her.

And that’s when she realized the only one still crying was her.
She scrambled to her feet, only realizing once she was standing she’d basically shoved Beca off her and she reached down to help her up with an apology.

“He stopped a few minutes ago.”

Chloe looked down at Presley, finally calm and silent after what felt like an eternity of distress, and felt a wave of relief pass over her. It must have been obvious, or Beca knew her that well because she nearly fainted but Beca caught her.

She was spent - emotionally and physically.

“Come on; we’re going to bed.” Beca touched her lower back to get her moving and to avoid disturbing him too much, carried Presley upstairs in the car seat bucket rather than picking him out of it.

When Chloe woke again, the bedroom was bright with the light of late morning. She turned to check on Presley in his cradle next to the bed but it was empty and she sat up in a disoriented panic as she remembered what had happened that night. He was gone, and Beca wasn’t in bed, and maybe something was wrong and she’d taken him to the hospital and -

She spotted Beca across the room in the armchair, head lolled back as she lightly snored, Presley propped in her lap against her chest wide awake but quiet as he stared at a shadow on the ceiling from a tree moving in the breeze. Like he hadn’t spent hours screaming as though he’d been possessed by a demon half the night. There were pillows wedged alongside her - barriers, Chloe figured, to keep Presley from potentially falling from his perch - and two empty bottles, one on the floor and one still in Beca’s left hand poised to drop any second.

Chloe smiled and grabbed her phone as she crawled out of bed to tiptoe over and take a photo. She shared it to Instagram with the caption: “Sleeping like a baby. Presley, on the other hand… #BechloeBaby #BecaIsMyHero.” It was far from the most flattering photo of Beca, but she hoped she would be forgiven in favor of the cuteness.

She tossed her phone back to the bed so her hands were free to pick him up as gently as she could so it wouldn’t wake Beca.

“Let’s go make breakfast for Mommy.”
“You have our numbers.”

“Obviously.”

Chloe slung her purse over her shoulder. “And the pediatrician’s number is on the fridge.”

“And the Poison Control Center’s,” Beca added as she tugged on her other boot.

“He’s six weeks old, Beca; he’s not mobile. He’s not going to accidentally drink poison.” Aubrey shifted Presley in her arms and Chloe knew she was making a point. “Please go on your date. Get out of this house. For my sake.”

“Okay,” Chloe said nervously before darting in to kiss Presley’s forehead. “We won’t be gone that long.”

“An hour, max,” Beca said, kissing him as Chloe had.

“I better not see you back here earlier than 9:00.” Aubrey opened the front door and looked at them expectantly until Chloe huffed and grabbed Beca’s hand.

“Okay.”

“Okay,” Beca repeated. “We’re going.”

“Totes going.”

They stood on the front step staring at Aubrey and their son, neither making the next move to leave.
“Go!” Aubrey finally said as she closed the door in their face.

She looked at Beca who looked as worried and excited as she felt. “So…”

“I guess...we should go?” Beca asked.

“We do have a reservation…”

“No, wait,” Chloe said quickly when Beca picked up her glass.

Beca looked at her expectantly.

“This is our first date night since we had Pres, and this,” she tapped on her wine glass, “is my first drink since April.” They were at one of her favorite restaurants, a little Mediterranean place on Vine walking distance from the house.

“And?” Beca teased.

“And it’s February."

Beca laughed. “So you’re going to be hammered after one glass of wine?”

“Probably.” Chloe grinned. “Make a toast.”

“A toast?”

“Yeah! C’mon, please?” She batted her eyelashes for good measure and she saw Beca blush a little, either from her flirtation or being put on the spot to make a toast. She watched Beca scratch at a smudge on the side of her glass to gather her thoughts.
She took a breath. “Okay. So, like...I’m really glad we’re doing this. I mean, like, us, our whole family thing. It’s pretty sweet. So.” She held her glass out toward Chloe. “Cheers?”

Chloe giggled at Beca’s somewhat of a misfire of a speech but it was so acutely Beca that she loved it even more. She clinked her glass to Beca’s. “Cheers.”

They drank and the rich tones of the merlot swam over her tongue. She couldn’t help but groan in pleasure and close her eyes to savor it. It was exquisite.

When she opened her eyes, Beca was staring at her, her own glass still hovering in the air. “What?”

Beca cleared her throat and swallowed. “You, uh...I haven’t heard you sound like that in 41 days.”

Chloe blinked, confused. Then she smiled as she replayed the moment in her mind. “You’re counting how many days it’s been since we made love?”

Beca set her glass down and leaned forward to whisper harshly, “ 41 days, Chloe.”

All Chloe could do was laugh. If she didn’t, she’d cry. She’d literally never gone so long without sex since she started having it 12 years ago save for two extended phases of singledom around the end of high school and beginning of college. She was advised by Dr. Merriweather to wait at least four weeks for anything too “ambitious” in the bedroom to allow her body time to heal, and though that meant they could do pretty much anything else, the few times they decided to try were interrupted by 1) Presley waking up (of course), 2) the security alarm going off because a bird flew into a window, and 3) Chloe’s boobs leaking and it being so weird and hilarious they’d had to stop.

She considered masturbation on more than one occasion but if she wasn’t taking care of Presley, she was pretty much just eating or sleeping. Plus, she had massive guilt about it because Beca said if Chloe couldn’t, she wouldn’t either because that wouldn’t be fair. Chloe had insisted it wasn’t fair to Beca to stand in solidarity with her forced chastity, but Beca had insisted right back that if Chloe wasn’t getting off, neither would she.

It wasn’t that she was dying of horniness - she actually wasn’t that horny. She knew her post-baby hormones were tamping that down. Her agony came from the absence of physical connection more so than that of mindblowing orgasms.
Though she really missed those, too.

And the way Beca looked at her over the rim of her glass when Chloe absentmindedly moaned at the taste of wine told her Beca was definitely missing those.

And *that* did make her horny.

“Maybe we can try tonight?” she asked, liking that Beca’s eyes darkened at the suggestion.

Beca nodded. “I might spontaneously combust if we don’t.”

Chloe winked at her and liked that that had an effect on her, too, and it made Chloe squirm in her seat. “Let me see how Pres is doing and see if we have a chance.”

She unlocked her phone and texted Aubrey. *How’s it going?*

Aubrey’s reply was quick. *We are good!*

It was followed by a picture of Presley in his little spongy bath chair in the kitchen sink looking pretty bored with the situation. She turned her phone and showed Beca, who grinned at the photo.

“Send me that.”

“‘Kay.” She saved the photo to forward to Beca and Aubrey sent another message.

*I’ll call you if anything is wrong. Please enjoy your date!*

*Thx Bree! Trying not to be helicopter. Just nervous.*
Chloe, he is 100% perfectly okay. I promise.

I don’t want to hear from you again unless it’s to tell me you’re on your way home.

And that better not be for another hour.

At LEAST.

Chloe smiled at her phone and tapped out a quick Kk and then set it down on the table. “She says he’s fine and not to text her again until we’re on our way home and that it better not be for at least an hour.”

Beca’s smoldering demeanor from a few minutes ago returned as she took another drink of wine. “So I have to wait at least an hour to finally fuck you?” she said with a smirk, just loud enough for Chloe to hear it across the small table in the crowded restaurant.

Chloe knew it made her blush and while part of her wanted to grab Beca’s hand and run out of the restaurant and home, a bigger part of her wanted to sit at that table to enjoy one another in this way - talking and flirting and laughing with the only interruptions coming by way of their waiter delivering dinner and their second glasses of wine.

The wine did go straight to her head. She was a ball of giggles most of the evening but she reigned them in long enough to have an actual conversation with Beca - one that wasn’t about poop frequency or its characteristics or how Chloe’s nipples were feeling.

It was somewhere in the middle of sharing with Beca what she had planned for her students when she would return to work in a couple weeks that she realized she’d kind of forgotten who she was as Chloe Beale, that she was someone else in addition to Presley’s mom. Of course, she then felt guilty for finding happiness in something other than him, but she tried not to; she knew it was irrational and unfair to herself to strip away everything from her life but being a mother.

She would never have wanted her own mother to give up who she was before she had kids; if she had, she wouldn’t be the awesome mom she is.

So she pushed her guilt aside and told Beca how she’s going to spend the last three months of the school year teaching her kids Elvis’s “Jailhouse Rock” for the year-end pageant, which made Beca cackle in laughter and promise to be there (though it’s not like she would have missed it anyway).

“What about you?” she asked Beca; she’d done so much talking that Beca was finished eating
while she’d barely started. “I keep expecting The Weeknd to be sitting on my couch when I come in gross and sweaty from Pilates.”

Beca had been home almost nonstop since Presley was born; it was wonderful, especially after how much time she’d been away to set herself up to take this break. But as much as Chloe loved having Beca home and figuring out the whole parenting thing together, she knew Beca was itching to get back to work. She had a creative mind that never stopped, whether she was watching the Kardashians or reading a book.

“I’ve been working on some stuff at the house.”

“Really?” Chloe buzzed with excitement; new Beca-music was one of her favorite things. She’d spotted Beca in her home studio a few times recently but was either too busy with Presley or too tired to ask her about it and she had made a promise to herself she would never enter the studio uninvited. Beca was thoughtful enough to bring her work home, so the least Chloe could do was allow her the personal space to be productive.

Beca pushed around the last scallop on her plate to make designs through the sauce as she shrugged. “Yeah. We had that kick-off a couple months ago and we’re supposed to start next in a few weeks, so.” She didn’t seem her usual confident self when it came to discussing her music and Chloe set down her fork.

“What’s wrong?”

Beca shrugged again. “I...feel like I’m out of my league.”

Chloe shook her head. “Baby, you are an amazing producer and they wouldn’t have asked you to join their team if they didn’t believe that, too.”

“It’s not coming as easily as it usually does, I guess. That’s all.”

Chloe reached across the table and laid her hand on Beca’s wrist and offered a warm smile. “It will come to you. It always does.”

Beca smiled, too, the shy little smile that was a rarity nowadays. “I kind of forgot what it’s like to be the small fish in the big pond.”
“Beca Beale, you are a shark in a puddle and I will never let you forget that.”

Beca laughed at that and it made Chloe’s heart warm.

“Did you forget where we’re going next week?”

Eyes rolled at her and Beca went back to her scallop to pop it into her mouth. “The Grammys,” she said with her mouth full.

“The Grammys,” Chloe repeated with a nod, “where they’re going to announce your name more than once. Because you are a shark.”

“Okay, okay, enough with the shark,” Beca said, laughing again.

Chloe pointed at her. “I’m not going to let you forget it.”

“Okay.”

“I might dress up like Left Shark for the red carpet.”

“Chloe.”

She picked up her phone. “I can text Katy right now and ask to borrow the costume”

“Fuck you,” Beca said with a laugh as she half-heartedly tried to grab Chloe’s phone.

“If you doubt yourself again,” Chloe put down her phone her face stern, “I’ll be forced to take drastic action.” She received a little salute in acknowledgment and let the topic of Beca’s hesitation go unless she brought it up again herself. “Did you figure out what you’re going to wear?”
“Not yet,” Beca said with a shake of her head as she ripped off a corner of her pita to dunk it in olive oil. “Narrowed it down over email. They’re coming to the house this week with a rack for each of us.”

“I loved that sparkly black one, with the one shoulder?” Chloe swiped her hand over her shoulder and down her chest. “You kept it, right? I need to see it on you.”

“I kept it,” Beca said with a smile. “And I want to see that white two-piece on you.”

“Oh, no no no.” Chloe shook her head. “I am so not ready for tummy-showing outfits. And definitely not when I’m going to be on E! News.” She ran her hand over her stomach, suddenly regretting her choice of a carb-heavy entree that night.

“You look amazing, babe. And it doesn’t show your stomach anyway. It’s like, your ribs.”

Chloe sighed and sipped her wine. She wasn’t used to being self-conscious about her body and while she was only one dress size off from her pre-baby size (and three cup sizes), showing skin, especially in that area, wasn’t very enticing. “We’ll see.”

“Well, whatever you end up wearing, you’ll be hot as hell.”

She half-choked on her wine as she started laughing at Beca’s matter-of-fact statement. “Thanks, baby.”

“Now stop talking and finish that,” Beca pointed at her plate, “so I can take you home and rip off your clothes.”

Beca moaned when Chloe shoved her back to a tree on the boulevard. They’d walked to the restaurant and it while it was nice and romantic to stroll hand-in-hand on the way there, Chloe was regretting the decision to be romantic right about now.

“We said we’d be home 20 minutes ago,” Beca mumbled against her lips and Chloe felt fingers scrabbling around her waist under her top.
“I said we might get sidetracked on the way,” she mumbled in response and pressed herself closer. “She understands.” Her body was on fire and she rolled her hips against Beca’s and felt Beca shudder against her.

Talking stopped as tongues had better things to do like flutter, twist, and slide over one another.

It wasn’t until her hand was up Beca’s shirt, breast in her palm with Beca’s hand between her legs to press against the seam of her pants and a passing car honked at them that they broke apart.

Chloe’s heart was in her throat as she fought to interrupt the orgasm that she was teetering on. She didn’t want to stop, but she also didn’t want their reunion to happen against a tree on a residential boulevard. “Let’s go home,” she breathed against Beca’s lips before kissing her again.

They ran home.

Literally.

Chloe couldn’t remember the last time she was running with Beca - it had to have been at least a year since Beca decided (again) that cardio was overrated and excused herself from the few couples runs they’d gone on together.

But they were running now, all laughs and playful chasing and grabbing and drunk on wine and each other as they jogged the last few blocks after sprinting the first two.

When they hit their front porch they were both breathing hard and laughing as Beca unlocked the door to spill into the house.

“Shh!” Chloe whispered and then burst out laughing again for a second before she thought to cover her mouth.

“Oh my God. Are you drunk?” Aubrey asked as she rounded the corner coming from the living room, glasses on and a book in her hand. She was smiling.
“No,” Beca said with a face-splitting grin.

“Maybe,” Chloe followed with and then winked. “I haven’t had anything to drink in, like, a year, Bree.” Despite that, her mind cleared after a second. “How’s Pres? Did it go okay?”

Beca made her way to a stool in the kitchen and plopped onto it to wrench her boots off her feet. “He didn’t give you too much grief, did he?”

Aubrey shook her head and pulled out a slip of paper from her book. “He’s asleep. He was a perfect angel. I notated everything we did for your records.”

“You don’t have to kiss our ass, you know,” Beca said with a smile as she grabbed the note before Chloe could get her hand-eye coordination together. “You can babysit whenever.”

“There’s nothing wrong with being detail-oriented, Beca. I thought you’d appreciate knowing how much he ate and when he went to sleep and such.”

Chloe waited until Beca seemed to be done reading Aubrey’s notes and then gestured for it so she could read it over, too.

“No, you’re right,” Beca said as she hopped back to her feet. “That was cool of you to do. Thanks for your help. It wasn’t easy. Leaving him.”

Chloe smiled at Beca’s comments as she read Aubrey’s meticulous notes about how many ounces he drank and how many times he burped and the number of diaper changes and that he sneezed once.

“It’s safe to say you had a good time?” Chloe could hear the mirth in Aubrey’s voice and nodded as she handed the note back to Aubrey, only to be handed it right back and told to keep it.

Beca seemed to be wandering but she showed up behind Chloe, arms wrapped around her waist as she rested her chin on Chloe’s shoulder. “Yeah, it was really nice,” Beca answered before biting Chloe’s shoulder. She didn’t know what unspoken communication was happening between Beca and Aubrey, but Aubrey’s cheeks seemed to redden a little and Chloe giggled. She assumed whatever it was, Beca had made their intentions for the evening clear.
“In that case, I’ll bid you goodnight,” she said as she made her way back to the living room to gather her personal things.

Beca’s hand snuck down Chloe’s stomach while Aubrey was out of the room and cupped between her legs. The unexpected rush of pleasure made Chloe stumble but the arm around her waist caught her, and then the hand snapped back just as Aubrey returned.

Her fluster must have been obvious because Aubrey rolled her eyes.

“Thanks again,” Beca said over her shoulder. She gave it another teasing nip before she backed away and stepped around to give Aubrey a hug.

There was a day, now so many years ago, when Chloe would have been shocked that Beca was initiating a hug with her best friend - and when Aubrey would be equally as shocked, and maybe even repulsed.

But that was years ago and Chloe felt warm and tingly from more than the wine and Beca’s touch.

She was really, really glad that her best friend and the love of her life found peace with one another.

But now she needed her best friend to leave so the love of her life could pin her down in bed and do all the things she’d whispered in her ear against that tree on the boulevard.

She clapped her hands and ran up to hug both of them together. “Thank you,” she said as she squeezed Aubrey. “We needed it.”

Aubrey laughed at the double-hug and finally stepped out of it. “You should make it a regular thing. It’s good for you to get out. Let me know when because I’m happy to help.”

“We will. Now please leave,” Beca said with a smile and an exaggerated gesture toward the front door.
Aubrey only laughed again and gave Chloe another quick hug after she walked her to the door. “Call me tomorrow. You owe me coffee.”

“Deal. Drive safe.”

Chloe sensed Beca’s arrival before she felt it, or even saw it, as she locked the front door and set the alarm system for the night.

And then she was pressed into the wall with a gasp as hands pulled her hair roughly back and over her shoulder before Beca’s lips were gliding along it.

It went right to her head just like the wine and she sagged against the wall, letting Beca’s body keep her pinned there as she worked over Chloe’s neck in a way Chloe couldn’t even remember experiencing before.

She was tingling again, but this time, for another reason. Or an additional reason. “Baby,” she rasped as Beca jerked her hips backward. “Baby, I need…” Beca bit down and she had to gasp again. “I need...I’m sorry, I need…” Damn it was so inconvenient right now… “I need like 20 minutes…”

Beca didn’t stop, though she did back off a little. “What? Why?”

“I have to...” she stopped to swallow and then give in and moan when Beca’s fingers ran along the edge of her pants. “I have to pump. It’s been too long.”

Beca groaned and fell heavily into Chloe, pushing her into the wall again - not helping her comfort level any. “Not fair.”

“I don’t want to stop either,” she said as she forced her way around to face Beca and pull her into a real kiss. “But it’s starting to hurt, and -”

“Sorry, no,” Beca said as she quickly stepped back. “I mean, yeah. Yes, I didn’t mean...I feel like a jerk. I’m sorry, I’m just drunk, and - and I miss being with you, and -”
Chloe grabbed her by the hand and pulled her in again to kiss her one more time. “Baby, it’s fine. You didn’t do anything wrong. Come upstairs with me. I’ll do that, you check on Pres, and let’s pray he stays asleep for another hour.”

Beca smiled, though Chloe could tell she still felt bad. “Only an hour? That’s only, like, 40 minutes once you’re finished.”

“I love your ambition.” Chloe tapped Beca on the nose and turned to run before Beca could respond or react, sprinting up the stairs on light feet to do her best to not wake up Presley.

He was in his bassinet next to the bed wearing the ducky onesie she’d had to talk Beca into buying before they even knew if she was pregnant. She giggled at Aubrey’s choice of sleepwear for him and took care not to disturb him as she grabbed her breast pump bag from the corner of the room and slip out to do it in the nursery so the noise wouldn’t wake him.

She passed Beca in the hall, who let her arms wrap around Chloe’s waist for a moment to reel her in and kiss her before letting her continue on her way.

She heard her stage-whisper a moment later, “Oh my God, he’s a duck!” She popped into the nursery doorway a second later. “He’s wearing the ducky!”

Chloe laughed. “I know. I saw. It’s the best.”

“It’s the fucking best, oh my God.” She patted her front and back pockets. “Where’s my phone? I need my phone. It’s in my purse. Be right back.” And then Beca was gone down the stairs and then back up, whizzing past the nursery leaving Chloe sitting in silence save for the electric hum of the motor of the machine that she tried to pretend didn’t make her feel like a dairy cow.

All she could really do was sit and wait as she’d also left her phone in her purse downstairs. She picked at her nails to pass the time and she was relieved when Beca showed up to plop onto the chaise lounge next to her.

“That contraption is ridiculous,” Beca said as she grabbed Chloe’s feet to pull them into her lap.

“You don’t have to tell me that.”
Beca made a face like she was about to crack a dirty joke and then shook her head to drop her eyes to Chloe’s feet and play with her toes.

“I saw that. What are you thinking?”

Beca scrunched her nose and shook her head. “I’m drunk and turned on and thinking dirty things.”

That was intriguing. “Dirty things like…?”

“Is it -” Beca huffed and kept her eyes down. “Is it weird that I’m, like...curious. About that.” She gave a quick jerk of her hand toward Chloe.

Chloe was confused. “About what? My boobs?”

“Yeah. I mean,” Beca scratched at her nose, “I mean, like they’re...they’re getting sucked on all the time and I haven’t done it in forever and I miss them but I don’t know what would happen if I did it now, like tonight, and I mean I know it’s kind of gross and maybe messed up or something but I’m just curious and it’s weird and...nevermind. Just nevermind.” She made to stand up but Chloe pushed her back down with her leg.

“Bec, we read the same books about this stuff,” she said gently. “You know it’s not weird if you’re curious about what’s going on with me now.”

Beca finally looked up. “I want you so much, but you know, what happened last time, and we had to stop -”

“That’s why I’m doing this,” she tapped on one of the plastic cones, “now. Probably won’t happen this time.”

“Oh, but like,” Beca shifted in her seat, tucking one leg under herself, “what if I’m like, what if I’m kissing...sucking on you and like...like, it thinks I’m a baby.”
Chloe tried not to laugh and bit her lip through a smile. “Okay. Not to burst your bubble, but my nipples really don’t want you sucking on them anyway, even if they do miss you. They’re tired.”

Beca seemed to deflate a little at that.

“But even if you did, I promise it’s not gross and perverted. Some couples are actually really into it.”

“I’m not - I’m not, like, fetishizing breastfeeding,” Beca said quickly as she pushed her hair back nervously, “I’m just - I don’t know...I don’t know what to expect. Is all.”

“It’s sweet.”

Beca looked up sharply. “What?”


Beca just stared.

“What? I literally have milk coming out of my body. I wanted to know. Just like you do.”

“So it’s not gross?”

“The milk or wanting to know?” Chloe shook her head before Beca could answer. “Neither of them are gross. It’s not weird, and it’s not going to make you gag if you decide to go for it.”

“You,” she shifted in her seat, “you wouldn’t mind?”

“It’s part of me. Why would I mind?”

“Because it’s weird!” Beca said with a laugh. “It’s so weird!”
Chloe laughed, too. “Bec, I don’t care! Just don’t ask me to put you in a diaper, okay?”

“Oh my God, now you really made it weird.” Beca shoved Chloe’s feet off her lap in fake disgust and stood up. “I’m going to bed.”

Chloe only laughed again. “Don’t start without me.”


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Beca was indeed in bed when Chloe returned, the lamp on Beca’s side on as she thumbed through her phone on her back. She was topless, and while the sheet was over her waist, Chloe assumed bottomless as well and she quickly shucked her own top to earn her Beca’s attention and the phone being set on the nightstand.

“Has he woken up at all?” she asked as she wiggled out of her jeans with a glance at the bassinet that she noticed was a few feet further from the bed than it was when she checked on him a bit ago. No doubt Beca feeling a little weird about trying to go for it tonight with him in the room and putting some extra space between them.

Not that a six-week-old would have any idea what in the world was happening anyway.

“Not a peep.” Beca’s eyes didn’t leave her as she tossed aside her bra and underwear and while she knew her body wasn’t back to being its perfect temple yet, Beca seemed to appreciate it all the same - more, even - and that helped Chloe crawl into bed with more sexual confidence than she’d felt recently.

She pulled the sheet back, pleased that she was right about Beca’s state of undress, and straddled her waist. Beca’s hands were on her immediately, grabbing her backside as she bent down to kiss her.

She was on her back a second later and even Beca seemed surprised by her speed of flipping and pinning Chloe, but her moment of surprise and pride turned lustful again and Chloe was pressed into the pillow beneath her with the force of Beca’s kiss. She parted her knees and Beca’s hips slipped between them with ease, just like they always fit together.
At the first roll of Beca’s hips into her, they both moaned and they both froze, staring at each other, knowing what the other was thinking - worry and hope that it wouldn’t wake their son.

But the room stayed silent so they smiled at each other and then Beca was moving again, dropping to kiss her.

They’d been so hot and heavy on the way home that despite the half-hour break they’d had, Chloe knew they were both as turned on as they had been then. She spread her legs further and grabbed Beca’s rear with one hand and pulled, lifting her hips to meet her as she let Beca claim her mouth over and over again.

It was sudden - Chloe wasn’t even ready for it, but she was close, and she knew it hadn’t even been five minutes. She groaned into Beca’s kiss as she came, a quick but intense explosion.

“Did you just -” Beca asked with a breathless gasp as she pulled back a little, her hips still rolling into Chloe.

She just nodded and pulled Beca back down to kiss her again. “Don’t stop.”

“Fuck,” Beca breathed against her lips, kissing her like Chloe was wanting her to. But then she was moving, lips traveling along her jaw, down her neck to suck just enough to burn but not leave a mark, along her collarbone, down the valley between her breasts, and while she tensed a little, she hoped Beca wouldn’t notice and take it to mean something bad.

Beca did pause, but only for a second and then she was moving again, kissing along the curve of Chloe’s right breast, fingers teasing around the left’s. Beca moved more slowly the closer she got to the peak. Her hesitation was evident but Chloe kept shifting beneath her, moaning quietly to encourage her exploration and curiosity until she felt Beca’s tongue slip over her nipple the same moment a fingertip traced the other.

She gasped and slid her fingers through Beca’s hair - it didn’t feel like it usually did when Beca’s mouth was on her. It wasn’t bad, but they were tired from constant use. Despite that, it still made her hips jerk.

Beca was gentle, her caution and curiosity evident, her tongue drawing circles before getting brave and closing her lips.
It was brief, but Chloe felt it, the pull of suction and the tingle in her breast, and then a quiet noise from Beca and she was moving again. Kisses and tongue traveling over Chloe’s ribs to her stomach, still imperfect but treated no differently by Beca than any other time, lower still until Beca was pushing her thighs apart to settle herself between them.

“Please,” Chloe said with a moan as she lifted her hips toward Beca, only for them to be pushed back down.

Then there was Beca’s tongue.

“Shit,” she gasped. Her fingers twisted in Beca’s hair and pulled too hard but all Beca did was moan in response.

It had been so long.

So. Long.

In her last weeks of pregnancy, she couldn’t be in any one position very long; they’d been able to have sex, but it was by getting creative and was only able to consist of Beca’s fingers.

She’d almost forgotten what it was like to have her tongue between her legs.

“Shit, don’t stop,” she gasped again as she parted and lifted her legs to try to get Beca as close to her as possible.

There was a quiet chuckle and then fingers pressed inside her and curled as the lips that had so tentatively pulled at her breast pulled at her flesh with every bit of determination that had been pushed aside before.

Beca’s tongue always fascinated Chloe. Her mouth said dirty things and did even dirtier things and it had been one of the most exciting things to learn about her when they first began sleeping together.

Quite simply, no one had ever gone down on Chloe the way Beca did.
It was like Chloe’s soul left her body, and maybe a little like a demon had possessed Beca’s the way she blissfully tortured Chloe.

“I’m gonna -” was all she managed before she saw stars.

Beca was kissing her when she came back to herself and she groaned at the taste on Beca’s lips. It made her hungry and she felt as energized and as turned on as she had been before the two orgasms Beca so effortlessly gave her and she flipped them back to their original position

She straddled Beca, kissing her with the same passion and urgency Beca had kissed her as she ran her hands up her arms and down Beca’s chest. She had no need to be hesitant like Beca and she covered her breasts and squeezed, making Beca arch beneath her and whine against her lips. She pulled away and moved to her neck, licking and sucking until she was just below Beca’s ear to flutter her tongue over the super-sensitive spot that had Beca almost twisting away from her until she begged her to stop with a desperate sob that had Chloe pushing her way backward.

She wasn’t curious and she had no need to be gentle; she felt like she was the demon now as her hand guided Beca’s breast to her mouth.

She sucked - hard - and heard a broken moan above her and from a flurry of movement, she glanced up to see Beca shoving a pillow over her face.

It only spurred Chloe on; there was something so hot about Beca knowing she was going to be loud and not wanting to stop and thus taking action to muffle herself.

She was rough - not too rough, but rougher than an average night together as she left actual teeth marks next to Beca’s nipple which was harder than Chloe could remember ever having seen it. She couldn’t help but flick her tongue against it, short quick taps that had Beca’s hips jerking and grinding against the little contact with Chloe they had.

She was intentionally avoiding contact there; she knew Beca had been on thin ice from the moment she took over and she planned to have her tongue planted firmly inside her to taste every bit of the 41 days of unattended lust. In fact, she craved it and though she’d meant to draw it out much longer, her hunger got the better of her and she moved back to push Beca’s thighs apart - not that she had to try. They snapped open so quickly she almost laughed.

She would have laughed if her mouth didn’t have something better to do, and after one quick swipe
of her fingers through the sea of wetness between Beca’s legs she dropped down, slid an arm under her ass to lift her a little, and pressed her tongue into Beca.

The reaction was immediate, Beca’s entire body arching off the bed which only made the angle better for Chloe. Her fingers were quick and unforgiving back and forth across swollen nerves as she felt Beca around her tongue, squeezing her and pulling her in.

There wasn’t a gradual crescendo.

There was no patient increase from slow to fast.

It started desperately and only grew more desperate as Chloe’s arm lifted Beca higher and her hand pushed her thigh to open her even more.

She could tell the sounds coming from Beca were loud and another glance up showed her the strain and force of which Beca was pressing the pillow into her face and Chloe allowed herself one long moan because it was all just so hot and she wanted Beca to come so badly and she knew she was so close.

Her fingers and tongue moved even faster and finally (“finally” - it hadn’t even been the five minutes it had taken her the first time) she felt Beca quivering, then a rush of heat, and then she was almost having to chase Beca to not lose her as much as she was bucking.

She could hear her, loud, muffled, her voice cracking with her long-needed release.

Chloe reveled in it and almost came again from the sheer intensity of it.

She’d missed sex with Beca so much and now she couldn’t understand how they’d been able to go so long without it without losing their minds.

She’d teased Beca about being ambitious to hope to go at it for less than an hour, but as she tasted every single drop of Beca’s lust she wondered how she could possibly stop after only an hour.

Of course, there really was only one thing that could stop them, and when Beca’s thighs finally fell
from her ears, she listened, but only heard the sounds of their own labored breathing.

She felt like she was on fire and she hadn’t felt like this for so long; she pulled away from Beca and laid down next to her to drag the pillow off her face.

Tears were running down Beca’s cheeks and she reached over to push them away and then they were kissing, still passionate and wanton as hands roamed and pulled at each other until -

“Turn around,” Chloe said between kisses.

Beca hummed for clarity while their tongues slid together.

“You don’t have to do me again, I -”

“You’re going to do me again, too. Turn around and sit on my face, Beca.” She said it with such authority it surprised both of them and then Beca was scampering, a clumsy shuffle of shoving pillows and blankets out of the way until Chloe was guiding Beca down to her mouth and running her hand up her back to feel her bend down and run her tongue over Chloe.

Chloe pressed her moan into Beca, letting it vibrate against her as she tongued at the flesh she’d not yet properly worshipped.

She felt Beca do the same and she wasn’t shy about her need, parting her legs further as she pulled Beca down even closer.

Beca wasn’t shy either; she rolled herself over Chloe’s tongue, again and again so much so that Chloe didn’t even have to do more than give her something to grind against. A high-pitched, “Fuck!” reached her ears and that was all Chloe needed to fall over the edge again and drag Beca with her as they shuddered against one another until Beca tipped off her to collapse on the bed and hug Chloe’s leg.

Chloe laughed as she pushed a knee off her face and let her hand rest on Beca’s ass to squeeze it a
She was exhausted in the best way and could tell Beca was, too, despite the fact that she was still dropping kisses over the top of her foot and her ankle, up her shin to her knee until Beca finally shoved herself upright to fall back down, this time landing face-to-face with Chloe.

Beca was grinning.

So was she.

“That was -”

“Amazing,” Beca finished before rolling into Chloe to kiss her, now soft and slow after the passing of their aching desperation.

And in that peaceful moment of kissing one another after finally reconnecting as lovers for the first time since becoming parents, a broken cry pierced the silence.

Beca burst out laughing against their kiss and she rolled back to rub her hands over her face. “That was a photo finish. We both owe like $20 to the swear jar after that.”

Chloe laughed, too, and started to get up, only to be pushed back down by Beca.

“I got him. He’s on a bottle today anyway.” She climbed over Chloe, which was a little unnecessary but more about prolonging their closeness a few extra seconds, and then she was ducking around the corner into the bathroom followed by the sound of the sink running and then she was back wearing the tee Chloe had seen her discard that morning before showering.

Chloe fetched their displaced pillows and curled up with a soft smile to watch Beca.

“Hey, my little rubber ducky dude,” she said as she lifted him in his bright yellow fuzzy onesie that had a duck face on a hoodie dangling behind him, out of the bassinet, “thanks for holding out as long as you did.” She cradled him in one arm - she’d gotten good at that - and grabbed a burp cloth off the stack of clean ones they didn’t even bother to put away anymore and make her way
downstairs.

“We’ll be back,” she said with a smile over her shoulder before disappearing.

Chloe heaved a sigh and then a yawn, and then a stretch that made things pop in the good way and she smiled up at the ceiling as she listened to the sounds of Beca in the kitchen. It was a routine now and they both knew it by heart - fetching a bottle from the fridge, the metal clatter of the pot of water (which must have needed refilling) that now lived on their stove to quickly bring the chill off the milk, Beca’s soft voice talking to him as he cried impatiently.

Then she heard her singing, first what was definitely “Rubber Ducky” from “Sesame Street,” and then it changed to something she didn’t recognize. She couldn’t make out the words, just a sweet melody that made her eyes sting with happy tears.

Her wife was singing to their son - and she couldn’t be happier.
The Grammys

Chapter Notes

Did you think I abandoned this? Sorry if I gave you a scare! Just took me awhile. I'll never leave you guessing if I'm coming back because I always am unless I say I'm not!

Sometimes Chloe forgot that she was married to a celebrity.

To her, Beca was the secret softie baby whisperer with a snarky streak and a smirk that could bring her to her knees who stole her heart half a decade ago, who somehow fell in love with her, too, and now they share a house and a child and a life.

But this weekend was that lapse when she remembered that her Beca Beale was still Beca Mitchell to the rest of the world.

“Look up, please.”

Chloe cast her eyes on the high ceiling of the hotel suite which had been converted into a full hair and makeup salon. She was perched in a director’s chair wearing her bathrobe while one man (Tony) wielded a curling iron behind her and another (Sergei) took sponges and brushes to her face. This, in addition to a woman (Nichelle) sitting on a stool next to her giving her a manicure.

Her toes had already been done.

There was a gasp followed by unintelligible gibberish and the distinct sound of a gentle raspberry being blown, and then the quietest little squawk in response.

She smiled and waited until the eyeliner pencil was no longer threatening blindness to slide her gaze to her left. Beca was in her own director’s chair and bathrobe, brunette locks fully styled and shining in their carefully placed and pinned curls, blowing raspberries on Presley’s tiny round tummy as she lifted him off her lap. Every time she lifted him, his little white T-shirt rode up, so Chloe understood the compulsion.
She suspected the fact that Chloe dressed him in a tee she’d custom ordered online to feature the two of them, a photo Chloe had snapped when Beca had brought him into the studio with her, Presley asleep in the crook of her right arm while she worked the mixing board, headphones on and free hand fiddling with sliders helped to encourage the activity. There were big bold letters around the photo declaring Beca MOMMY OF THE YEAR.

Beca didn’t know it yet, but there was a matching tee in her size waiting for her, too; it was packed in Chloe’s suitcase for the flight home.

She watched as Beca’s own glam squad - one she knew well, as Beca preferred to use the same people whenever possible - hung back while she played until Kristoffer, her makeup artist, cleared his throat gently. “I need to get started on you, honey.”

“I know, I know,” Beca said with a sigh. “Just one more…” Another raspberry and a squawk and she saw Beca stand and disappear from her periphery with Presley. “Can I pass this rugrat to you for a while?”

“Oh course!” she heard Aubrey say from behind her on the couch. “That’s what I’m here for!”

The three - four - of them were in New York for the Grammy Awards. Since they still hadn’t got around to figuring out a nanny situation (which wasn’t good because Chloe had to go back to work sooner rather than later), they’d asked Aubrey if she’d like to join their little “road trip” for the weekend to help with Presley while they were doing Grammy things.

Aubrey got a free trip to New York and a promise to attend a pre-show party with Beca Saturday night while Chloe stayed with Presley at the hotel, and Beca and Chloe got free trusted childcare on Grammy Sunday.

Presley’s first trip on an airplane had gone generally well; there was fussing and a bit of crying during takeoff and landing when the air pressure changed, and about 30 minutes of full-on screaming two hours into the flight.

Thankfully, the trip was on a private jet and there was no one to irritate with a screaming child but themselves and Beca’s team.

She saw Beca return a second later and climb back into her chair only to be descended upon
immediately by Kristoffer. “Someone’s been keeping us up at night all week; please deal with the
dark circles under my eyes. I look like a zombie.”

“No you don’t,” Chloe offered from her seat. In truth, they were both pretty exhausted; Presley had
been in fine form the past few nights and they’d both lost a lot of sleep as a result. “But I know I
do.’

“You’re right; you do.”

Beca’s joke caught her off-guard and she burst out laughing, causing a fair bit of consternation for
her makeup artist. “Screw you.”

“Later.”

She laughed again and fought to keep face-forward so her eyebrows could be...well, whatever was
being done to them. She felt Beca’s hand squeeze her forearm.

“You’re both going to look flawless by the time we’re finished here,” Kristoffer said as he capped
what he was using and stepped between Chloe and Beca, blocking her from her periphery again.

She heard the click-clack of the ceramic curling iron behind her and sighed; she wished she’d have
thought to spin their chairs so they were sitting in a circle to better allow the three of them to have
an actual conversation that wasn’t speaking to walls or backs, but they’d made it two hours - what
was one more?

“Okay, my little music magician,” Kristoffer said as Chloe saw him step away from Beca to
examine his team’s work. “My work here is done. Off you go.”

“Thanks, babe,” she heard Beca say and then saw her hop out of her chair. She was excited to see
Beca, given the whole stare-straight-ahead-the-entire-time situation offered little in the way of
sneak peeks, but Beca instead pulled a U-turn and she heard her doting over Presley and the giggles
and joining-in that came from Aubrey, and then, “I know, I’m going, I’m going! Let me pee first,
okay?” and she heard Beca’s light footsteps down the hall toward the bathroom and a bedroom
where their stylist had set up her station.
“Now that she’s gone,” Aubrey said from behind her, “is she nervous about tonight?”

Chloe itched to turn around to talk; instead, she focused on the eerie blue light of the device setting her gel manicure. “We’ve honestly been so busy, I don’t know how much of a chance she’s had to get nervous. Last year, yeah, she was a wreck.”

“She’s not jaded already, is she?”

She laughed. “Never. Just...distracted. We’ve had more important things to think about.”

“I bet you mean this little guy!” Aubrey’s voice pitched up and then she was cooing over him again and it was killing Chloe that she couldn’t watch whatever was going on behind her.

“Oh, va-va-voom!” Aubrey said when she looked up from him to see Chloe. “You look stunning.”

Chloe didn’t actually know how she looked whatsoever; the present setup didn’t offer mirrors. She could tell most of her hair was up, though not all, and she was pretty sure they’d gone darker with her makeup palette since she could see everything laid out in the kits Sergei used. She wouldn’t know until she got next door to get dressed how she’d been transformed from “Exhausted New Mother” to “Wife of Grammy Award Nominee and Winner.” “I better go get dressed.”

“I can’t wait to see you two; hurry up!”
Chloe smiled. “Okay. BRB!”

She hustled, making a pitstop in the bathroom, too - she’d learned her lesson once, and that was one too many times, failing to go before getting possibly sewn into a dress - before joining Beca in the bedroom.

She knew Beca would be in full glam mode - she’s seen it dozens of times with the photo shoots, awards shows, and television appearances over the past couple years - but she still wasn’t prepared.

She wasn’t prepared for Beca to turn around at Chloe’s entrance and be red carpet-ready.

She wasn’t prepared to be bowled over by her beauty and she actually faltered a step.

Because Beca’s team had outdone themselves.

She’d already forgotten that part of the process tonight included Beca having her hair colored; nothing drastic, just a slight lightening to a honeyed golden brown. And those honeyed golden brown tresses had been smoothed and curled and pinned back so they fell over her shoulders and down her back but kept clear of her face which had been made up so expertly she almost didn’t recognize her.

But there was no mistaking Beca.

Her eyes shimmered and her lips glistened and her lashes were to die for - fake, Chloe knew, but regardless…

She’d chosen the dress Chloe had hoped for - a one-shoulder black number that hugged her waist and flowed in gauzy layers at the skirt, delicate beading adding a hint of sparkle along the narrow strap over her left shoulder.

She was still trying on shoe options and presently had on a pair of peep-toes.

“Did I literally knock you off your feet?” Beca said with a grin and Chloe knew her lack of grace had been noticed.
Chloe only pushed her shoulders back and strode forward toward her own rack and kept her eyes on it - her chosen dress and two back-ups just in case something happened. “You can’t blame me. I walked in here expecting to see my wife but instead, it’s some supermodel glamazon.”

She heard the smirk in Beca’s voice as she replied, “Right. ‘Glamazon’ is totally me.”

Chloe let herself giggle and dropped her robe. “You look amazing, baby.” They weren’t alone, Beca’s stylist was still having her step in and out of different shoe options, so she had to behave herself a little. If they’d been alone, she probably would have considered a striptease rather than just tossing the robe over the back of a chair.

“Thanks,” Beca mumbled and Chloe glanced over - it was dangerous to look too long - and saw her blushing a little as she watched Chloe, despite the layers of makeup.

“Your bra is in the bag hanging there,” the stylist - Cheryl - offered from her spot on her knees in front of Beca.

“Oh, thanks!” Chloe was no stranger to the world of fashion; she figured Beca was probably weirded out the first time someone made her try on underwear options for an event, but Chloe knew the importance of flash-testing dresses and the corresponding undergarments to prevent an embarrassing faux pas. Plus, she’d never turn down going home with some expensive piece of lingerie she probably wouldn’t have otherwise purchased without a good reason.

She slipped it on and didn’t bother trying to fiddle with tightening the straps which crisscrossed behind her neck to allow for the sleeveless halter-style dress she’d chosen.

It wasn’t the white tummy-showing one Beca had hoped for, but Beca had approved of it nonetheless.

She took a seat on the bed to await her turn and sure enough, after a minute or two, Cheryl was having her stand up and turn around so she could fix her bra.

She liked turning around; it meant she got to face Beca, who was perched somewhat delicately on a stool while Cheryl tightened her bra to deal with boobs Chloe still couldn’t really believe were her own. And she got to watch Beca watch it happen, and Beca wasn’t even trying to hide the fact that she was staring.
Not that Chloe cared.

“Stop eye-fucking. In you go.”

Chloe burst out laughing at the amused voice behind her and turned to see Cheryl holding her dress so she could step into it.

She’d ended up going with a black A-line dress, the satin bodice covered in sequins with a pleated floor-length chiffon skirt.

She let Cheryl zip the short zipper from her waist to mid-back and then she turned, wanting to see herself in a mirror but instead she saw Beca fall off her stool and catch herself just shy of actually landing on her ass on the floor.

“Now, who knocked whom off whose feet?” Chloe said with a grin as she watched a flustered Beca pull herself upright. Beca stared at her agape another few seconds before breaking to nervously play with her dress as though she was dusting it off and checking for damage.

“Yeah, yeah, we all know you’re the hotter one.”

Chloe gasped and would have crossed the room in a hurry to assure Beca that was not the case if Cheryl hadn’t caught her wrist to snap a band of platinum and diamonds around it. “That is so not true!” Earrings went on next, understated but sparkly strings of diamonds. Beca’s, she noticed, were heavy teardrops.

“You’re both stunning,” Cheryl intervened. She’d been around enough to know Chloe and Beca would remain at an impasse on that particular subject. “Chloe, shoes?”

“Oh, sorry,” she offered as she paid attention to where Cheryl had crouched in front of her to help slip on the stilettos that were little more than two thin straps of leather.

“You going to be able to walk all night in those?” Beca asked from her perch.
Chloe met her gaze and lifted an eyebrow at her. “I’m sorry - did you just meet me?”

Chloe has spent half her life in stilettos; if there was anyone who would lose the endurance race tonight, it would be Beca.

“Okay ladies, time to go,” Cheryl said as she stood and passed Chloe the clutch she’d tucked a few important belongings in earlier that day. “Have a great night!”

“Ready?” Chloe asked as she held out her hand to Beca.

“We’re going to have so much fun tonight,” Chloe said as they rode in the back of a black Cadillac Escalade with Luke, her publicist Kristen, Cheryl, and Kristoffer, who were armed with mobile kits of their applicable arsenals. She pulled her phone out of her clutch and toggled to Beca’s Instagram account. “Come on. You have to Insta Story the whole day; not just make the one post.”

Earlier, Chloe had asked Kristen to take photos of them in front of the floor-to-ceiling windows of their suite with the Empire State Building in the background before they left so they could both post a photo and give credit to their fashion and style teams where it was due before they hit the red carpet.

“I leave it to your capable hands,” Beca said as she leaned in to allow Chloe take a selfie of the two of them.

Beca’s nomination for Producer of the Year (Non-Classical) meant they were on their way to the Grammy Awards at the bright and early time of noon.

They have a three-hour ceremony to attend where the non-televised, largely non-celebrity awards are distributed at...another three-hour ceremony.

It’s condensed, relatively speaking; far more awards and there are “only” five performances by artists from the less mainstream categories, plus an In Memoriam that had both of them getting choked up as photographs of the performers Chloe grew up listening to showed up one after
another with the artists and creators Beca long-admired.

The awards pass one by one. Chloe elbowed Beca a fair bit over the category specific to Best Arrangement, Instrumental or A Capella and while it went to someone who arranged a saxophone jazz piece, they both smiled knowing their friends Pentatonix took it home a couple years ago.

Beca knew one of the people on stage accepting for Best Engineered Album so she leapt up and whistled.

This non-televised version of the awards was a little off the rails, more loosey-goosey and full of a lot more shoutouts and absence of speech play-offs compared to the main ceremony last year.

It’s about the work, not the flash. Just like Beca.

She liked this ceremony a lot more.

That is, she liked it until she was so nervous she worried she might be sick because a pair of presenters was about to read off the names of the five Producer of the Year (Non-Classical) nominees.

They’re alphabetical, and it feels like it’s taking forever. The nominees are announced alphabetically, and with their names come the songs that earned them the nominations, and all the artists on those songs.

Calvin Harris and his two songs. Greg Kurstin and his six. Blake Mills and his six.

Beca Mitchell and her five.

The Stereotypes and their seven.

Beca won a Grammy last year. Record of the Year. One of the biggest awards of the night. But it was for creating one perfect song.
Producer of the Year was peer against peer. Which producer could trick out the best track, and it wasn’t necessarily quantity that mattered, so Calvin Harris and his two songs didn’t mean he had no chance of winning against Beća’s five, just as it didn’t mean she had no chance of winning against The Stereotypes’ seven.

And yet -

“Beca Mitchell.”

Chloe didn't actually hear the announcer repeating back that Beca Mitchell previously won a Grammy Award for Record of the Year and is nominated for three awards tonight because she’s cheering too loudly, on her feet before Beca herself and she had to grab her hand and tug her to her feet Beca she seemed a little stunned.

Beca’s body was a little more limp than usual when she pulled her in to squeeze her in a hug and she finally felt her respond, a quick tensing and then Beca was hugging her, too.

“Oh, shit.”

Chloe just nodded and hugged her tighter. She opened her eyes and saw the pair of camera operators waiting in the aisle trained on them, broadcasting onto the big screens and the online live stream while they hugged and while everyone else waited for Beca to make her way to the stage.

“You better go!”

She felt Beca nod and take a step back but then they’re kissing, initiated by Beca, and Chloe smiled into it before pushing her away to give her a playful nudge into the aisle.

She sat down, though she seriously considered standing the whole time but only did as she watched Beca make her way down the aisle and up the stairs. She didn't sit down until Luke grabbed her wrist and yanked her back into her seat.

She watched Beca walk to the stage and accept a Grammy last year.

Last year it was Beca, and Katy Perry, and roughly six other people, and Katy did all the talking.
This year, Beca climbed the stairs, hand held for support by Ed Sheeran who’d hopped out of his seat in the front row to make sure she didn’t trip.

She watched the two presenters hand Beca her award - it looked just like the one that sits on a shelf in Beca’s home studio, but Chloe knew this one was going to be so much prettier.

“Well, shit,” Beca said into the microphone with a stunned laugh as the applause died down.

Chloe was the last one to stop clapping.

“Well, shit,” Beca said into the microphone with a stunned laugh as the applause died down.

“Um, well...okay, thank you to the Recording Academy. I think you might want to fire your accounting firm, though, because there’s no way I just won over Greg Kurstin - you do fucking Adele, man!” she said as she pointed to him. “And Calvin Harris, like, what? You are the shit and I’m just...I look up to you all so much and I really hope there’s booze backstage because we’re all going to do a shot together.”

Chloe’s vision was getting blurry and she did her best to dab at her eyes without totally smearing makeup everywhere as the audience laughed at Beca’s joke.

“Right, um, thank you of course to Katy and Emily and Demi and Tori, and...all these girls’ names end in the -ee sound, what the fuck?” she added with a laugh, and then suddenly she got serious, like she remembered she left the stove on at home and then started flexing and unflexing the fingers of her right hand, the left clutching the award, and Chloe knew she was working on remembering things and watched her tick them off on her fingers as she rambled. “Sammy at Residual Heat for giving me my first internship at a studio. You’re a dick but you took a chance on me. Everyone at Capitol and Metamorphosis and UMG and Safehouse. Luke and Kristen and Cheryl and everyone who tries to keep my life from falling apart. My parents; Dad, you made me join a club my first year at college because you promised you’d pay for me to go to LA and start my music career if I did and I hated you for it, but I ended up meeting my second family there so thank you, and thank you to Aubrey Posen who’s babysitting for us tonight, Fat Amy Patricia Hobart, Cynthia Rose Adams, Stacie Conrad, Lilly Onakuramara, Flo Fuentes, Jessica Smith, Ashley Jones, Denise...girl, it’s like you fell off the face of the Earth after Freshman year, I haven’t seen you in years but thank you. Emily Junk - you’re probably screaming your face off in a hotel room a few blocks away right now pissing off your glam squad and I’ll see you tonight.”

Chloe watched her take a deep, steadying breath, and Chloe realized she was holding her own breath watching Beca and exhaled. If she was wearing pearls, she’d be clutching them and settled for clasping her hands and shoving them under her chin to beam her smile up at her.
“And…” Beca finds her in the audience and meets her eyes. “Chloe Beale. You are...my life. I literally wouldn’t be standing here right now if it wasn’t for you. You put up with this crazy life and my brand of crazy. You are my light and my rock and my other half in every possible way and you will never know how much I love you and our son, Presley. And your names end with -ee, too. This is for you. That’s it. Thank you. Thank you all so much. Now leave because we have to be back here in an hour to sit through another one of these.” Beca lifted the trophy in salute toward her and then she was gone, escorted off the stage with the presenters to applause.

Chloe’s ears were ringing and her palms stung from clapping so hard. As soon as Beca was out of sight she was jumping on Luke to hug him and squeal in his ear.

She heard him laugh and urge her to move. “Come on, I have to get her through the press line.”

“Okay!”

Chloe watched Beca answer question, alone on a mini stage with cameras on her and a few dozen reporters shouting questions and raising their hands until she called on them to ask.

It was otherworldly.

She was so proud she could burst.

When it was over she made sure to wait at the bottom of the steps Beca would have to take to exit. It was clear Beca had no idea she was even there, and she almost shrieked in surprise. As close to a shriek that could ever come from Beca, anyway.

Chloe laughed and caught her as she launched off the last step and into her arms and Chloe felt her break down in tears so she took a few quick steps back to get her out of sight of the reporters, though most of them were already packing up for a break before the main ceremony began. “Shhh, it’s okay. You’re okay, you did so well and you worked so hard and you earned this.”

Beca hugged her even harder and then she let go and lifted her head, mascara and eyeliner completely ruined, and she smiled with a loud snuffle. “I can’t believe it.”
“Oh, baby,” Chloe said with a gentle smile as she reached up to dab at the black rivers staining Beca’s cheeks. “I never doubted it for a second.”

Chloe was suffering from deja vu. Only this time, they were in a different hotel room, literally across the street, and they were having their hair refreshed and makeup retouched - in Beca’s case, almost completely redone - and dresses steamed; their dresses which hung on hangers on a rack while she and Beca stood in their fancy and specifically chosen lingerie in a room full of people.

They could have donned robes, but they were both hot on adrenaline and the people who weren’t women were gay men, so really, who cared? And Luke. But Luke didn’t count.

It was hilarious and dumb and Chloe found her phone to snap and post a Boomerang of her and Beca - yes, in their underwear (she was conscientious about how much she showed) - pretending like they were embarrassed to be caught half-naked to Beca’s Instagram Story about getting ready for Round Two.

They checked in with Aubrey and Presley over Facetime. Aubrey was holding Presley and still crying about Beca winning and being in disbelief that she thanked her.

Presley was content and half-asleep in Aubrey’s arms.

And then they were back in a car to drive four blocks out of the way only to return to Madison Square Garden, literally across the street, so they could enter properly.

“I think we’re here! Again!” Chloe said when the vehicle slowed. She could see crowds and police and people in tuxes with clipboards directing cars to the left or right. Theirs was waved to the left. “You ready for this?” She squeezed Beca’s hand. Sure, Beca just took home her biggest possible win of the night, but now they had to run a gauntlet of publicity and schmoozing and wait to see if Beca’s personal success would be bestowed upon her artists as well.

Beca scoffed, but it wasn’t serious. “Please. I’m a vet now.” She leaned over to whisper in Chloe’s ear, “That’s total bullshit; I’m still fucking nervous.”
Chloe’s heart hammered for Beca and she squeezed her hand again. “You have two Grammys, baby. And you’re like, The It Girl this year. Everyone’s going to be falling over themselves to see you.”

“I doubt that.”

“You’ll see.”

What Beca didn’t know, since she was choosing to not monitor her social media, was that Beca’s Instagram of the two of them revealing their looks for the evening went viral. E! News was already talking about them being the best-dressed couple of the night and both Kim and Kanye and Beyoncé and Jay-Z had already arrived.

Their little half-naked Boomerang had generated a fair bit of conversation as well.

Chloe saw a tuxedoed clipboard round their vehicle and make to open the vehicle’s door to let them out onto the red carpet facing a sea of photographers and the long entrance leading to Madison Square Garden.

“Nope. This side,” Beca said as she slid toward the opposite door and opened it herself. Her publicist scrambled after her, cursing under her breath.

There were cameras there, too, but they were all smartphones and screaming girls and Beca stepped out of the SUV as delicately as she could given its height and her dress and heels.

“No - Becky!” Luke called as he scrambled when he realized where she was going. “You’re going to freeze - it’s the middle of winter!”

“You should know this by now,” Chloe chuckled as she hung back to watch from the car as Beca scurried up to the wall of music fans to start signing autographs and posing for selfies. “She never gets out on the press side.”

Luke only sighed and followed, going into manager mode as soon as he caught up with her as he urged her along the line of fans and politely nudged overzealous fans’ waving arms out of her way. A burly man in a tux with an earpiece trailed her doing much the same but less politely.
“Give me your face,” Kristoffer said to interrupt her voyeurism of the moment. She turned and he was ready to touch up Sergei’s work with a dab of powder and dot of lip color. “Beautiful. Go.”

“Thanks,” Chloe said. It was her turn freak out as she worked her way to the open door to join Beca.

She slipped out hoping to be inconspicuous but was shocked that she got her own mini ovation of girls screaming her name and reaching for her with phones in hand.

It got Beca’s attention and she turned to look; when she saw what it was, she gave Chloe a smile and a nod and a gesture toward the crowd while she mouthed, “Have fun!”

Chloe had never experienced anything like it. Sure, the Bellas had a following, and Suzanne at school was like her own personal fangirl, but this...was so much more.

Last year, she didn’t join Beca on the red carpet as her guest, instead choosing to walk with Luke and Kristen to be more of her assistant than her date until the ceremony began. And sure, she’s been recognized before, usually with Beca and, on three occasions, by herself: at Trader Joe’s, at the gym, and at a gas station.

But this was a wall of a few hundred people begging for her attention.

And the fact that it was due to Beca’s success made it extra super special.

So she smiled and stepped up to the first girl holding a copy of a magazine with Beca on the cover, which Beca had already signed, and the girl immediately held up her phone for a selfie.

So Chloe posed with her for a selfie.

Followed by another. And another. And then she was signing things with Beca’s face on them and even things that didn’t. The temperature was hovering below freezing and she was only wearing a flimsy dress but the adrenaline blocked the cold.
One girl begged her to sign her arm so she could get it tattooed. She tried to discourage it but then the girl pointed at her forearm.

Beca’s signature was already there. And it wasn’t just in Sharpie.

“Oh my gosh, okay,” she said with a laugh as she scrawled her signature under Beca’s and then gave the girl a hug because she started crying and let her take an excessive number of silly-faced selfies with her. That is, until Beca noticed how far ahead she’d gotten and stopped to walk back and take her hand to pull Chloe with her.

“I gotta steal her; sorry guys,” Beca said with a wave. “Thank you!”

“You’re all aca-awesome!” Chloe yelled as she let Beca lead her across the carpeted street toward the massively crowded, tented entrance to Madison Square Garden.

They had to make their way through three security checkpoints before the path finally dumped them out into an arrivals tent swarming with activity. The step-and-repeat stretched for at least three dozen yards with a photographer pen opposite it. Chloe also spotted numerous media outlets set up for on-camera interviews. The moment they stepped onto the red carpet proper, Kristen was speaking in Beca’s ear to be heard over the chaos and Beca’s hand latched onto Chloe’s and then they were moving with purpose...

...only to come to a halt after a few steps in front of Nancy O’Dell for the Grammy Awards’ official red carpet coverage.

“Oh, look who’s here, everyone!” Nancy said to the camera and Chloe felt Beca drop her hand in favor of Luke’s to help her step up onto the elevated platform for the interview. “Beca Mitchell! Wow, you look absolutely gorgeous tonight. Who are you wearing?”

Chloe tried not to grimace; she wasn’t on camera with Beca, but there were cameras everywhere, including a drone that was buzzing along the tent ceiling and a jib that was swinging a television camera throughout the area. Beca hated being asked about fashion; she loved dressing well, but had pumped her fist and hollered when Reese Witherspoon tweeted #AskHerMore.

“Givenchy,” Beca answered politely. “And before you ask, my shoes are Jimmy Choo.”
Chloe smiled then; she hoped the real Beca would show up more tonight.

“Well, you look amazing. And you actually just won your first Grammy of the night for Producer of the Year - congratulations! How does it feel?”

“I mean, it’s awesome. I don’t do it for awards, but they don’t hurt, right?” Beca said with a dazzling yet humble smile.

“There are so many amazing artists here tonight. Is there anyone you’re hoping to meet? Or a performance you’re looking forward to the most?”

Beca laughed. “Obviously I’m looking forward to Katy Perry opening the show, and my girls Demi and Tori Kelly are performing, too. But I’m probably most excited to see Emily Junk because we’ve been friends since college.”

Nancy laughed, too, and Chloe, despite her love of these types of events, cringed internally at how forced and fake it all felt. “Of course you are. And you have plenty of more people to see so I won’t keep you. Good luck tonight.”

Chloe silently criticized Nancy’s interview skill; anyone who’d done their research would have been able to ask Beca at least two more questions coming off her offering up her college years with a fellow nominee for discussion, but instead, she was dismissed.

“Thanks!” Beca said with a wave and then she was reaching for Luke to be guided out of the bright TV light and off the platform where she heaved a sigh and gave Chloe a look that definitely meant she thought it all ridiculous.

“One down?” Chloe said as she ran her hand down Beca’s arm.

“A dozen more to go.” Beca clasped her hand and they were walking again, Kristen leading them and Luke bringing up the rear as they snaked through the crowds of A-list musicians, celebrities, press, handlers, and crew.

“She wasn’t good,” Chloe whispered.
“She never is.”

Beca settled into her role of “celebrity” for the night after a couple more interviews, Chloe watching off-camera with pride as she gabbed like the star neither she nor Chloe saw her as. Beca even got excited when she saw Ryan Seacrest and urged Kristen to get her up there with him. He’d always been good to her, debuting her songs and having her call in for interviews.

Five minutes later, they’re waiting at the bottom of the stairs to his platform watching him wrap up an interview with…

None other than Katy Perry wearing a head-to-toe sparkling black jumpsuit with an LED belt around her waist that seemed to be displaying programmed messages; at present, “#TIMESUP” was rotating round and round.

Beca was beaming and Chloe thought her hand might break with how tightly it was being squeezed. They watched the conversation and then it was clear Ryan and Katy had been alerted to the waiting guests as they both turned, Ryan with a smile and Katy with a shriek of, “Rebecca!” before rushing off-camera to yank her into a hug that Chloe saw the camera swing to capture.

“Chloe Beale! You’re here, too!” she added as she reached for Chloe to pull her in. “And you both look fucking hot. Wow.”

They thanked her and then, much to Chloe’s surprise, she pulled both of them back with her to the interview she’d so abruptly interrupted. Chloe felt her stomach drop to her shoes as she was suddenly thrust onto live television with one of the hottest music stars in the world.

And Katy Perry.

“Guys, this is Beca Mitchell!” Katy shouted right into the camera. She gave both of them, her right arm around Beca and left around Chloe, a jostle. “She made this album and I’m literally never working with anyone else ever again!”

“Shut up,” Beca grumbled but she was grinning like an idiot.
“And this is her wife, Chloe, so back off ladies and gents: they’re both hot and they’re both taken.”

“Well, welcome to the Grammys, Chloe!” Ryan Seacrest said with a huge and sincere smile.

She wondered if he was annoyed his interview had been hijacked.

And then she realized she’d just been addressed. “Oh, thanks! I mean, I’ve been here before, but…” she added with a smile as a shrug.

“That’s right! Beca won Record of the Year last year for Katy’s ‘This Girl Says’ and now she’s back this year with a combined six nominations, and she just took home Producer of the Year. How does that feel?” The microphone tilted back into her face.

“It feels aca-awesome,” Chloe answered with a huge grin and she felt Beca’s nails press into her arm where it was holding her behind Katy’s back. “She’s super talented and I’ve been lucky enough to experience it first-hand.”

“You’ve known each other for quite awhile, is that right?”

At least Ryan did his homework, but Chloe wasn’t surprised; he’d interviewed Beca several times in the last couple years. “Yep, since college! She used to have the cutest little recording studio set up in her dorm room. Her roommate hated her for it.”

“How do I get my hands on those tracks?” Katy asked cheekily. “I’m ready for round three.”

“Not on your life, Perry.” Beca was cool and comfortable despite the live interview and Chloe’s heart soared watching her in that element.

“So you met Chloe in college and now you’re together here, at the Grammy Awards. That’s pretty amazing, Beca.”

“She’s done nothing but support me since the day we met. I wouldn’t be standing here if it wasn’t for her.”
Chloe had to cast her eyes to the roof of the tent to prevent the tears that suddenly welled from spilling and ruining her makeup. It’s what Beca had said on stage just hours ago, too.

She meant it.

“Oh, shit, I’m suddenly the third wheel,” Katy cracked and then she was ducking out from her centerpiece spot to instead stand next to Beca instead of between them.

Beca and Chloe automatically stepped closer and Chloe couldn’t help but pull her in for a side hug. Beca hugged her back and rested her head on her shoulder for a moment before lifting it to place a featherlight kiss on her cheek, immediately followed by a dabbing of her fingertips to remove whatever lipstick smudge happened.

Chloe suddenly remembered they were being broadcast on live television and no one was saying anything, so she drummed up a sly, “I wouldn’t be standing here if not for Beca, either. Obviously.”

It succeeded in making the rest of them laugh and Chloe was grateful when she saw Ryan’s people signaling to wrap it up; she didn’t mind the attention so much, but tonight was supposed to be about Beca. They were dismissed quickly after that and once the three women had stepped down from the platform (passing Lorde in the process, making Chloe wish they weren’t doing a hot change on live TV so she could ask for a selfie) Katy wrapped Beca up in another hug, exchanging words Chloe couldn’t hear. Then, she received a, “See ya in there, Chloe Beale!” and a wave and Katy and her hefty entourage were gone.

She was about to say something to Beca about how crazy that was and how she hopes her mom was watching but she knows she was because of Beca, but then Kristen was half-shouting in Beca’s ear to steal her attention. Beca was nodding and they were walking, more weaving and Chloe could see the actual red carpet and step-and-repeat nearing and she knew they were about to be tossed out there to the wolves.

Her hand was in Beca’s again and she breathed a sigh of relief that Beca had reached for it. They were about to step out to the first little white X on the expanse of crimson carpet when a shriek from behind made them both jump and then something slammed into Chloe and she nearly fell into Beca who was caught by Kristen who happened to be in front of her waiting to give them the signal to enter the carpet.
“O-M-a-ca-gee!!! You guys!!!!”

Chloe was acutely aware that there was a sudden increase of flashes pointed in their general direction as she struggled to right herself while Beca did the same, and then Kristen was fussing with both of them and Cheryl showed up out of nowhere to start fiddling with things on their dresses that Chloe didn’t know were wrong.

“Thanks for the near-wardrobe malfunction, Legacy,” Beca said as she turned. Chloe was still recovering from the shock of the impact and slower to realize what had happened.

But then she knew.

She turned and Emily threw herself at Chloe, squealing in her ear again and Chloe laughed and returned the enthusiastic embrace. Then she felt Beca join in from the side to get both of them in her hug and she felt giddy with happiness. They might be [almost] on the red carpet of the Grammy Awards, but it felt like old times, hopping up and down with a jubilant Emily Junk.

“What up, Mrs. Junk?” Beca asked after leaving the group hug after a few seconds to give Emily’s mother a hug, too.

Chloe and Emily relaxed their hug but stayed close, hands locking.

“Oh, Beca. I don’t even know what to say.” Katherine Junk looked on the verge of tears, and like she’d been on the verge of them for several hours. “Thank you. And congratulations.”

“Hey, no. Lega - Emily wrote those songs. This is all her.”

“And you!” Emily called. “You fffffffucking -” she hesitated on the word as though she didn’t want to get in trouble for saying it - “Producer of the Year!”

“Call it a team effort,” Beca conceded as she gave Emily a playful shove to her bicep. “But you did this.”

Chloe felt Emily wind up again, ready to burst and then she did, jumping and risking a sprained
ankle and torn hem in her heels black curve-hugging calf-length skirt and white sleeveless crop top. She’d always loved Emily, saw a lot of herself in her with her ability to find joy and positivity in most things in life, though Emily always managed to take things to a level Chloe struggled to achieve.

“Yeah, I did!” Emily said with one of her trademark “tough” faces as she pumped her fist.

“Oh my God, please go ahead of us so we don’t end up looking terrified in all our pictures.”

Chloe slipped her arm through Beca’s to give it a squeeze as she giggled at Beca’s very valid concern, and then she had an idea. “Wait! Pictures!” She dropped Beca’s arm as quickly as she’d grabbed it to pop open her clutch and pull out her phone.

As easy as choreography, Emily fell into place on Beca’s left side while Chloe was on the right holding up her phone to snap half a dozen selfies, most of them with Emily and her making silly faces and Beca putting in minimal effort to look silly, including tossing another Boomerang into Beca’s Story.

Then it was Emily’s turn and with both hands free, Chloe was able to use them to poke and prod and inconspicuously grope (where her body was completely blocking where her hand was brushing) Beca into being a little more free and fun for Emily’s photos.

“Okay! Let’s do this!” Emily said with another fist pump as she put her phone away and then she stepped out in front of the looming black wall covered with little gramophone trophies.

Chloe heard Beca commenting under her breath and caught the shake of her head, but she was smiling softly as they both watched Emily, her mother a few steps behind to not be in the photos, grin like the giddy girl she was for the first flashes and then she slipped into a slinky smize and pose like she’d done it a thousand times.

“Anything new from Aubrey?” Beca said loud enough for Chloe to hear.

“Checking.” Chloe popped her phone open again and other than a slew of texts from friends and two missed calls from her mother, there was nothing from Aubrey. She was about to open their text thread when one popped up as though Aubrey had somehow anticipated it.
Chloe looked up sharply to pinpoint the camera she’d been caught on, to no avail.

*Presley’s fine. Go be famous.*

It was followed by a selfie photo of Presley asleep in Aubrey’s arms as she lounged on the couch of their hotel suite.

“They’re good.” She showed Beca the photo. “And apparently we’re on TV right now.” She put her phone away and tried to preen a little without being obvious. “Bree just saw us.”

“Oh, great,” Beca said with half a grimace as she did the same. “Kristen, we’re good?”

“You’re both stunning. When Emily hits her second mark, you can head out. Make sure you give them solos.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Beca grumbled and took up Chloe’s hand again as though ready to disobey her publicist’s orders.

“Go, now!”

Chloe felt a hand to the small of her back urging her forward and she tried to drop Beca’s hand so she could walk ahead but Beca held firm and Chloe let herself be led onto the red carpet and pulled into Beca’s side.

The flashes were almost blinding; Chloe had to keep looking at the ceiling so she could stand a chance at seeing the wall of photographers screaming Beca’s name. But at the same time, it was crazy awesome to be posing on a red carpet, and even crazier awesome to be doing it alongside Beca.

“Can we get Beca alone? We need a solo shot! Give us a solo shot! Beca, right here! One more, right here!”
They yelled nonstop, as though anyone could possibly respond to every photographer’s request. But that didn’t stop them from trying.

“Give them their solos,” Chloe said with a whisper before stepping back into a neutral zone.

She could tell Beca didn’t want her to leave but they couldn’t really debate it in front of a hundred cameras. But Chloe knew it was part of the deal - Beca was the celebrity, not her, and the media outlets wanted their photos, so she didn’t mind. She looked on with pride as Beca posed, at first awkward without Chloe but then finding her stride as she posed and turned and smiled and stared and even gave them an over-the-shoulder one that Chloe couldn’t wait to find online to save make her phone’s home screen (not her lock screen; that space was now mandated to always include Presley).

As soon as Beca was ushered by Kristen to the next mark, a photographer hollered, “Let’s get one with your beautiful wife!”

Chloe was already rushing toward Beca when Beca turned and reached for her to reel her in with a wide grin, and since they’d specifically asked for her (which Chloe couldn’t really believe), she decided to go all-in and pulled Beca into a chaste but full kiss. Flashes doubled and she could hear people whistling, and she definitely heard Kristen trying to whisper-shout at her to stop, but instead of obeying she felt Beca smile against the kiss and wrap her arms around Chloe’s neck.

She had a firm grip on Beca, too, so she decided to really indulge and with a hand to her lower back pressed forward until Beca got the hint and bent to let Chloe dip her. It was over the top and intentionally silly and meant to make a bit of a scene but she felt Beca shiver in her arms anyway followed by the briefest touch of Beca’s tongue slipping under her top lip before breaking the kiss.

“You gonna propose again?” Beca asked, still smiling up at Chloe as though they were alone and not on the biggest red carpet of the music industry.

Chloe smiled back; Beca had remembered their moment now two years ago when, while dancing down the minutes to 2016, Chloe had dipped her, kissed her, and popped the question. “Not this time.” She pecked Beca’s lips once more and then righted them, much to her publicist’s relief and aggravation if the look on her face was anything to go by when Chloe glanced her way. “I think Kristen’s mad.”

“She’ll get over it. And probably thank you for it tomorrow.”
“Probably.” Beca was still wearing her genuine smile when she turned back to the photographers to give them a “rock on!” hand signal with her tongue out like she’d just bagged the hottest chick in the room.

And Chloe knew that’s probably how Beca really did feel.

Because she felt the same way.

“Okay, go,” she said as she shooed Beca forward ahead of her toward the next mark and next segment of bossy, demanding photographers.

Stepping into Madison Square Garden was always a magical experience.

Chloe has been there a few times over the years: a concert (Coldplay) during a Spring Break trip; a Miami Heat-New York Knicks game with her family when she was 13 the summer before she started high school during a family road trip to Niagara Falls.

Of course, there was the moment that afternoon as well. And that was the most magical of them all.

For the main ceremony, everything had been given a shiny upgrade of some kind. There was music blasting and lights flashing and the floor she and Beca followed Luke through to their fifth-row seats was swarming with music stars and their entourages and the hugs and handshakes of reunions between friends and colleagues.

They filed into their seats, Beca taking the one on the aisle with a bit of grumbling about knowing she’s going to be on camera and Chloe nudging her and whispering that it’s because she’s awesome and the show’s producers put her on the aisle for a reason so she should hush and enjoy it.

To which Beca rolled her eyes and promptly elbow-battled playfully with Chloe for the armrest between them.
The show started soon thereafter and Chloe reached for Beca’s hand to wrap it up in her own, but it lasted only seconds as the whole crowd was on its feet with Katy’s opening performance of the single that was released two short weeks ago, another banger of a track Beca had produced and helped to co-write.

When it concluded with a bang - confetti dropping on everyone from the ceiling - Chloe was applauding as much for Beca as for the performance.

It launched the night on a high note; she sat with nervous excitement as an award was given, followed by a performance, followed by an award, followed by a performance, and another award.

Demi and Tori both performed. But neither of them took home Song of the Year; that went to Bruno Mars.

And then there was Emily.

Little Emily Junk, who was never little in anything but age. Little Emily Junk who’d shown up on their porch like an abandoned baby and become one of them as easily as singing a few lines of a song she’d written. Little Emily Junk who was on the stage of the Grammy Awards flanked only by a pianist and a guitarist singing her ballad, “Love Mind,” which she wrote, which Beca produced, which was one of the songs that earned Beca her producing award, which was the song that really blew up Emily’s career (in the good way), and had her performing tonight as a Best New Artist nominee.

Chloe risked taking her eyes off her stunning performance to glance at Beca, who had tears in her eyes.

She found Beca’s hand and locked their fingers together and felt Beca squeeze it.

Emily did win Best New Artist.

And Katy and Beca did win for Record of the Year and Album of the Year.

In one night, Beca went from a one- to a four-time Grammy Award-winning producer. Their entire life could change as a result.
The concept was as scary as it was exciting. Beca was already successful. She was already at work on her next project. But more could come. More will come. Artists were starting to request her a year ago. After this...Chloe had a fleeting worry that Beca would become so busy she wouldn’t have time for her anymore. That her fame would explode and rip them apart.

But as they fell asleep together in the king-sized bed of their five-star Manhattan hotel room, naked save for the expensive borrowed diamonds they decided to sleep in for fun, hours after the end of the ceremony and three after-parties, the sun already rising and the knowledge that their son, asleep in the travel crib next to the bed but sure to wake up for breakfast any second, she knew that her worry was absurd.

Right on time, his determined little cry started up and Beca was the first to move, mumbling a pitifully tired, “I got him,” as she tried to climb over Chloe to reach him on her side of the bed.

Chloe gave her a nudge back and she fell back easily. “Go to sleep, baby.”

Even after winning three more Grammy Awards. After partying all night with the best in the music industry until they were stumbling to their hotel room holding each other up to not fall. After talking to the world’s media and being photographed to appear on who knows how many magazines and websites…

After all that, Beca was the first to sacrifice her rest for their son.

Chloe shook her head at herself; all the fame in the world would never change Beca.

And that was why she married her.
“You know, I’d really planned for today to be a lot sexier than it was,” Beca said as she fell into bed next to Chloe.

Chloe turned onto her side and snuggled up next to Beca, hooking her thigh over Beca’s to be closer. “It’s okay, baby. Valentine’s Day doesn’t always have to be sexy.”

She knew Beca had tried; in fact, Beca was still wearing the sexy red negligee she’d surprised Chloe with about 30 seconds before Presley had a diaper blow-out while Chloe was trying to get him to sleep. He was getting particularly good at them, always improving both on timing and targeting. He’d ruined the adorable red onesie with the heart-patterned black necktie printed on it, but he’d made it most of the day in it and it wasn’t like it would fit him next year anyway, so it wasn’t a total loss.

Chloe had simply accepted her fate and took him with her straight into the shower and passed him out to Beca when he was clean before finishing her own shower.

By the time she was out, Beca was settling him, asleep, into his cradle across the bedroom.

“When was the last time we spent Valentine’s Day together and it wasn’t sexy?” Beca griped as her stomach sucked in from how Chloe was drawing circles over the silky material covering it.

Chloe let her fingers slip under the hem of the garment to start working their way higher until they were tracing the curve of a breast. “We still have a few minutes before it’s officially over. And he’s asleep now.”

She was grinning and ready to catch Beca as she rolled over and onto her with gusto.

“Challenge accepted,” Beca said with a smile before dropping to capture her lips.

“Okay. That is literally ridiculous.”
“I know.” Chloe smiled and adjusted the crocheted orange beard that was attached to a green felt top hat, doing her best to have it frame Presley’s face and not make him mad.

“I can’t with that little bowtie. But you do realize this is like, hypermasculinization, right?”

She looked up to see Beca watching her fiddle with his leprechaun costume as he sat in Chloe’s lap like a sack of Irish potatoes. Beca was grinning but trying to hide it behind her phone, which was most definitely taking photos of the progression of the moment.

“You love it.”

“You’re right; I love it,” Beca said with a wider grin. “Oh my God, just like that, okay, hurry,” she said as she leapt to her feet and grabbed a slightly larger - but only slightly - green top hat to plop it on her head as she crouched next to Chloe.

Chloe was prepared; she was already wearing her headband with shamrock boppers on it and a snug green tank top with KISS ME, I’M A GINGER printed across her boobs that was more chosen for her upcoming date night with Beca than a family portrait with their son, but she tugged at it a little so it wasn’t so tight across her chest as Beca held out her phone to take a photo.

Beca’s own shirt coordinated with Chloe’s, but she’d wisely covered it with a green and black flannel for purposes of the St. Patrick’s Day-themed family photo.

Beca was proud of it, though, and she tossed her flannel back onto the couch to pull Chloe in for a kiss before answering the doorbell, happily sporting I KISSED A GINGER AND I LIKED IT across her own boobs.

“The Easter Bunny brought you way too much chocolate, dude,” Beca said as she added a wrapper to the embarrassingly large pile she’d amassed on the end table next to the couch.

“Well, I wonder why the Easter Bunny thought he needed that much chocolate?” Chloe asked her pointedly while she popped another jelly bean into her mouth from her seat at the other end of the couch.
“I think he was just super flattered by Pres’s imitation. I mean, wouldn’t you be?” Beca gestured at Presley laying on the cushion between them, protected from rolling off by Chloe’s leg stretched alongside him to rest in Beca’s lap.

Chloe smiled at the fuzzy floppy ears of the costume that was surely only going to be tolerated another few minutes. “I think ‘homage’ is more appropriate than ‘imitation.’”

Mother’s Day for Chloe was always special.

She sent her mother flowers and a handwritten, sometimes handmade, card and called her first thing in the morning, and when she still lived in Miami, made it a point to take her out for brunch or lunch or dinner every year.

Once she moved to Atlanta for college, Mother’s Day had to be pared back to the flowers/card/phone call scenario; she was always in the thick of studying for finals and definitely couldn’t sneak away to fly home for a quick visit in the middle of May.

Then she’d moved to Los Angeles with Beca and got a real job with a classroom of little kids for whom she had to help make cards to send home with them for their mothers, grandmothers, aunts, or whomever they wanted to give a card to on Mother’s Day and she had fun making something nice and tacky to send to her own mom via Express Mail so she’d have it by Sunday morning.

This year was a whole new ballgame.

She had Sunday all planned out.

But before she could experience her first Mother’s Day as a mother, she still had to go to work on Friday, and she was demonstrating to her kids how to fold their red and pink pieces of construction paper in half to make them into greeting cards when there was a knock on her classroom door.

Half her students jumped up and excitedly informed her by shouting that someone was at the door while the other half - the half who were her secret favorites because they were always well-behaved - stayed seated at their tables working on folding their cards or, those more ambitious,
already drawing with crayons.

“I hear it, I hear it. Take your seats, please,” she said as she weaved through knee-high tables and their studious occupants. She glanced through the window in the door to see who it was but all she could see was the empty hallway. Another knock-and-ditch, as was commonplace at the end of the year, the older students getting a kick out of riling up her little ones by rapping on the door as they passed by with bathroom or library passes.

She opened it anyway, as sometimes the callers were small enough to be missed by only looking through the window. Seeing no one, she started to close the door again, when -

“Happy Mother’s Day, Mama!”

It was Presley - well, it was Beca’s squeaky, high-pitched voice she had taken to using whenever narrating or speaking on his behalf - and he was cradled in Beca’s left arm wearing a little red and white ringer tee with MY FIRST MOTHER’S DAY printed on it and a little pair of elastic-waisted jeans and tiny red Converse and a decently impressive spit-bubble, and in her right hand a bouquet of red and pink roses already in a vase.

Beca herself was half-hiding behind him, as though he was there of his own volition with a dozen roses for his mama.

Chloe felt herself tear up instantly, chest tight and eyes hot and she rushed forward with an, “Oh my goodness, oh my goodness!!” She plucked him out of Beca’s arm and snuggled him to her chest to kiss his soft little fuzzy brown hair that always smelled so good and she heard him coo in response.

That had been a recent development; the other night, she and Beca had been having a conversation about Beca’s need to finally get around to buying a “family car” so they weren’t having to swap cars every time Beca needed to take Presley somewhere while Chloe was at work when they noticed every time they stopped talking he’d babble nonsense like he was responding.

He wasn’t quite starting to talk, but he was starting to figure out communication and she knew the beginnings of actual words were right around the corner. They could be waking up to a semi-purposeful “Mama” any day.

“What are you two doing here?” she asked, smiling at Beca who now seemed to feel awkward
holding only a vase of flowers.

“It’s Mother’s Day. I mean, almost. And Pres wanted to visit you at work.” She offered a dopey smile and shrugged and Chloe felt herself melt all over again.

She reached for Beca and reeled her into a hug and a soft kiss, then took her by the hand to lead her into the classroom.

“We have special guests, everyone!”

She had Sunday all planned out.

What she didn’t plan for, however, was for Beca to also have Sunday all planned out.

Nor had Beca planned for Chloe to have the day all planned out.

Their morning began with a polite debate over who would be the first one up with Presley when he woke, both insisting the other deserved to sleep in past 4:00 am.

The result was neither of them sleeping in because even though Chloe won the debate, citing her boobs needing to serve their purpose, Beca got up and stayed up with her in solidarity.

Chloe had planned to make breakfast and bring it to Beca in bed, but by 6:00 am, all three of them were back in bed. They’d figured out how to handle sleeping with Presley in their bed, and while they joked with each other that it would probably come back to bite them as he got older, Chloe really loved looking over to see her son, wearing only his diaper with Big Bird and Elmo printed on the Velcro tabs, asleep on his back, arms out like he was doing a jumping jack. It was a new thing - he was rejecting being swaddled tightly and seemed perfectly content sprawled out wearing nothing.

It meant that the house thermostat now sat at 78º instead of 72º where they preferred it in the Spring and Summer, but they didn’t want him to get cold.
She really loved sleeping on her side and opening her eyes to see him there, asleep, sometimes still, sometimes twitching, and next to him, Beca, also asleep, sometimes still, sometimes twitching.

She’d planned to make breakfast and bring it to Beca in bed, but Chloe decided napping with her son and her wife on their first Mother’s Day was a pretty solid trade.

“Are you sure it’s warm enough?” Beca asked from the deck, plastic margarita glasses in hand. She was in a bikini, though still with an old pair of gray sweatpants slung low on her hips, sunglasses on and an obnoxious straw hat she’d borrowed from Chloe.

It had been an unseasonably warm May in Los Angeles and between the constant temperatures in the 80s and kicking on the pool’s heating system a couple weeks ago, the water was more than pleasant.

Chloe bobbed Presley in the pool, wearing his Little Swimmers and rashguard sporting Dory on the chest and a black and white striped bucket hat to keep as much sun off his thoroughly suncreened skin as possible. He watched the water flowing between them before flailing his hands a little. “He’s totally fine. Put those down,” she nodded at the glasses full of pale green slush, “take those off,” and at her pants, “and get in here. But bring the drinks with you.”

She listened to Beca grumble a bit about it being too early in the year to swim but she shut up when she took her first few steps into the pool. Chloe looked at her pointedly from where she was walking in slow, wide circles, holding Presley like he was dog-paddling, and Beca just returned the look over her sunglasses and waded out to her.

“He seems to like it.” Beca smiled and held Chloe’s drink for her while she shifted him to sit on her hip. He could almost keep himself upright, but it was wobbly and only lasted a few seconds at a time, so she angled him to lean against her chest. It was his very first time in the pool, and mostly he’d been either amused or unimpressed by the experience.

“Like a duck to water.” She smiled at him and then accepted her glass from Beca to tap it to hers with a plasticky clack. “Happy Mother’s Day, Mommy.”

“Happy Mother’s Day, Mama.” Beca grinned at them both as they sipped, and then she frowned and hissed, clutching her forehead as she waded to the edge to set down her glass and hat. “Oh
God, brain freeze!"

“Oh no!” Chloe said with a laugh as she watched Beca dunk herself to try to stop it. “Better?” she asked when Beca popped up again.

Beca nodded as she wiped water off her face and out of her eyes. “I’ll survive. Okay, my turn,” she said with her hands out in waiting.

She laughed again and “swam” Presley the few inches between them with her arm around his chest and into Beca’s hands.

“Hey, dude,” Beca said with a smile as she hopped backward with him a few feet into slightly shallower waters. “Is your Mama teaching you to swim? I bet she’s doing a really good job. She’s a good swimmer. But she looks better in a bikini than she is good at swimming."

Chloe laughed. “I heard that!”

“I meant you to!” Beca called back, looking up from the conversation she was having with their son to smile at her before returning to it. “Are you gonna be the next Michael Phelps? Yeah? No, you’re gonna be the first Presley Beale.”

Chloe watched her walk him in circles much like she had, narrating like an Olympic commentator as though they were in the midst of a heated relay race and not walking around in three-and-a-half feet of water, and she smiled, heart feeling impossibly full and incredibly spoiled.

Chloe woke up to the yummy, comforting smell of bacon and fresh coffee and she smiled, first stretching to confirm her suspicion that she was alone in bed and then curling up to hug the fluffy duvet.

It wasn’t quite 6:00 am but Beca was making breakfast, and Chloe was pretty certain she knew what it would be.

She let herself doze happily until she heard Presley’s incoherent jabbering making its way closer
with Beca ineffectively shushing him. She watched them enter with one squinting eye, pretending to be asleep. Beca had Presley on her back in the Snugli and a tray in her hands, arranged with extreme care from what Chloe could see from her angle.

She watched Beca pause, unsure of what to do with Chloe still sleeping and her hands holding a tray full of breakfast with a babbling infant on her back, so Chloe helped her out and stirred and yawned and feigned waking up.

“Mmm, morning,” she said with a smile and a yawn. “What’s all this?”

“Happy Anniversary!” Beca said quickly, like she was trying to beat Chloe to the punch. “We made you breakfast.”

“In bed?” Chloe said with a hum as she sat up and fixed the blankets to lay over her smoothly and make room for the tray Beca was fixing to set across her lap. “And my favorite.” Beca might be a little predictable in her romantic gestures, but never in the way that was disappointing. She knew what Chloe liked and there was no need or reason to try to deviate into something she wouldn’t like as much. And Chloe loved Beca’s chocolate chip pancakes and bacon and coffee and orange juice and half a grapefruit that was arranged just-so on the tray, complete with a carefully folded napkin, silverware, and a bud vase with a red rose blossom floating in it.

“He helped,” Beca said, turning her back - and Presley - to Chloe. “He added the special ingredient.”

She burst out laughing - his tiny little nose had a perfect dot of flour on it. “And what is the special ingredient?”

Beca turned back around and hefted the baby backpack off herself to remove him from it and hold him directly. “Love.” She wrinkled her nose as though disgusted by her own cheesiness as she said it but smiled nonetheless.

It melted Chloe’s heart and she laughed. “How much did that pain you to say that just now?”

“Surprisingly, not that much? Oh, and we got you these.” She held out her hand to Chloe, a thick dark square in her palm.
“What is this?” she asked, accepting it to find it to be fabric, then noticing it was folded. So she unfolded it into… “Socks?”

“It’s cotton this year. Flip them over.”

Chloe knew cotton was the traditional gift this second anniversary; she had a pillowcase she’d covered with her own handwriting in Sharpie telling Beca how much she meant to her and how special she was to her, but she didn’t necessarily expect socks. But Beca never let her down so she flipped over the pair of almost knee-high black socks to find printed on the bottom, SOLE MATES.

It was dumb and adorable and made her tear up immediately. “Oh my gosh,” she said with a whine and a laugh and then laughed again when Beca balanced herself and lifted up her own foot to show Chloe that she was wearing a matching pair. “Bec,” she said with another whine. She reached out and grabbed for her. “Baby, c’mere.”

“Hm, what?” Beca asked dumbly as she stepped closer until Chloe could grab her and pull her in, though cautious to not upturn her tray full of yummy breakfast.

“Get down here,” she said with a pout and a tug at the hem of Beca’s tank top.

Beca crouched a little - she didn’t really have to crouch that much given the height of their bed - and Chloe pulled her down into a kiss, wrapping her arm around both Presley and Beca. “I love you so much,” Chloe said before kissing her again. “Happy Anniversary.”

Beca smiled against her kiss. “I love you, too.”

“I have literally never seen so many dicks in my entire life.”

Chloe burst out laughing, having to pause her inflation of the approximately 6-foot long male appendage comically laying flaccid between her knees.

“I mean, penis whistles, penis straws, penis shot glasses…”
“Don’t forget the penis lollipops.”

“I wish I could,” Beca said with a frown and a shudder. “Tell me why we have straight friends?”

Chloe only rolled her eyes, knowing Beca wasn’t serious. “You know we both like guys, right?”

“No, no no no,” Beca said, wagging her finger at Chloe. “We liked guys. Now we’re married. We don’t like guys anymore.”

“Speak for yourself,” Chloe teased before reaching for one of the penis straw to lick it before sucking on it pointedly to take a drink of her water. She was hydrating in advance of Aubrey’s bachelorette party.

“I hate you.”

“Careful, you might make me go back to penis.”

“Don’t you even joke about that, dude,” Beca said with such vigor that Chloe decided it was maybe time to stop joking.

“Don’t worry, baby; the one in your dresser is the only penis I want,” she said with a wink before changing the subject. “Did you remember to confirm the limo?”

Beca nodded. “Did it while I was in the bathroom. They’ll be here at 3:30.”

“You look pretty, by the way,” Chloe said with a sincere smile before turning to her less than demure task of blowing [up] a giant penis.

Beca blushed a little and she loved that she could still have that effect on her wife. But she really did look pretty with her side-swept low ponytail and simple white halter dress over a charcoal bikini Chloe helped her pick out last weekend.
That had been a fun shopping trip.

Beca had helped her pick out a new bathing suit as well; it was her first new bikini since having Presley and while she knew logically she had nothing to be self-conscious about, today would be the first day anyone but Beca saw her in one. Her own was a simple solid black and presently covered up by a flowy dress of her own.

“Thanks,” Beca said shyly before busying herself with ripping open the last of the packages of novelty party favors and emptying its contents into the giant-sized Ziploc bag now full of myriad multi-colored items in the shape of the male’s anatomy. “I’m going to go grab our bags; Morgan should be here soon.”

Chloe let her go without saying anything; every once in awhile, Beca’s old self, the one unsure how to deal with too much affection, bubbled to the surface. Chloe had learned not to take it personally long ago. She smiled to herself and finished her task and affixed the plug and tossed the inflatable like a javelin toward the door.

“Um...bachelorette party?”

“How’d you guess?” Chloe asked as she let Morgan into the house.

Morgan was their new nanny - or, really, just nanny, but she was still new, and their first. They’d spent the better part of two months interviewing applicants and getting referrals from friends and colleagues until they found Morgan, a 23-year-old who graduated from UCLA with a degree in Linguistics and Psychology and was taking a year or two off before grad school. They’d been hesitant to hire someone who had a definite exit date - they’d have preferred as much continuity in Presley’s life as possible - but she’d checked every single box they’d had on their must-have list (and even some on their bonus list) except longevity and they decided to give her a chance.

And it had turned out that she was pretty awesome, was good at her job, and Presley seemed to adjust well to spending time with her without either Beca or Chloe present. So far, they’d snuck away for a night here and there to test the waters to resounding success, and this would be the first time they left him for two nights in a row. It hadn’t been an easy decision, and she and Beca had actually fought about it until they were both laughing because they were literally fighting about how they didn’t want to be bad parents.

But their pediatrician assured them it would be fine, and their parents assured them it would be fine
- in fact, that it was better and easier to get away while he was too young to understand their absence - and they eventually talked each other into agreeing to a weekend away.

“Wild guess,” Morgan answered, pushing aside the giant inflatable penis so she could enter.

“Hey,” Beca said as she returned, a duffel bag over one shoulder and twin totes over the other. “Pres is napping. Went down about half an hour ago. Ate right before that, but he’ll be hungry when he wakes up because he fell asleep before he finished.”

“Got it. There’s a limo out there, by the way. Fancy.”

“Oh, awes. You ready Bec?” she asked, making a quick lap through the house to grab her purse and stoop to give Presley the lightest of kisses on his forehead to not wake him. She was startled when she stepped back, Beca right beside her to do the same.

“Now I am.”

“Okay, ladies!” Chloe said loudly to be heard over the non-stop chatter of the Bellas, champagne already in hand in the back of the SUV limo, who’d flown in for Aubrey’s bachelorette party. “Take one and pass them down.” She handed Jessica and Flo each a stack of white captain’s hats, gold anchors embroidered on the fronts of them, keeping two for herself and Beca. “The pink one is yours, Bree.”

“Honestly, what do you guys have up your sleeves?” Aubrey asked with a smile as she smoothed her hair after putting on her cap. “You had us pack for the beach and now sailor caps?”

“You’ll find out...schooner or later,” Chloe said with an obvious wink.

“Is it a boat? Are we going on a boat?!” Emily said with a squeal that made half the girls cover their ears.

But Chloe just laughed. “Oh ship! Water you doing, Em? Don’t spoil the surprise or I’ll have to give you astern talking to.”
“Oh, let the girl off the hook, Chlo.” The pun came from Beca and Chloe looked at her, surprised. “It’ll be water under the bridge in a few minutes anyway.”

Aubrey seemed just as surprised but in the shocked type of way. “We’re going on a boat?”

“Welll, I don’t know if I’d call it a boat …” Beca said with a squint out the window as the vehicle slowed to a stop.

All eleven girls filed out of the SUV at the entrance to the marina where a teenage boy was waiting for them, looking the part in khaki shorts, a blue polo, and white top-siders. “Posen Party, I presume?” he asked with a grin that was perhaps a little too revealing of his excitement by the group of women in beachwear who’d just arrived at his docks.

“Yeah, that’s us,” Chloe answered with a wave.

“Right this way, ladies,” he said with another broad smile before taking off down a long wooden staircase to lead them past sailboats and fishing boats, further and further out until they were at the end of the dock. “Welcome to the High C’s.”

“You’re joking,” Aubrey said breathlessly. “Chloe, you have to be joking.”

“Ooh, this is like my dad’s Fat Dingo Bitch! His might be a little bigger though.”

“His what?”

Chloe ignored Beca and Amy’s conversation behind her.

The High C’s - its name being the ultimate deciding factor between the two yachts she and Beca were evaluating for charter for Aubrey’s bachelorette weekend - was a blue-hulled, white-decked, 70-meter-long yacht with seven cabins, a cinema, a gym, an on-deck pool, a killer A/V system, an elevator, and a crew of 17 ready to cook, clean, host, and do their best to give the group a good time.
“Not joking!” Chloe said as she gave Aubrey a hug. “Permission to come aboard?” she cheekily shouted from the dock side of the short set of stairs connecting the vessel to land.

“State your purpose,” a handsome deckhand responded from above.

“To party all weekend and celebrate my bestie,” she grabbed Aubrey and pulled her close, “who’s getting married in two weeks!”

“Permission granted,” he said with a smile and Chloe pushed Aubrey on ahead to be the first to step foot on the massive yacht.

“Oh, que guapo.”

“Hands off, Chiquita Banana, he’s mine.”

“Oh my God, there are so many hot men on here.”

The girls chattered and flailed behind them and Chloe smiled.

They were going to have an aca-awesome weekend.
Leaving Port

Chloe groaned as she fell back onto the plush bed in Beca’s and her cabin. “This is the besssssst!”

The girls had run through the yacht like children at Halloween, squealing over features like the swim-up bar and the movie theater and the full gym that they all declared they would use to work off their inevitable gluttony and then laughed at themselves for being so ridiculous as to think they’d actually work out this weekend. Next came the claiming of cabins, the only one off-limits being the Owner’s Stateroom on the Main Deck which was already marked with a placard placed by the crew that it was for Aubrey. Beca and Chloe grabbed a “smaller” cabin a deck below on the starboard outfitted with a king-sized bed, couch, and pop-up big screen TV.

She felt Beca hop onto the bed next to her and then she was towering over Chloe on her knees looking down at her. “It’s pretty suite. Get it? Sweet? Suite?”

Chloe laughed. “You’re stealing my puns.”

“I didn’t know you had a monopoly on the pun industry,” Beca smiled.

“Oh yeah, big time. I think you owe me for using one.”

Beca quirked an eyebrow at her. “Is that so?”

“Yes.”

“Maybe we can work something out.” Beca straddled her waist as she said it and leaned down to kiss her.

No sooner had they started than there was a knock on their door. “Break it up, you two,” Emily said with a giggle.

Beca sat up with a groan of annoyance and rolled off Chloe.
Chloe sat up, too, and saw Emily hovering in the doorway, trying not to look and blushing. Apparently, they hadn’t bothered to close the door to their cabin. “What’s up, Em?” she asked, wiping her bottom lip with her thumb.

“They sent me to find you. Something about a toast?”

Chloe lit up. “The sail-away! Bec, come on!”

At the suggestion of their charter consultant, the ship’s crew had arranged a sail-away party at the stern of the ship’s Sun Deck as the yacht set sail from the marina to cruise the Pacific coastline for the weekend. It was the most casual of glamorous parties as the girls skittered around chattering with one another barefoot in their beachwear with crystal flutes filled with expensive bubbly served to them by a pair of waiters carrying gleaming chrome trays.

Chloe found Aubrey right away, greeting her with a hug and a promise that it was going to be the best weekend ever because Aubrey deserved it.

“Two more weeks,” Chloe prompted with a nudge to Aubrey beside her. “Excited? Nervous?”

“Yes,” Aubrey said with a breathy laugh. “All of the above. Part of me can’t wait for it to be over. But a bigger part of me doesn’t want it to end.”

Chloe, unfortunately, couldn’t relate to her fears; she and Beca never went through the ordeals of wedding planning. They’d eloped and moved on to the happily ever after part of their lives. But she did know excitement (of all shades), stress, and anxiety, so she wrapped Aubrey up in a tight hug. “It’s all going to be okay,” she whispered before kissing her cheek and turning back toward the semi-circle of girls relaxing on lounges and chatting at cocktail tables.

“Ladies,” she called with her champagne flute held high to get their attention and ignored their friendly griping about “a Chloe toast.” So she sometimes got a little rambly when she was emotional and drinking? Who doesn’t? “I’ll keep this short and sweet. Here’s to Bree’s pending nuptials and an aca-awesome Bellas weekend. Cheers.”

There was a beat of silence as though everyone was shocked at her brevity and then it erupted into calls of “Cheers!” followed by the tinkling of glasses.
She was still sipping her champagne when she felt a hand on her lower back, trailing around from her right side to her left until Beca showed up in the space between Aubrey and her. She offered up her glass toward Aubrey for another toast. “Wanted to say congrats for the hundredth time,” Beca said with a crooked smile. “Especially since that’s what we’re going to do here all weekend.”

Aubrey pretended to tear up and clinked her glass to Beca’s. “Beca, that’s so sweet. What would I do without you?”

“Well, let’s see. To start, you wouldn’t be getting married. You wouldn’t live in LA. You probably wouldn’t have revived the Bellas. You wouldn’t be an aunt. You —”

“Okay!” Aubrey interrupted with a hand almost in Beca’s face. “I owe you my life. I get it.”

“Your words,” Beca said with a bigger smile before drinking again. “But really though, congratulations.” She set down her glass and reached for Aubrey to give her a hug.

Chloe smiled at both of them, feeling her own, genuine tears welling.

“I can feel you hovering; get in here,” Beca said with a glance over her shoulder.

Chloe let herself squeal a little and felt a tear escape as she wrapped both of them up in a hug, her wife and her best friend, and felt like she could burst from love.

Dinner was a casual affair; the kitchen staff prepared an array of grilled seafood and vegetables and the girls dined on the massive wrap-around sofa at the rear of the ship on the Main Deck.

The cruise itinerary called for an evening and night at sea before mooring in Ensenada, Baja California in the morning for snorkeling and shopping, so everyone was eager to break in the yacht’s amenities as soon as possible - none more so than the pool and its swim-up bar on the Sports Deck, with intentions for a Legally Blonde quote-along in the cinema [much, much] later.
While in their cabin to steal a few minutes of peace and quiet and rest after dinner and before the real party began, Chloe gave Morgan a call to check on Presley.

“He’s good. She said she had to drive him around for a few but he went down around 8:00,” Chloe said when she hung up.

Beca sighed in relief next to her where they’d sprawled out on the bed. “Thank God. He’s eating and everything?”

“Yep, totally normal. Is it weird that I’m proud of him for behaving while we’re gone? It’s not like he’s old enough to misbehave.”

“Not if it’s weird that I’m proud of us for being able to leave him for a weekend without having nervous breakdowns.”

“Agreed.”

“Cannonball!!!!”

“No, Amy! It’s not deep enough!” Beca screamed as she tried to get out of the way, moving in slow motion in the water.

Chloe was frozen in fear seeing Amy barrelling right for them. Beca grabbed her hand as she worked her way to the far side of the small pool to pull her out of the way. She was vaguely aware of shrieks of other girls and frantic splashing.

Amy stopped herself on the rails of the ladder, a dramatic affair that was not unlike a train trying not to hit a car stuck at a crossing.

And then she burst out laughing.

“You should have seen the looks on your faces! USDA Prime Cut fear.”
There was a heavy air of silence before the small pool erupted in waves and curse words all aimed at Amy, who cackled as she climbed the steps and eased into the pool at a far more appropriate speed than she’d originally presented.

“Don’t worry your skinny little hearts. I’m saving my award-winning cannonball for whenever we get to jump off the side of this dinghy.”

In all the chaos, Chloe had lost track of Aubrey, but she spotted her on the opposite side, perched on one of the stools at the swim-up bar next to Cynthia Rose, a martini glass in hand as she surveyed the scene in front of her, nonplussed by the near brush with death had by all. She took a sip of her drink and then smiled at Chloe, eyes a little unfocused and wobbly on her stool, and Chloe laughed.

“Bree’s already drunk,” she whispered to Beca, who still had a hold on Chloe, now with an arm around her waist and her fingers being a little too exploratory at the seams where Chloe’s bikini met her skin – but not so much to make Chloe suggest she behave.

After all, they were on a yacht all weekend to pretty much engage in guilt-free debauchery, so what was a little underwater teasing?

“Mm, so am I,” Beca said before giggling, which is how Chloe knew she wasn’t lying.

“Drunk and you were still ready to save my life?”

“I’m always ready to save your life.” Beca said it with such wide-eyed sincerity that Chloe felt bad for having teased her for it. And she believed that Beca would save her life if such a terrible situation were to arise.

She believed it because she would do the same for Beca.

“I know you are, baby,” Chloe said as she twisted a little to be able to kiss her. She lost her breath for a second when Beca’s tongue slipped past her lips in the way it was so skilled at doing.

Beca hummed when she pulled back. “I can’t fucking wait for tonight.”
“What’s tonight?” Chloe said with a curious smile.

Beca winked at her and started to leave her. “I think you know.”

Chloe, of course, knew what Beca meant - a much-needed night alone (relatively speaking). She’d wanted her to say it, to whisper something salacious in her ear to make her shiver and start thinking about it.

Instead, she gave her nothing.

And something about that was even hotter.

“What are we whispering about?” Chloe said as she floated up to where Jessica, Ashley, and Flo were gathered in a corner of the pool. Beca had swum off to get another drink and seemed to have gotten caught up talking to Aubrey, joining her on a stool at the bar instead of swimming back to Chloe.

“We’re placing bets on who’s going to hook up this weekend,” Flo whispered.

“Don’t tell Cynthia Rose. You know she’s fallen off the bandwagon a few times. Wait, do you mean hooking up with each other?” she asked, both amused and confused. She wondered what she might have missed in the months away from her friends; she and Beca were always the topic of such conspiracies in college, but now?

“No,” Jessica and Ashley answered in unison. “We meant with the crew,” Jessica clarified.

“Ooh! I want in,” she said. “What’s the buy-in?”

“$20,” Ashley answered. “And you can’t bet on yourself.”
“I’m a married woman!” she said with a gasp of mock offense.

“We’re also placing bets on one of us catching you and Beca doing it somewhere you shouldn’t.”

“Thanks for that, Flo,” she said with an eye roll and a laugh. But she didn’t try to dispute their game; she knew it was highly likely to occur at some point.

“You can buy squares on who will find you and where it will be, like Emily, in the study, with the lead pipe.”

Jessica gave her a sharp elbow to the side. “Ashley!”

“What? She doesn’t care.”

Chloe laughed at Ashley’s joke and shook her head to confirm, and then gave them a wink. “I might feel like a little cardio in the gym in the morning.”

“Insider trading. In my country, you would be hailed a hero.”

“She’s a hero in this country, too. Cha-ching!” Ashley said as she high-fived Jessica.

“'mso sleepy,” Beca mumbled into Chloe’s shoulder. They were curled up together – or more accurately, Beca was curled up against Chloe, who was stretched out – on a lounge chair back up on the Sun Deck away from the lights and the noise of the ongoing party below.

An hour or so earlier they’d snuck away together to see the stars, brilliant above the midnight black Pacific Ocean and away from the lights of Los Angeles. They’d stood at the rear of the ship leaning against the railing side by side looking out at the sea of sparkles, enjoying the peace and presence of one another.

“I can’t tell where the water stops and the stars begin,” Chloe whispered.
“I can,” Beca whispered back.

“Where?” She squinted, waiting for Beca to point out the horizon.

“The stars are always in your eyes.”

The compliment was a bit of a misfire in execution; if Chloe had stated her question differently, Beca would have knocked it out of the park, but it was the sentiment that mattered, and it made her chest tighten anyway.

“Stop,” she said with a shy laugh as she nudged Beca.

“What?” Beca nudged her back and then turned to face her. “It’s true. I don’t need to look at the stars when I can look at you.”

That one was far better executed and Chloe fell into her with a kiss not bothering to thank her with words.

They kissed there at the stern of the ship on a sea of stars, getting lost in one another until a laughing conversation grew louder until it was clear they weren’t alone anymore. Aubrey and Stacie had made their way to the upper deck to do some stargazing of their own, and a wolf whistle made them break apart with shy smiles, though Beca still held Chloe close and led them to a lounge chair to kick back on.

“I can’t believe you guys have been married for two years and still can’t keep your hands off each other,” Stacie said with a wink as she leaned back against the railing Beca and Chloe had abandoned. “It’s hot.”

“Can you blame me?” Beca asked with a bark of laughter. “You’ve seen Chloe, right? I mean, look at her.”

It made Chloe blush hard; she would never tire of hearing Beca say she was attracted to her.
“Trust me, I don’t blame you. She told you how we used to fool around, right?”

Beca sat up like a bolt of lightning. “Whoa, wait. What?”

“I’m sorry, what was that?” came from Aubrey.

Chloe flinched. She’d innocently forgotten that she and Stacie used to use each other to let off a little steam once in a while. It was Chloe’s first Senior Year and it felt like a lifetime ago, something that was so casual and so far in her past that never had a reason to be remembered and shared, though suddenly it felt like a massive betrayal. “Stacie! Oh gosh, Beca, I can explain.”

"I'm waiting."

She turned to Beca, afraid of which Beca she would find, but her face wasn’t mad – it was more surprised than anything. “Okay, yes. Stacie and I hooked up a little. Obviously, it before we were together, and it never went past second base.” She frowned at her own defense; second base didn’t mean much when it came to two women. Half the time, the sex she had with Beca was considered ‘second base.’

Baseball metaphors for sex, especially lesbian sex, were dumb anyway.

Beca’s surprise turned into a sexy smirk that rattled Chloe. “You seriously failed to share that information with me until now? Maybe I should reconsider my fantasy.”

Beca’s fantasy – one of many, but one that they both knew would never come to fruition at this point in their lives because they were married, and Aubrey was getting married, and their relationship with Aubrey was not one that would ever lend itself to her joining them in their bed.

“What fantasy?” Stacie and Aubrey asked.

“Nothing,” Chloe answered quickly.

“The one about how I wanted a threeway with Aubrey and Chloe.”
“Beca,” Chloe whispered before wishing she could hide somewhere and settled for hiding her face in her hands. Her wife was definitely drunk and definitely failing to self-censor.

“Okay, no, that is hot,” Stacie said and Chloe could hear the cheeky smile in her words.

“I – you – what?” Aubrey sounded like she might faint and Chloe hoped Stacie would keep her from falling overboard.

“Calm your tits, Aubs. It was just a fantasy I used to have. You should be flattered.”

Chloe looked up and wasn’t surprised that Aubrey had turned pale. “We were never going to try anything, Bree. Beca just liked…she liked…”

“The idea of making you give up control,” Beca finished succinctly.

Chloe was sober enough to be embarrassed by what was happening but drunk enough to not try harder to stop it. She swatted Beca’s thigh and decided that was sufficient effort.

“You guys need to stop talking about this,” Stacie said, fanning herself as she caught Aubrey around the waist when she seemed to falter a bit, “or I’m going to have to find one of those deckhands to tend to my needs.”

“Or I could rethink my fantasy and we can get a little crazy tonight.”

Chloe stared at Beca. She seriously – well, she didn’t know how serious Beca actually was – invited Stacie to sleep with them. With both of them. Simultaneously and together and at the same time.

“Oh, I am so fucking in. You’re so hot together. No strings attached? Just straight sex? Well, gay sex. Please tell me you’re serious. Are you serious?”

Beca finally looked at her. “Well? Am I serious?” She was leaving it up to Chloe – she could say
no and it would be laughed away and dismissed and forgotten.

She could say yes and they could have an exciting new experience together. She knew it was likely to be a good one, so long as jealousy didn’t come out to play from anyone. Stacie was an amazing lover – not that they’d gone that far, but they’d gone far enough that Stacie could claim ownership of roughly a handful of Chloe’s lifetime tally of orgasms.

And she owned roughly a handful of Stacie’s.

And there was something, really, really hot about the thought of Beca and Stacie together, both feisty and as ready to give up control as they were to take it, and the image of sitting back and watching Beca pleasure someone – or be pleased – while she watched, or maybe pleased whoever was doing the pleasing, or maybe Beca’s fantasy how Chloe and Stacie would have a moment while Beca was the one to watch.

But they hadn’t talked about it in ages, not since Beca confessed it now years ago, and not more than a whisper in Beca’s ear to drive her crazy in a particularly heated or dirty moment. It seemed irresponsible to jump into such a thing when they were all drunk and discussing it so casually. Like they were trying to decide if they wanted In-N-Out or Taco Bell for dinner.

“Well?” Beca repeated.

“Well?” Stacie echoed.

“I...am intrigued?” she admitted and watched Beca’s eyes go wide at the statement. “But I think we should talk about it first, Bec.”

“That’s fair,” Stacie conceded without argument. “Name the time and place you two want to get busy, and I’ll be there with bells on - and nothing else.” She turned back toward the water. “These stars are insane. Do you see that zig-zag pattern that looks like a spread-out letter M? That’s Cassiopeia.”

Aubrey was still staring at Beca, glancing at Chloe every few seconds as though she was waiting for the other shoe to drop until Beca shrugged and fell back against the chair and pulled Chloe down to lay with her.
Chloe’s mind raced, as much as it could in its inebriated state, and she tried to focus on the stars above them and the warmth of Beca next to her and attempted to think rationally about what Beca had proposed and Stacie had so readily agreed to.

“You would really sleep with them?” she heard Aubrey ask Stacie, still sounding a bit winded. “Just like that?”

“Why not? They’re hot. I trust them. Sex doesn’t have to be a big deal all the time.”

“I could never sleep with one of my friends.”

“I know. Why do you think I never tried to hook up with you? It’s not because I didn’t want to, but that’s not who you are.”

A beat of silence.

“I need another drink.”
Chloe woke up shivering. Someone had left a window open and if her head didn’t feel heavier than lead, she’d get up to close it.

“Baby,” she mumbled. “Close the window.”

She felt Beca stir next to her and grumble and make to get up and then stop. And then let out a sleepy laugh. “I can’t.”

“What? Beca, it’s cold. Please.” She reached for the covers but found nothing, not even a bed. Her hand patted at air until it fell and clunked against wood.

“What? Beca, it’s cold. Please.” She finally opened her eyes, squinting to see in the dark, and realized - “We’re outside?” She sat up and wrapped her arms around herself, brain swirling for a few seconds, to see that Beca and she were still on the Sun Deck lounge that they’d settled into when Stacie and Aubrey had come up to look at the stars. Only now, they were alone and in the dark, save for the ship’s exterior lighting.

“We fell asleep,” Beca said, already sitting up and rubbing at her forehead. “I think I’m still drunk.”

Chloe nodded in agreement and then regretted it, and her shivering only made it worse. “I’m freezing.”

Beca heaved herself off the low-lying chair and Chloe watched her steady herself, muttering something about being drunk on a boat was a bad combination, and then she was moving,
They took the stairs down to the Sports Deck where the main party had been but it was now deserted and reverted to its pristine, pre-party conditions by the attentive crew. Chloe had no idea what time it was, nor any idea where her phone was to check it. They didn’t pass a single clock as they made their way forward through the theater toward the main staircase.

“No, nope,” Beca said, grabbing Chloe’s hand and pulling her around to stop in front of the elevator. “I will 150% puke if I have to walk down a spiral staircase on a rocking boat right now.”

Chloe took a quick survey of her own constitution and agreed, punching the call button with her thumb.

It only took a few seconds to descend three levels down to the Accommodations Deck, but as tired as she felt, even that was too long. That deck was quiet as well, doors closed to the cabins that had been claimed in pairs when they embarked last afternoon: Jessica and Ashley, Stacie and Cynthia-Rose, Flo and Emily, Fat Amy and Lilly, and Beca and Chloe as they closed and locked the door to their cabin.

After a sleepy and clumsy pit stop in the bathroom, they slid into bed. “I’m never waking up ever,” Chloe mumbled as she snuggled up behind Beca and held her close. She finally found a clock in their cabin to discover it was pushing 4:00 am. She was still shivering but felt Beca’s warmth making its way into her tired body as soon as they settled together.

“Same, dude,” Beca said with a yawn.

Chloe was almost asleep again when a muffled thud hit the wall high behind their head, followed by what was definitely Stacie’s moan. Chloe heard it enough times in their three years living together at Barden to recognize it through even the thickest of walls.

“Stacie’s hooking up with one of the crew guys,” she said, almost laughing because it was so predictable.

“Didn’t see that one coming.”
“Good morning, Bellas. This is Captain Matten.”

Chloe woke up to the sound of a thick Scottish accent filtering into the room from speakers hidden somewhere. It was an unfortunate development as her head began pounding as a result of the sudden awakening. It was dark, the crew having drawn the blackout shades as part of their turndown service, but it felt like it was very late morning. There were sounds of life upstairs, what she knew was the crew working in the main dining room for the breakfast she and Beca - who was still dead weight between her arms not having moved an inch since they went to bed - were probably missing.

“It is 9:00 am, Saturday, June 2. The temperature is 23° Celsius, 74° Fahrenheit with clear skies and light winds of five knots. The high temperature today is 28° Celsius, 83° Fahrenheit.”

She groaned; it couldn’t be that early, could it?

“Let me be the first to welcome you to Mexico. We are presently moored outside Ensenada. Breakfast is ready in the Dining Salon and will be served until 11:30. The ship’s tenders will be ready to ferry you to shore at your convenience, and you must have your passport with you to do so. Please make note that we will be departing these waters to begin our return journey at 12:00 midnight this evening.”

Yep, they were missing breakfast. She would have let herself fall back asleep if it wasn’t for the fact that the weekend was supposed to be all about togetherness and sisterhood in celebration of Aubrey’s wedding, and as the matron of honor, she really couldn’t skip out on any of the events, even a breakfast.

She eased Beca awake as gently as she could with whispers and touches until she stirred with a groan to match Chloe’s own level of crappy-feelingness. “We should go up for breakfast,” she whispered, kissing Beca’s bare shoulder to ease the request.

She felt Beca stiffen in her arms. “No food.”

“You don’t have to eat. But we need to make an appearance. We can come back and take a nap after.”
Beca finally started moving and stretched with another groan. “I love naps.”

It smelled like baked goods and fried breakfast food on the Main Deck and Chloe’s stomach rumbled, though she wasn’t sure if it was in a good or bad way. They passed a bathroom on the way from the foyer to the dining room, so if it was in a bad way, at least she wouldn’t have far to go.

While they weren’t the first to arrive, they certainly weren’t the last. Cynthia-Rose had made it and she didn’t seem too worse for wear as she chatted with a member of the kitchen staff. Jessica and Ashley made it, too, and were seated at the table, heads propped on fists and leaning against one another to keep from tipping sideways. Ashley looked up when Flo - who was laying on the floor - wished them a good morning.

“No gym?” Ashley asked, turning her thumb down in disapproval at Chloe.

It took Chloe a minute, but then she remembered last night in the pool and how the girls were running a game on someone catching Beca and her fooling around somewhere they shouldn’t, and that she’d meant to set it up so she and Jessica could win.

“Maybe tomorrow,” is all she offered in apology, not wanting to have to explain it to Beca - not that Beca seemed to be paying attention at all as she slumped into a chair at the massive table and let her head rest on Lilly’s shoulder. She didn’t want to talk about gambling around Cynthia-Rose, either. Chloe took the empty seat on the other side of Beca and reached for the water glass set for her. She downed it and before she could politely flag down a staffer, it was refilled, and she pushed Beca’s glass toward her with a request for her to drink her own.

“Where’s your bunkmate, Flo?” Beca asked with a yawn before drinking.

“I’m here.” There was a bump and a quiet curse and Emily half-fell into the chair next to Chloe, wearing sunglasses. “I thought hangovers were the worst thing ever. But I was wrong. Hangovers on boats are the worst thing ever.”

They weren’t in rough waters, not by far, but the constant rocking was less than pleasant.
“Preach it, Legacy,” Beca said reaching past Chloe like she was going to fist-bump the girl, only for Emily to not notice it and Beca’s arm to fall limply into Chloe’s lap before retreating.

A yell of, “You pitches are weak!” startled everyone, which was followed by a cacophony of groans and swearing as Amy strode in wearing spandex workout clothes head-to-toe. “I’ve been up since 8:00 am. They have a personal trainer on board, did you know that? He reeeeally warmed me up, if ya know what I mean.”

Jessica shook out of her stupor and Chloe knew she was about to say something about the ongoing bet about who was going to hook up with the crew. She shushed her before she could. They could work out who won what later, away from the ever-recovering gambling addict.

“Yeah, Ames, we know what you mean,” Beca said with a wave of her hand toward where Amy had taken a seat across from them. “Now, shh.”

But as hungover as she was, Chloe couldn’t resist a little gossip. “You know, I think Stacie had some fun of her own last night.”

“Really?” Emily asked, perking up. She must have bet on Stacie; that wasn’t very surprising - it was a safe bet.

“I am shocked,” Flo dead-panned from her prone position on the floor.

Beca suddenly sat up. “Ohhh my God. Stacie!”

“What about Stacie?” Cynthia-Rose asked, taking a seat at the table. “Girl never came back to the room last night.”

But Beca wasn’t listening to her; she’d whirled around to face Chloe, mouth open, finger pointing, and ready to say something until she snapped her jaw closed, face turning red. “We need to talk.”

Chloe was confused by Beca’s outburst and then it all came rushing back to her.

Kissing Beca under the stars. Stacie and Aubrey interrupting them. Stacie and Beca’s commentary
on Chloe’s attractiveness. Stacie revealing to Beca and Aubrey that she and Chloe fooled around a few times in college. Beca all but brushing the news aside and nonchalantly mentioning her ménage à trois with Aubrey fantasy, and then switching it up to invite Stacie into their bed.

She regretted drinking all that water as her stomach gurgled from the rush of nerves and anxiety stirred up by the memories and if it wasn’t for Amy interrupting the intense non-verbal conversation she was having with Beca, she might have had to rush for the bathroom.

“She must have shacked up with that cute one, Ollie,” Amy said. “The First Officer. She was in his lap half the night and I haven’t seen him around yet.”

“She’ll show up when she’s finished with him,” Ashley chimed in.

“Whatever. I’m so hungry,” Jessica said with a pitiful moan. “Can we eat? Are we still waiting for Aubrey?”

Aubrey’s name pulled Chloe back into the now instead of the last night and she turned back to the group conversation. She and Beca would definitely be talking about last night later. “This is her weekend; it would be rude to eat without her. I’ll go see if she’s up. Or, you know, alive.” As much as she didn’t want to have to move, it was ultimately her duty to see to Aubrey’s well-being and comfort so she pushed her chair back from the table and stood and steadied herself for a few seconds. “Come with me, Bec?”

“You need my help to check on her?”

Chloe ignored the sass, knowing Beca’s attitude was the result of her hangover and her more well-behaved self would return when she felt better. “Nevermind. Emily? Come with me.”

“Why me?” Emily whined though she stood anyway.

“Because I asked you to.” Chloe’s captaining days were long behind her, but it was still a little fun to have the girl - now a former Bella herself - hop-to as if Chloe was still in charge.

Aubrey’s stateroom was on the other side of the foyer they’d come up through, only a dozen or so steps away. Its door was closed and it didn’t sound like Aubrey was awake unless she was maybe just up reading or in the bathroom doing her makeup; it was a rarity for her to be in bed past 9:00,
even on vacation, but they did all have plenty to drink last night.

Chloe knocked. “Bree?” she called through the door. “It’s time for breakfast. Are you up yet?”

There was silence and she looked at Emily to see if she heard anything, but she shook her head, also hearing nothing.

“Do you know how much she drank last night?” Chloe asked. “I don’t really remember.”

“I don’t really remember anything,” Emily said with a frown.

“Should we check on her? What if she’s sick?”

“We’re all sick. If you’re worried, we should check on her.” Emily gestured at the door.

Chloe considered the scenarios, everything from sleeping to already out and about on the yacht to alcohol poisoning flipping through her tired brain. “Maybe she’s still sleeping. But I think we should check on her.”

She tested the doorknob and it gave easily, unlocked, and she glanced at Emily, who nodded and pushed her sunglasses up into her hair, before easing the door open.

It was dark in the room, but with its plethora of windows, they could see well enough to enter.

Aubrey’s stateroom was roughly twice the size of her own spacious cabin, this one outfitted with a study - complete with shelves of classics and modern best-sellers - that they tiptoed through.

Emily tripped and cursed under her breath, Chloe whirling to catch her and then balance her as she detangled her foot from the bikini top she’d hooked around her right ankle. “Since when does she not put her dirty clothes in her special laundry bag?” Emily whispered, face pinched in annoyance at the amount of physical activity saving herself from falling had required.

“She gets lazy when she drinks,” Chloe answered as they passed the floor-to-ceiling shelving unit
full of books and the lounge area with a wall-length couch until they could see the bed and, more importantly, Aubrey in it, plush bedding bunched at her waist, and apparently topless as she slept on her stomach.

“See, she’s fine,” Emily whispered as she pointed. “You can see her breathing.”

Chloe sighed in relief and moved forward. “Bree?” she whispered. “Honey, it’s after 9:00.” She sat on the foot of the bed and felt for her leg to give it a gentle squeeze. It pulled away from her touch. “Everyone’s waiting for you for breakfast. Do you want to get up and join us?”

“Go away, Chloe,” grumbled back at her.

“Okay, sorry, I’ll let you sleep, I just -” Chloe stopped; Aubrey didn’t sound right.

She looked at Emily, whose mouth was hanging open, eyes wide. Those wide eyes met Chloe’s and then bounced back and forth from Chloe to the bed behind her until her hand came up and started pointing emphatically but saying nothing. Just gesturing wildly in silence.

Chloe turned back to Aubrey, still asleep and breathing deeply. She stood to see what Emily was pointing at and finally saw it.

Aubrey wasn’t alone in the king-sized bed. Her bedmate, asleep on their side and turned away from them, appeared to be equally topless and sported a long mane of dark hair. Another three seconds glancing around the room revealed the other half of the bikini Emily had tripped over - and then a second one, along with two familiar cover-ups, one on the floor, one hanging off the back of a chair.

She gasped so deeply it made her dizzy and suddenly she was stumbling backward, Emily catching her and then they were both power-walking hand-in-hand out of the bedroom until they were sprinting through the study to spill into the foyer where they slammed the door behind them.

“Oh my God, oh my God, oh my God,” Emily chanted, walking in a tight circle, hands clenching her hair.

Chloe’s mind was spinning. “It’s probably nothing, right? They fell asleep talking?” There was no way - no way - that what looked like had happened had actually happened. “They just didn’t want
to sleep in their bathing suits, that’s all.”

“I don’t know, Chloe. I don’t sleep naked with my friends.”

“Who’s sleeping naked with their friends?” Amy’s voice cut through Chloe’s panicking thoughts and she looked up to see her waiting in the doorway of the dining salon.

“No one.”

“Aubrey and Stacie!”

“Emily!” Chloe hissed, swatting her arm. This wasn’t just a couple of strangers drunkenly hooking up. This was Aubrey, a very engaged Aubrey on her bachelorette weekend to celebrate her upcoming wedding to her fiance that she’s been with for two-and-a-half years on whom she may or may not have cheated with their friend. “Amy, don’t -”

But it was too late. Amy was already turning around to announce to the other six women, “We have our hook-up pool results! Did anyone bet on Chloe or Emily finding Stacie and Aubrey bumping uglies? Anyone?”

Chloe caught up with her and had to refrain from shoving her in annoyance and instead pushed passed her into the dining room. “Ignore her! It’s just a joke, just another one of Amy’s hilarious pranks! Ha ha ha ha ha! Such a jokester, Amy! You should do stand-up!”

“Wait, what?” Beca asked, Chloe earning her full attention with her over-the-top defensive outburst. “Chloe? What’s going on?”

“Nothing! Absolutely nothing!” She waved to get the attention of the smartly dressed chef on the other side of the room. “Hi, excuse me, yes, Chef Tamara? Everyone’s ready for breakfast.” She hoped and prayed her request would result in the dining room being descended upon by kitchen staff and food enough to distract everyone long enough to either forget about what Amy said or for her to figure out some way to explain it away.

It worked in part, the hangovers and the business of food service interrupting shaky trains of thought, but Beca was up and out of her seat to wave Chloe and Emily to follow her out the back of the dining room and into the saloon, a sprawling room outfitted with plenty of overstuffed chairs, a
bar, and a baby grand piano.

“Okay, what’s going on, Chlo?” Beca asked after closing the door behind them.

Chloe whined, clenching her jaw. Saying it out loud made it real, but she didn’t have a choice. “Aubrey wasn’t up so we went into her room to check on her and she’s in bed with Stacie, and it kind of...looks like they…”

“They had sex.”

“What?” Beca laughed, looking at Chloe for confirmation, and she sobered. “Wait, you’re serious?”

“I don’t know!” she wailed and sat down heavily into a nearby chair. “They’re in bed together, they’re both half-naked -”

“At least half-naked from what we could see,” Emily helpfully interjected.

“- their bathing suits are thrown all over the room.”

“Maybe it’s nothing, right?”

Chloe glanced up to see Beca starting to look as concerned as she felt.

“Maybe they just had a sleepover and-and-and you know, it got too warm and they’ve been friends forever and we’ve all seen each other naked at this point, so -” Beca was starting to pace and stopped short at the eruption of whistles, hoots, and hollers coming from the dining room.

Chloe recognized it - she’d heard that chorus of salacious cat-calls and cheers before; she’d been greeted by it more than once when her romantic relationship with Beca was beginning to bloom.

“One of them must have shown up,” Beca said, turning toward the outburst.
“Or both of them,” Emily said excitedly before taking off toward the dining room.

Beca slumped onto the arm of the chair Chloe was in. “What is happening?”

“I have no idea.”
“Well, let’s go find out,” Beca said with a sigh before standing again and heading toward the dining room.

“Guys, seriously, calm down,” Stacie was saying when Chloe walked in. “What is going on?”

It was barely contained chaos, everyone talking at once - some to each other, some to the staff trying to get something to eat.

“I think you know.” Amy was goading her. “Even Emily figured it out.”

“I didn’t figure anything out!” Emily shouted before clutching her forehead in either pain or confusion.

“You said you saw them naked in bed together. If you can’t figure that out, you’re dumber than I thought.”

Ashley looked up. “Who was naked in bed together?”

“Hey!” Beca shouted over the racket. “Legacy isn’t dumb. She didn’t do anything wrong, so lay off, Amy.”

Chloe looked at Beca, surprised at her yelling at anyone, especially one of her best friends. But it was in defense of another friend, a younger, less well-armed friend, and though Beca was smaller than everyone in the room except Flo, there was no doubt who could pack the biggest verbal punch when it came down to it.

Beca’s voice succeeded in quieting everyone down and they took their seats at the table, all staring at Stacie.
Aubrey was still conspicuously absent.

“Divide and conquer?” Beca asked her and Chloe nodded.

“Everyone be nice,” Chloe said firmly before continuing through the dining room toward Aubrey’s stateroom.

She didn’t bother to knock; she’d seen enough that there was nothing that could shock her now. The bedroom was empty. “Bree?”

“Chloe?” Aubrey emerged from the bathroom wearing a bathrobe and toweling her hair. She smiled. “Good morning. Did you knock? I didn’t hear you.”

There was so much bouncing around in Chloe’s brain that she didn’t know where to begin. She was confused. She was potentially angry at her best friend and even more angry at her other friend. She was imagining standing in the church next to Aubrey and hear her say she can’t marry Eric. She was imagining Eric calling off the wedding when he found out as she begged for forgiveness. She was imagining Aubrey moving in with her and Beca and nursing her through the crushing break-up.

“No, I…” she paused. “Sorry. Can we talk?” She gestured at the seating in the small study area and sat down.

Aubrey followed, looking concerned. “You don’t look well. Are you hungover, too? I feel awful.”

“I’m fine. I mean, yes, I’m hungover. That’s not -” Chloe stopped and took a breath to try to slow her mind and heart. “Did you hear me come in this morning?”

Aubrey smiled. “I just said I didn’t. Why?”

“No, not just now. I mean earlier when you were still in bed.”

Aubrey’s smile faded a little. “You were in my room this morning? Before now?”
Chloe nodded. “You didn’t show up for breakfast. We were worried about you because we all drank so much, so Emily and I came to check on you but you didn’t answer the door so - because we were worried about you - we came in.”

“Oh.”

Chloe swallowed and tried to mask all her emotions except one: concern. “Bree, I saw Stacie here, in bed with you. Did...are you okay?” A lot was said in her lack of words and she watched Aubrey chewing through a response in her head.

“Okay, I know what you’re thinking -”

“I’m not here to judge you,” she said quickly. “I’m your best friend. But Bree, you’re getting married in two weeks, and it’s not like you to -”

“I didn’t sleep with Stacie.”

She snapped her mouth closed.

“I know that’s what it looked like if you were in here this morning. Yes, I slept with her, but we didn’t have sex. Do you really think I would do that?”

“No!” Chloe reached to grab her hand and squeeze it. “I said I’m not judging you! I only know what I saw; that’s why I’m here asking you about it.”

Aubrey frowned but didn’t pull her hand away. “Well, I didn’t sleep with her.”

“Then can you - you don’t have to defend anything, I just - you were sharing a bed? In the nude?”

Aubrey sighed. “Okay. Here’s what happened: you and Beca fell asleep fooling around upstairs and I was tired, so Stacie walked me back because she didn’t want me to fall. She had to use the bathroom so she came in, and apparently, the heater in here was turned on by accident, I don’t
know, but it was really hot and we were drunk. You know how drunk we all were. And we were laughing and sweating and complaining and it’s not like our bathing suits were making us that much warmer but we decided they had to go, so they went. I was tired so I went to bed and when Stacie was finished she said she was too tired to go to her room, so she slept here.”

Chloe waited to make sure she was finished with her story. “So you slept with Stacie.”

“In a non-figurative way, yes.”

“Naked.”

“We were hot and drunk and didn’t care. How many times have I seen you naked?” More times than Chloe could count, frankly.

“Okay. I believe you, I do. But your cabin is right above ours and we heard...well, we heard Stacie, and we all know what Stacie sounds like when she’s -”

“She tripped over a chair and hit her knee.”

“Oh.” Well, it was official. Chloe felt like a huge jerk for even assuming Aubrey would cheat on someone. “Okay then! So the wedding is still on!” She beamed at Aubrey to try to override the terrible misunderstanding. “Yay!”

But Aubrey didn’t respond. In fact, she looked away and refused to meet Chloe’s gaze.

“The wedding is still on...isn’t it?”

“Chloe -”

Chloe was off the couch like lightning. “Oh my gosh, you’re calling off the wedding!”

“Chloe! Please keep your voice down!”
“You’re calling off the wedding!” she repeated in a harsh whisper. “You said you didn’t have sex with her!”

“And I didn’t! Would you sit down? Please?”

Chloe’s head was pounding as much as her heart but she sat down anyway.

“Can I talk without you exploding at me? Please? For two minutes?”

She exhaled and tried to calm down, but there had been a lot to process this morning. “I’m sorry.”

“Thank you.” Aubrey seemed to steel herself with a breath before continuing. “Stacie did say something to me last night. About how I’m not the type of person who would fall into bed with one of my friends. And how she had been interested in me like that in the past. And I keep thinking...what makes me the type of person who isn’t inclined to have a little fun with someone I trust? I think we all know I could have used something like that in college.”

Chloe bit her tongue but agreed; a lot of Aubrey’s Barden-induced stress could have been reduced by some intimate affection.

“And I love Eric. I really do. I feel like he’s my Prince Charming, but if I’m honest...I’m a little...bored.” Her eyes shone with unshed tears and Chloe shifted over to take up her hand in her own again. “And I’ve never...you know...with a woman. But I have thought about it.”

Chloe wanted to tease but bit her tongue again.

“And I see what you have with Beca, how it’s just so easy to be with your best friend.”

“ You’re my best friend, Bree.”

Aubrey shook her head. “But so is Beca. And she should be. I think about that a lot, and how I love Eric and how he makes me happy, and we live together well.”
She hesitated and Chloe sensed another ‘but’ coming.

“But...it feels a little empty. I can’t stop thinking about feeling this way the rest of my life and Chloe...I don’t think I can bear it.” She broke down in tears at the admission and Chloe rushed to gather her into a hug.

She let her cry, minutes passing. Movement at the far end of the room caught Chloe’s eye and she looked to see Beca peeking around the bookshelf looking concerned. Chloe just shook her head and Beca nodded and disappeared.

“Heyyy, it’s okay,” she finally said when the sobs began ebbing. “Getting married is a big deal and if you don’t feel ready, then it’s okay to change your mind.”

“I’m a horrible person.”

“You are not a horrible person!”

“Who gets cold feet? That’s so cliché.”

“It’s not cold feet!” Chloe searched her mind for a suitable substitution. “It’s -”

“It’s having a quarter-life crisis.”

“You’re not having a crisis, you’re -”

“I’m having a crisis, Chloe!” Aubrey half-shouted to cut her off. “I’m supposed to be getting married in two weeks and I’m sitting here questioning my sexuality and I don’t want to marry Eric!”

Chloe felt Aubrey freeze in her arms at the confessions. She doubted Aubrey had ever admitted either of those things to anyone before this moment. “Okay. Hey, that’s all okay. You don’t have to marry him if you don’t want to.”
“But everything’s already planned! Our parents wasted so much money.”

“And if you get married and are unhappy, it makes it an even bigger waste. Because then you’ve wasted time. And time’s worth way more than money.” She hugged Aubrey tighter, feeling her trembling as she fought her emotions. “It’s okay to change your mind.”

“I threw away my life for him.”

“Whoa, whoa, whoa,” Chloe said quickly as she forced Aubrey out of her embrace to hold her at arm’s length. She looked at her squarely; her eyes were bloodshot, tears falling nonstop. “That does not sound like the Aubrey I’ve looked up to half my life. You did not throw your life away for him. You moved here because it was the right thing for you. And now look at you! You’re in law school, and in a couple years, you’re going to be this kickass attorney locking up all the bad guys. And hellooooo,” she dared eeking a little humor into the moment like Beca would, “you still have me and what more do you need than that?”

Aubrey huffed a shuddering, pitiful excuse for a laugh. “Shut up.”

Chloe smiled warmly. “It’s true though. Eric isn’t your life. And the Lodge wasn’t your life either. You’re the strongest person I know and even if you feel weak for a little while, you are going to come out the other side of this even stronger.”

“Did you just paraphrase Kelly Clarkson?” Aubrey said with a rough sniffle before leaning out of Chloe’s hold to reach for the box of tissue nearby.

“Not on purpose this time.” Chloe shrugged and watched Aubrey pull herself together. “Whatever you decide to do - I promise, you won’t have to do it alone.”

“You’re my best friend,” Aubrey said with a soft, still watery smile.

“And I told you - you’re mine.” Chloe couldn’t help but wrap Aubrey up in another hug. “I love you.”

“I love you, too.” Aubrey snuffled in her ear and then sat back, pulling herself back together in
earnest. “I suppose everyone already thinks I slept with Stacie by now?”

Chloe tried to hide her sad laugh. “I don’t know...Emily does think something happened -”

“Emily,” Aubrey said with a grumble. “She and I need to have a talk about privacy. Again.

Chloe glanced toward the door - she could hear the girls in the dining room, the muffled sounds of jovial conversations, the occasional shriek, the clatter of plates and silverware. “Wanna come have some breakfast?”

“Better to cut the rumor off early, I suppose,” Aubrey said with one final tissue-dabbing at her eyes. “Do me one favor though?”

“Of course. Anything.”

“Don’t tell them about what I said. About the wedding, or anything else. I want us to have a fun weekend without everyone turning it into a pity party for me.”

“Of course. I promise.”

Aubrey nodded and stood. “You can tell Beca, though. Just ask her not to tell the other girls?”

“I don’t have to tell her, Bree.” Chloe stood, too, to join Aubrey as she walked toward her cabin door.

Aubrey took Chloe’s arm like she was being escorted to dinner - or breakfast. “You’re married. You shouldn’t keep secrets from each other, and certainly not because of me. And Beca’s like family to me. Besides, I know you’re going to want to explode all of this at someone, and I’d rather it be her than anyone else.”

Chloe looked up at Aubrey to see her smirking and she blushed a little. “Sorry.”

Aubrey squeezed her arm. “I said it’s okay, Chloe. Now - what’s for breakfast?”
Chloe expected their entrance into the dining room to be one more typical of entering during moments of Bella-style scandal - she’s been the victim of it innumerable times by this point, almost always the result of being caught or overheard in a compromising situation with someone. It was a chronic occurrence for much of college until her sexual excursions dried up once Beca entered her life.

They’d had their share of wolf-whistle entrances together nonetheless.

But this morning in the dining room of the High Seas, their entrance was as anticlimactic as that of the crew’s.

It didn’t go unnoticed by Aubrey, either, who whispered, “I thought I was going to walk into a war zone.”

“Yeah, same,” Chloe whispered in return as she surveyed their friends all chattering amongst themselves harmlessly. “I guess let’s sit down and act like nothing happened?”

Aubrey nodded and they parted ways and Chloe took her seat next to Beca who looked up from her breakfast with curiosity.

“Tell you later,” she said under her breath as she reached for the glass of orange juice Beca had apparently poured for her while she was gone. “What was the story in here?”

“Said she twisted her ankle and passed out drunk in her bed,” Beca said with a glance toward Stacie who was busy posing for selfies with Flo.

“That’s what Bree said, too.”

Beca snapped off a piece of bacon and looked around the table, still keeping her voice low. “She was pretty convincing. Everyone’s already moved on.”
“She was convincing because that’s what happened.” Chloe unfolded her napkin to drape it over her lap, doing her best to not be conspicuous that she and Beca were engaged in Top Secret conversation.

“Really?!” Beca was a little too loud and Cynthia-Rose turned to look at the outburst, but quickly lost interest when Beca didn’t share with the group and she flinched. “Really?” she repeated in a whisper.

“Tell you later,” she said with a nod, and then in a normal volume, “We should call and check on Presley. Who wants to Facetime with us??” She laughed as everyone rushed to gather behind her while she gave their nanny a call.

“Okay, are you going to tell me what happened?” Beca asked before the door to their cabin had even finished closing.

Chloe let it close and then locked it for good measure. They’d all returned to their cabins to finish getting ready for the day to do whatever they chose to do - in their case, they were going to spend it lying in the sun on the aptly named Sun Deck until the peak heat of the day when they decided they’d take their turn on the jet skis that traveled on the ship and snorkel if the water was warm enough. Half the girls were heading ashore for shopping and authentic Mexican cuisine, but Chloe, Beca, Aubrey, Emily, and - for better or worse Chloe felt - Stacie were staying with the yacht until sunset when they’d head in for some good, not-clean fun in whatever club they found.

“Yeah.” She pulled the threadbare high school tee she’d worn to breakfast over her head and tossed it toward the corner where the closet was before heading toward the surprisingly spacious bathroom. “Come shower with me and I’ll tell you.”

She heard an exasperated, “Finally!” behind her and felt Beca’s hands on her waist before she’d even made it into the shower stall. She was still waiting for the water to heat up.

“Finally! what?” she asked with a knowing laugh.

“We’ve been on vacation for 24 hours and haven’t had sex.” Beca’s lips connected with the back of her shoulder. “That’s what.”
Chloe sighed and tilted her head and pulled her hair aside to let Beca at her neck. “Did you think I brought you in here to have sex? I was trying to be efficient.”

“Then why are we showering before we get in the ocean? I thought we’re taking the jet skis out.”

“I…” She paused. “I didn’t think this through.”

Beca laughed and wrapped her arms around Chloe’s waist in a tight squeeze. “Well, since we’re in here…”

Chloe moved her arms over Beca’s to return the embrace and hummed. “Okay, but do you want to know what happened with Bree and Stacie or not?”

“Spill. And don’t think I’ve forgotten that you still owe me an explanation about you and Stacie.”
Chloe was still hungover by the time they got home Sunday evening; Saturday night in Mexico for what was ostensibly a bachelorette party, or what Aubrey, Beca, and she knew was that it was more of a wake - or, potentially, an awakening. Late into the night, Chloe had lost track of Aubrey in the club, only to spot her across the room dancing with a woman Chloe didn’t recognize. It had only been a few minutes from what she’d seen, but Aubrey’s face, when she came back to the group, said a lot - a lot that Chloe wasn’t going to ask her about that night.

Aubrey had met her curious look and blushed, and it was enough of a conversation.

They’d danced the evening away after spending the day snorkeling and taking turns on the yacht’s jet skis, sometimes sharing one, sometimes racing each other if no one was waiting for a turn.

Beca kept losing their races and Chloe kept explaining that being born in South Florida was like coming out of the womb on a Seadoo (which made Beca freak out imagining it) and to not feel bad about not being the best at something for a rare moment of her life.

But Beca claimed she was just distracted.

“Okay, spill. You and Stacie.”

“What do you want to know?” Chloe asked airly as she let her post-shower towel fall to the floor as she sat on the bed with just enough bounce to make Beca smile.

Beca stared for a second before snapping her eyes up. “Don’t play dumb. And don’t try to distract me.”

“Like I said - what do you want to know?” Chloe stepped into the bottoms of her bikini and then
posed, hands on her hips, to smile at Beca’s very obvious fight to not stare at her body (she’d
declared it officially back to its pre-pregnancy state, thank you very much).

“Like I said,” Beca parroted, “don’t play dumb. You and Stacie used to hook up? When was this?
And where, and how, and what kind of hooking up are we talking about? And do I need to kick my
friend’s ass? And if so, how severely?”

“You’re cute when you’re jealous,” Chloe said with a smile before booping Beca’s nose and
going a lot of huffed grumbles in return. “Okay. It started the summer after your first year.”

“This is something that lasted long enough to have a specific beginning?” Beca’s voice sounded
strained.

“Everything has a beginning,” Chloe said with a smile before looping her bikini top over her head
and turning to let Beca tie it. She felt Beca’s hesitation to help and then took pleasure in the harsh,
erking motions that pulled too tightly; a jealous Beca was something she rarely got to witness and
it was a little thrilling to feel the way she couldn’t quite contain the emotion. “We were at a party
and got pretty wasted and I said something about needing to get laid and she said she could help
with that.”

“You said -”

“We never had sex,” she said, being able to feel Beca’s ire rolling off her in waves despite still
having her back turned. “Not like full-on sex. We made out and, like, got each other off, but we
were never naked.”

“Then what did you do?”

Chloe turned around to see Beca sitting on the bed again, a little pink in the cheeks.

“If you didn’t have sex, I mean.”

“Stacie’s got some maaaad hip action,” she answered with a salacious wink and a roll of her own
hips.

“Okay!” Beca shouted, hands suddenly punching straight down into the mattress she was sitting
on. “That’s enough. I get it.”

Chloe burst out laughing and fell into Beca’s lap to kiss her, only for Beca to start grumbling again and do her best to turn her face away from Chloe’s kiss attack. “You’re the one who asked. You can’t handle hearing about someone else making me feel good?”

“Shut up,” Beca shouted again, but it was only half as forceful as the first time, probably sedated by Chloe giving up on trying to kiss her mouth and instead settling for kissing her neck, high near her ear where it always made Beca forget her own name.

“You don’t think it’s hot, even a little bit?” Chloe said as she felt Beca’s posture starting to sag. “Stacie topless and grinding her thigh into me until I came?”

“You said you weren’t naked,” Beca said; she seemed annoyed that her body was betraying her as she shuddered beneath Chloe.

“We weren’t naked,” she clarified. “Just topless.”

She felt Beca steel herself again and then was pushed out of her lap to stand on her own. “Why did you never tell me?” She didn’t seem mad, or hurt, or turned on. Just...put out, a little.

Chloe sighed. “I’m sorry. I wasn’t hiding it from you on purpose. Honestly, I keep forgetting it happened. It wasn’t like we dated, and I didn’t really see it as anything more than making out that sometimes came with a happy ending.” She shrugged. “Are you mad?”

Beca was silent for one scary moment, and then, “I can’t be mad about something you did with someone else before we were together.” Chloe relaxed at that. “But I reserve the right to be irritated that you never told me.”

“That’s fair.” She waited for the other shoe to drop; she could see Beca’s mind still processing.

“Anyone else you’ve forgotten about that this is maybe jogging your memory for?” Beca said with a squinty eye.
“Honey, to be honest, I can’t remember every single person I’ve ever kissed. Can you?”

“Don’t turn this around on me.”

“I’m not,” she said placatingly. “I only want you to understand why you didn’t know; not because I was intentionally keeping it from you, but because I don’t think about it anymore.”

Beca was quiet again and then sighed. “No, I know. I’m not mad.”

“Promise?”

Beca was slow to smile, but eventually, she did as she reached out and pulled Chloe back down onto her lap. “Yeah, I promise. But only if you tell me if she’s better in bed than I am.”

Aubrey’s revelation went unaddressed the rest of their cruise, most of them stumbling back aboard after the night at the club to pass out and sleep until they docked at the marina again. When they parted ways, Chloe promised Aubrey she’d be there for her no matter what and to let her know if she needed anything.

She wondered how long it would be until she heard something. Or if she would ever hear anything all.

“Oh my goodness, where’s my little guy!” she said with a squeal when she threw open the front door. She heard Beca laugh behind her and push her through the door more quickly and her hangover evaporated. “Mama’s home!”

“He’s right here,” Morgan said as she rounded the corner, Presley sitting on her hip wearing -

“Ohh, you’re the cutest sailor I’ve ever seen!” Beca beat her to him to pluck him out of Morgan’s arms and into a hug that Chloe invited herself into.

“Where’d you find this?” Chloe asked as she took off his little white sailor cap to kiss the dark
wispy hair beneath it. “I don’t remember it.”

“Eric dropped it off; said he wanted his nephew to steal his moms’ hearts.”

Beca grimaced a little at Chloe - and Chloe understood why. “That was nice of him,” Beca said as she squeezed Presley one more time before surrendering him to Chloe’s sole embrace. “So everything was okay while we were gone?”

The next week flew by. It was the final week of school for Chloe, and when she wasn’t staying late to organize and clean out her classroom to prepare for the summer break, she was with Aubrey or running errands for her, doing things like calling to make sure the nail salon they’d booked carried enough bottles of Essie’s “Romper Room” shade of nail polish chosen to match the dresses she, Beca, Aubrey’s sister, and Eric’s sister would soon be wearing.

Things like going with Aubrey to her final fitting for her wedding dress.

Chloe promised herself she’d never push; she’d never pry and ask Aubrey if she’d given any more thought to her confessions at sea, or ask her if she’s sure. Aubrey was the type of person who needed to work out problems her own way and in her own time, and with the wedding now a matter of days away, Chloe was wondering if she’d decided to go through with it.

“You’re beautiful,” she said from her spot on a chaise in the fancy fitting room of the bridal shop where they’d now spent countless hours together picking out the perfect dress. She met Aubrey’s eyes in the mirror her friend was facing as the seamstress plucked and pressed at a seam at her hip until she seemed pleased with it.

Aubrey smiled, but it didn’t quite reach her eyes. “Would you excuse us, please?” she said to the seamstress who nodded and excused herself. Aubrey waited until the door closed behind her to sigh and step down from the small platform in the center of the room filled with mirrors.

Chloe’s heart started racing. “What’s up?” she asked and hoped her voice didn’t sound as anxious as she felt, made so the moment Aubrey asked for them to be left alone.

Aubrey lifted the tulle skirt of her dress and let it drop back into a place. “Why am I still doing this?”
Chloe kept her mouth shut.

“I feel like a fraud. I have to tell him.” Aubrey settled on the chaise next to her, Aubrey’s usual perfect posture faltering as she slumped to hold her face in her hands.

“Is there anything I can do to help you?” she asked tenderly. “I don’t know what I could do, but I can be there or you. I can...I can wait outside if you want to leave right away, or I can be right there if you need me to, or -”

Aubrey’s back straightened, quick as lightning, as though someone had snapped their fingers and made her come to a decision. She didn’t say a word as she stood and started stripping off her gown to carefully place it over the dress form the shop stored it on and then hurriedly dressed.

It was with determination that Aubrey gathered the rest of her things and strode out of the fitting room toward the exit and Chloe scrambled to catch up. She didn’t ask what was going on and Aubrey remained silent save for, “Take me home, please,” once they’d made it back to Chloe’s car.

She dropped her off and waited to pull away until Aubrey was in the house, which took a few extra seconds as Aubrey hesitated before straightening her shoulders and stepping inside with confidence.

Chloe drove home and sprinted through the house from the garage looking for Beca until she finally found her in the studio. She pressed the little doorbell that didn’t actually make noise - instead, it illuminated a little blue light on Beca’s mixing console. Beca had asked for that specifically so she could keep the studio as soundproofed as possible and so unexpected knocking wouldn’t risk interrupting something.

She saw the bulb light up and Beca looked at the door a second later with her headphones half-on, smiling when she saw Chloe. She waved her in and was ready with a, “It’s rush hour, be careful!” right as she opened the door.

It made Chloe freeze in confusion and then laugh when she understood why; Presley was in the studio, too, crawling as he’d figured out to do not too long ago. He couldn’t make it very far yet without giving up or figuring out what all this locomotion was meant for, but it was enough to make it a nonstop highlight of their days. Sometimes his coordination got messed up and he kind of just rocked in place trying to get going again; she and Beca cried laughing over it last night.
Today she was careful to not bump the door into him and then bent to pick him up and plop him on her hip as she stooped to kiss Beca hello.

“You guys are finished already?” Beca said as she pressed a few more buttons, presumably to pause whatever she was doing, and remove her headphones completely.

“She left in the middle of the fitting and had me take her home. I think she’s breaking it off with him right now.”

Beca’s eyes went wide and she pressed a few buttons on the board and spun in her chair to face Chloe fully. “Really? She’s actually doing it?”

“I think so,” Chloe said with a nod. “She can stay here tonight if she needs to, right?”

“You don’t even need to ask me that. She really didn’t say anything though?”

“No; she said she felt like a fraud and booked it out of there. I took her home and that was it.”

“You have your phone on so you hear it?” Beca asked as she fetched her own from where it sat on a side table. She clicked the switch on its side and turned up the ringer.

“Yeah - ring and vibrate. Ah!” Her head tilted from the force of Presley’s grip yanking on one of her curls that was within her reach. “Don’t pull, sweetie,” she said as she pried his fingers open and pushed her hair safely behind her shoulder.

Beca slid hers into her rear pocket. “So I guess we wait?”

“I guess.”

“I’m going to go make sure a guest room is ready; I’ve been throwing all my Amazon boxes in the far one all year and I...probably should take them out.”
“You what now?” Chloe asked with half a laugh as Beca slinked past her.

“Nothing!” Beca said before disappearing through the door.

“Your mommy doesn’t want me to know she’s a packrat,” she whispered down to Presley.

For the fun of it, she waited at the bottom of the stairs letting Presley play with her fingers. Several minutes passed before Beca returned carrying a pile of flattened cardboard boxes many inches thick sandwiched between her arms.

“Don’t. Say. A word,” Beca said without making eye contact.

Aubrey didn’t call. Or text.

Hours went by; they had dinner, put Presley down for [what they hoped would be] the night, and as both were unable to sit still long enough to watch a movie or read together, they ended up at a table by the pool with a baby monitor, a deck of cards, and a six-pack of Corona Light that Chloe went to the store to grab at Beca’s suggestion while Beca got Presley to sleep.

“Gin!” Chloe said triumphantly as she laid out her cards she’d spent the better part of half an hour strategically collecting.

Beca made a sound of disagreement and threw hers down with a huff so Chloe could gather them up to shuffle and take her turn as dealer when Chloe’s phone buzzed.

Their eyes snapped to it and Chloe’s hand shot out to grab it, on edge all night waiting to hear from -

“It’s her,” she said when she saw a text notification from Aubrey.

Beca leaned forward trying to look. “What’d she say?”
She turned her phone around so Beca could read it. “Knock knock.”

Their agreement was unspoken as they moved swiftly through the house to the front door, Chloe ready to catch a broken Aubrey when she fell into her arms.

Instead, when she threw open the door, Aubrey was bright-eyed, smiling, and holding up a bottle of wine in each hand.

“The wedding’s off and I just ruined my life! You pitches are going to get drunk with me!”

Aubrey was the only one to get drunk; she polished off the bottle of white herself while Beca and Chloe shared the red, getting only a little more than tipsy as they sat on the L-shaped couch.

Chloe was impressed they made it all the way to midnight before Aubrey finally broke down crying. Up to that point she had made a very obvious effort to not let herself feel sad. First, she was mad, then everything was hilarious, then she was determined she didn’t need to marry anyone at all.

When she was mad, she wasn’t mad about her breakup. She was mad at the barista at Starbucks who got her coffee wrong that morning, and she was mad that a repair to her car wasn’t under warranty when she thought it should be, and she was mad about all the stories she’d seen on the news for the past year and a half.

She thought it was hilarious that on the same shelf as a couple Bellas’ minor competition trophies Chloe and Beca had brought with them, also on display were Beca’s Grammy Awards. The Grammys got relocated out of the studio once there were four instead of one. Beca had been hesitant and didn’t want it to feel like she was boasting but Chloe convinced her that there was nothing wrong with being proud of her hard work, and if she was okay with an ICCA banner and a Southeastern Regional trophy being in the living room, she should be okay with the Grammys, AMAs, and Billboard Awards she’s snagged being there, too.

She wasn’t laughing at Beca; she was quick to clarify that. She just found it endlessly amusing that Bella trophies were given the same honor as Grammys until she became startlingly serious about how serious a cappella was and of course those trophies should be there with Beca’s others.
She also couldn’t stop laughing that Beca and Chloe had a child together; again she was quick to clarify that it wasn’t a bad thing, it was just that she couldn’t believe they had a baby.

Like, a baby.

They were parents now, and that was so funny to her.

“I can’t believe you’re married .”

Chloe braced herself and felt Beca do the same, finding Chloe’s hand resting in her lap to squeeze it. This was a dangerous path to tread tonight.

“I mean, who gets married nowadays? Lame-o’s, that’s who. No offense,” she said before taking another sip of her wine.

“None taken,” Beca said while side-eying Chloe, communicating silently.

Chloe tried to choose her words carefully “There’s nothing wrong with not getting married. It’s...not an indication of someone’s success.” She tried not to wince as she said it because it really didn’t feel like the right thing to say despite her attempt to be thoughtful.

“That might be the case,” Aubrey said before stopping to drain her glass, “but the fact that I took this long to figure out how ffffucking gay I am sure is an indicator of something.”

And then she broke down.

Chloe felt Beca’s eyes on her and Chloe knew it was up to her to respond, but she didn’t really know how. Aubrey had just come out, though Chloe wasn’t sure how to take it given Aubrey’s emotional, inebriated state. On one hand, she would be less restrained with her feelings and words, but on the other, she was really drunk and upset and maybe it wasn’t really what she meant.

“Then you came to the right place,” Chloe tried to say lightheartedly as she scooted over to wrap
her arms around Aubrey.

She saw Beca a few seconds later doing the same from the other side, both hugging her tightly while she cried.

“Do you wanna go to bed?” Chloe asked after a couple minutes. “We haven’t had a sleepover since you moved here.”

“Yeah; you can stay in the room next to ours,” Beca added. “I even changed the sheets.”

Aubrey seemed to hiccup a bit of a laugh though the tears didn’t stop and she nodded against Chloe’s shoulder.

“Okay, then let’s get you upstairs. On the count of three, we’re going to stand up, okay? One, two…”

“So...she said she’s gay, right?” Beca asked. “I didn’t imagine that?”

They’d half-carried Aubrey up to a guest room, sat with her while she drank a full liter of water, left a second on the nightstand and helped her get undressed and into bed. She was asleep before they’d even left the room.

Chloe turned onto her side and felt Beca do the same, an automatic response to Chloe’s movement in an invitation for Chloe to cozy up behind her. “Yeah, that’s what she said.”

She felt Beca chuckle.

“I wasn’t saying that like a joke.”

“I know.” Beca draped her arm around the one Chloe had wrapped around her middle. “Still funny though. You really think she’s gay?”
Chloe shrugged. “She didn’t really date much; I figured she was just picky or too busy. She seemed to really like Eric. Remember Halloween when they met?”

“God, don’t remind me,” Beca said with a shudder. “I can still hear it in my dreams. Or nightmares. I guess, you know, sexuality is fluid and all that.”

Chloe pressed a kiss to Beca’s bare shoulder. “You know I know that, baby. I didn’t come out of the closet, I -”

“Came out of the cabinet, I know, I know,” Beca said with fake annoyance. She hated Chloe’s corny pansexual joke but it was the perfect time to use it.

Chloe giggled and kissed her shoulder again and maybe it was the wine and the heightened emotions of the evening, but she found her lips sliding higher until they were on Beca’s neck making Beca dig her fingernails into the back of Chloe’s hand.

“Aubrey’s in the next room,” Beca said, but the tone of her voice made her argument weak.

Chloe tugged her arm out from where Beca was clutching it and moved it lower, not bothering with extensive foreplay. “And you know she’s completely passed out.” When her fingertips reached the juncture of Beca’s thighs they parted quickly and Beca rolled onto her back. “Oh, that was easy,” Chloe said with a quiet laugh as she let her fingers slip down between Beca’s legs. She watched Beca react to it, a deep breath and a slow arching of her back that ended with her hips rolling up into her touch.

“We can finish talking about Aubrey in the morning,” Beca said as she reached to pull Chloe down and into a kiss.

Chloe was the first one out of bed in the morning. It was painfully early for a Sunday but Presley’s schedule didn’t care what day of the week it is. He was up, so she was up. His fussing for breakfast had quieted down when she plucked him from his bassinet, though, so she snuck back to bed with him and was relieved when he was content to take his breakfast right there in bed between her and Beca so she could doze while he suckled.
She woke up again sometime later. It felt like only a few minutes but when she glanced down, Presley was sound asleep so it must have been longer than that. Beca was still asleep, too, though she’d moved at some point and was on her side facing Chloe, her hand on Presley’s back as though she’d been rubbing it after he ate and the onesie he’d been in was gone, which meant Beca had gotten up to change him and was too lazy to put it back on and probably didn’t want to wrestle with him to accomplish it.

She was still thinking about how lucky she was to wake up that way when the creak of a floorboard caught her attention. She glanced up and saw Aubrey, bleary-eyed and messy-haired with mascara tear stains down her cheeks and wearing one of Chloe’s WeHOAPA tees she left in the room for her leaning against the door frame. She appeared to be crying again, or still. Chloe moved to get out of bed but Aubrey shook her head.

“I’m sorry. Didn’t mean to wake you,” Aubrey whispered. “You guys look so happy.”

Chloe started to ask if she was okay, then thought better of it. That was a dumb question, considering everything. Instead, she waved her over with her hand. “Come to bed.”

She watched her hesitate and then start moving, wiping tears away as she walked. While their bed was certainly big enough for three people, the only free space for Aubrey was next to Beca and she hesitated before laying down slowly.

“You know we’re both naked, right?” Beca finally mumbled.

Chloe could stop the peal of laughter and slapped her hand over her mouth to try not to wake Presley.

“Yeah, I know.” She watched Aubrey keep her distance, lying stiff as a board with several inches between her and the lump that was Beca’s body under the covers.

Then Beca was shuffling around, not much, just to pull her arm out and tug at the duvet until Aubrey moved enough to let her pull it back while Beca held the top sheet in place to cover herself. “If you’re gay, you better get used to being in bed with naked girls. Now get over here so I can go back to sleep.”

Chloe didn’t know whether to laugh again or tear up at Beca’s sleepy form of light tough love so instead, she watched Aubrey turn onto her side and cautiously scoot closer until Beca actually
reached back, grabbed her arm, and tugged her forward before throwing the duvet back over the both of them.

It was quiet after that, just the sounds of rest and Presley’s quiet little sleep-hums and the occasional sniffle from Aubrey that told Chloe she wasn’t asleep. But soon she quieted, and just when Chloe was about to fall back asleep, too…

“Now, about that fantasy…”

Her eyes snapped open to see Beca grinning at her and Aubrey, half-sitting up behind her wide-eyed in shock. “Beca!” Chloe whispered harshly.

“Oh my God, calm down, dudes,” Beca said after a few tense seconds. “I’m kidding.”

Chloe’s heart started to slow down again. “Not funny.”

“Kinda funny,” Beca said, still smiling.

“No.”

“Yes.”

“It was kind of funny.”

She and Beca locked eyes, both surprised by Aubrey’s input, and then all three of them burst out laughing until the commotion woke Presley and Chloe gathered him up to soothe him and in doing so, the other two settled down and she felt the tension in the room finally break. She could hardly believe it when she saw Aubrey’s arm settle over Beca and Beca not do anything to stop it. Instead, Beca just reached over to rest her hand over Chloe’s where it held Presley.

Chloe knew they had a long road ahead with Aubrey coming to terms with a lot of changes in her life, but right then, at that moment, she didn’t worry if Aubrey would be okay.
Because she knew she would be.
“Morning, sunshine.”

Chloe looked up from her seat in the dining room where Beca, Presley, and she were having a late brunch at Beca’s greeting to see Aubrey making her way down the stairs. She was still wearing the borrowed shorts and tee, hair messy but tied up in a bun that matched both Beca’s and Chloe’s. It made Chloe smile to herself, the cuteness of it: three best friends, so different and yet so similar.

“Good morning,” Aubrey said with a yawn as she helped herself to brewing a cup of coffee and what was left in the pans on the stove of scrambled eggs, hashbrowns, and bacon before joining them at the table.

Their early morning group snuggle had been a cozy one, though short-lived as Presley’s post-breakfast nap didn’t last long. He started fussing and it woke both Chloe and Beca so they slipped out of bed to let Aubrey sleep off the wine hangover she was sure to have. They’d split breakfast duties, trading off between supervising Presley surrounded by a mess of colorful, noisy toys in the living room and cooking until Chloe wrangled Presley into his high chair at the dining table and the pureed bananas Beca had tossed in the food processor while she rotated strips of bacon.

“Hangover?” Beca asked once Aubrey joined them with her plate and mug.

“Not too bad.” She blew over the rim of her cup and took a careful sip. “I’ll be fine once I get some caffeine in my system.”

“I hope we didn’t wake you up? We tried to keep it down, but this one’s not so keen on being calm and quiet anymore.” She smiled at Presley and opened her mouth as she scooped a bit of banana onto a tiny rubber spoon and he mimicked her without hesitating to let her feed him. “You’re such a good little eater, aren’t you!”

Aubrey waved off her concern with her fork. “Not at all. Woke up on my own; it was nice.” She paused. “Thank you, by the way.”

“It’s cool, you’re welcome any time,” Beca said.

“Thanks, but I mean…” She shook her head. “I mean, thank you...for this morning. It was...it was
Chloe felt the sting of tears at Aubrey’s sincerity and -

“Yeah, I know you liked being all up on this.”

Chloe gasped. “Beca! Bree, I’m sorry, you know how -”

“It’s okay,” Aubrey said with a light laugh. “Beca’s right. I did like it. Not like that, ” she added quickly as soon as Beca opened her mouth to crack another joke. “I haven’t been sleeping very well lately and sleeping with you girls...well, it was just really nice. It felt...safe.”

Chloe felt her heart swell for her best friend who was coping with so much right now. “I’m so glad to hear that. Anything we can do—truly.”

“So you’re saying you want to make this a regular thing? Sleeping with us?” Beca took a pointed bite of hashbrowns and grinned across the table.

“Bec -”

“You’d like that, hmm?” Aubrey said with a smirk as she took another sip of coffee.

“Hell yeah, I would. Shit, Chlo, remind me to throw a $5 in the jar later.”

Chloe didn’t even know what to say to any of it; she sat frozen, watching her wife and her best friend flirt until Presley’s impatient hand knocked into hers to demand more bananas.

“Then I guess I better decide which of you are going to be my first.”

The clatter of a fork hitting the glass tabletop made Chloe jump and she looked over again to see Beca in a full blush and fumbling to pick up her fork, jaw moving but no words forming. The words hung in the air over them, palpable.
“Oh, my God,” Aubrey finally said with a cackle. “For someone who talks such a big game, you sure can’t take it as good as you give it, Beca.”

“I-I-I can take...wait, wait! Yeah, yes, you’re right: I know how to give it reeeeally good. Right, babe?”

“Beca.”

Chloe hooked one of the straps of her denim overall shorts onto its button at her chest. “You know we don’t have to go. I don’t want you to be uncomfortable.” She struggled to reach the other strap and felt Beca grab it and drape it over her shoulder.

“No, it will be fun. It’s not like I’ve never been to a Pride event before,” Aubrey said as she flipped through Chloe’s walk-in closet for something to wear. “I used to go with you all the time in college.”

“As long as you’re okay with it.”

“I’ll be fine, Chloe.”

“Then pick something and come out of the closet!” Beca said from her seat on their bed with Presley in her lap.

Chloe didn’t even bother chastising her anymore; Aubrey didn’t seem to mind Beca teasing her and it seemed to be Beca’s way of counseling her through her revelation.

“Funny,” Aubrey said as she emerged with a few garments in her hands. “I wish I would have thought to buy something. You guys are adorable.”

Chloe looked down at her tie-dyed pink, yellow, and blue sports bra and the overalls and her white Keds and at Beca in her blank tank top, denim shorts, backwards baseball cap, rainbow Converse
and half a dozen multi-colored bracelets on her wrists with their son sitting up on his own in the space created between her crisscrossed legs wearing a onesie with a rainbow electric guitar emblazoned across his tummy with the words MY MOMMIES ROCK over his chest.

She smiled. “We are, aren’t we? What did you pick?”

Aubrey shifted a little nervously until she finally held up a heather gray tee and opened it.

“Good for you, dude,” Beca said with a smile. “That was the first Pride shirt I ever bought.”

“It’s not too much? Not too raunchy right?”

“It’s perfect, Bree,” Chloe said as she rushed to hug her best friend. “Get changed. We’re going to do tattoos and stuff next.”

“Tattoos?!” Aubrey screeched.

“Not actual tattoos. Temporary.”

“Dial it back, man,” Beca said with a laugh. “We have body paint. Nothing crazy.”

“Oh, okay. Then...yeah...” She turned and stripped off the shirt she’d been wearing to pull Beca’s over her head. She was tucking the front of it into the waist of her white shorts when she turned back around.

“Let’s get one thing straight: I’m not,’” Beca read off Aubrey’s tee and then laughed. “Man, that’s great. Whoever came up with that is a genius.”

“You’re setting that up like you’re the one who wrote it, baby,” Chloe said with a pat to Beca’s cheek before plucking Presley from her lap. “Wanna grab the paints?”

“We were perfectly comfortable,” Beca said in fake protest as she shoved herself off the bed to rifle through one of the many drawers in their bathroom.
“Come, sit,” Chloe said to Aubrey as she pointed at the bed. “We’ll do each other.”

“Kinky. Can I watch?” Beca said when she returned with the palettes of face paint and a fistful of brushes and a hand towel over her shoulder.

Chloe shook her head and sat down to build a fortress of pillows that would keep Presley from getting too far so she could set him on the bed. “You’re in a mood.”

“It’s Pride, babe,” Beca said as she climbed onto the bed to sit on her knees.

“What does that mean?” Aubrey asked as she looked over Beca’s supplies. “You turn into a horny teenager? Like a werewolf on a full moon?”

“Basically,” Chloe laughed as she turned to face Beca and help her with the brushes and palettes to pop open one of them.

“I have no shame,” Beca said with a grin as she leaned in to kiss Chloe. “Okay, what do you want?” She picked up a brush and rolled it between her fingers.

Chloe had already decided. “I should match my top. And it’s important to bring more visibility to pansexuality. So do the pan flag. Keep an eye on Presley, Bree?”

“Of course.”

It was relaxing feeling the soft wetness of Beca painting the small flag onto her left cheek. It was also cute watching her focus on it, tongue peeking between her teeth as she worked to get the three stripes even, switching between brushes as she changed colors, and then repeated it on her right cheek. “There. Perfect,” Beca said as she sat back and surveyed her work. “Okay, do me.”

Chloe waited for the suggestive wink to follow wand was surprised when it didn’t, because even she was tempted to play up the comment. Instead, Beca smiled at her and then closed her eyes. “Rainbow, please.”
“Actual, or flag?” Chloe said as she found a clean brush in the pile on the towel on the bed and coated it in red paint.

“Flag.”

“I’m so bad at straight lines. Don’t judge my skill, okay?”

“I’ll consider it avant-garde.”

Chloe did her best, only having to start over once until she found her rhythm and steady hand with it to give Beca two little rainbow flags on her cheeks, just like the pink, yellow, and blue stripes on her own. “Done. What you think, Bree?” she asked as she snapped closed the palette to keep it from drying out and got caught a little off-guard when Beca darted forward to kiss her again and whisper her thanks.

“I think I’ll do a rainbow one, too.”

“I meant about—oh!” Chloe said, realizing Aubrey wanted one, too. “Totes! Bec, trade places with her.” She was almost giddy with excitement as Aubrey sat down and turned to face her.

She was clearly nervous as she took a deep breath. “On my left side, please?”

“You got it!” Chloe chirped as she picked up her red brush again.

Chloe felt Beca settle behind her, close enough that arms wrapped around her waist and a chin on her shoulder. “Don’t smudge our cheeks,” she said while she added a yellow stripe below the orange and tilted her head a little to the side.

“Hmm?” Aubrey said as she opened her eyes.

“She meant me,” Beca answered. “I won’t smudge it.”

“Are you going to watch her do the whole thing?”
“Yep,” Beca said with a squeeze to Chloe. “Actually, nope. We’re on the move.” Chloe felt her disappear and she paused her painting to see Beca crawl across the bed and snatch up Presley before he got too close to the pillow wall. “Where do you think you’re going, huh? You’re next, you better not run away!” She climbed off the bed with him to place him on the floor so he could scoot around in his start-stop-still learning way without risk of injury.

Chloe smiled at them before returning to her project with the green brush in hand.

“I really hope I have what you guys have someday,” Aubrey said quietly as she closed her eyes again.

“You will.” Chloe finished the last three stripes and then patted Aubrey’s knee. “Okay, you’re all set!”

“Yeah?” Aubrey said, eyes opening and looking a bit glassy. “How does it look?”

Beca plopped down on the bed behind Chloe again to look over her shoulder. “You look amazing, dude. I’m really proud of you.”

Aubrey blushed and looked down to fidget with her fingers. “Thank you.”

“Shé’s right, Bree. I’m so, so proud of you.” She pushed the brushes and palettes aside to lean forward and pull her into a hug and felt Beca join it a moment later, hugging both of them.

“Okay, go check it out,” Beca said after a few seconds. “Chlo’s going to want to have a photo shoot before we leave.”

“You say that like you don’t willingly participate every time,” Chloe teased as she pulled back to let Aubrey up to evaluate her artistic skills in the bathroom mirror.

“I know. Now make out with me before she gets back,” Beca said as she slid right into Chloe’s lap to pull her into a kiss.
Chloe barely had time to get her mouth open for Beca’s tongue before Aubrey was back and groaning in disgust to make Beca roll off her in laughter.

Aubrey fell onto the bed to lay on her side. “I’m going to start calling you Teen Wolf.”

“Works for me,” Beca said as she crawled off the bed to catch Presley and bring him back to hold him in her lap. “What should we do? Flag? Butterfly? Actual rainbow?”

“He’s going to smear it everywhere,” Chloe said with a laugh as she reached for the red brush and the palette. “Less is more, I think.”

“He only needs to keep it on long enough for the pictures. Don’t be lame. Since when are you lame?”

“I’m not being lame!” Chloe said with a laugh. “Only making a point.” The moment she touched the cool, wet brush to his cheek he flinched and made everyone laugh, and made Chloe have to wipe it off and start again.

He was still the second time and seemed mesmerized by what was happening.

It only took a few seconds to paint the little red heart on his tiny, plump cheek and he laughed when Chloe sat back and raised her arms. “All done!”

His shaky little arms lifted, too, as he smiled. Not that he knew what she’d done, of course, but he knew enough that “All done!” meant he’d done a good job as they said it every time he finished eating or having his diaper changed or having a bath.

“All done!” Beca repeated and bounced him in her lap.

“Oh, God, you’re going to make me cry,” Aubrey said with a strained voice as she sat up again.

“No crying; can’t have you ruining my masterpiece,” Chloe said with a pat to Aubrey’s leg. “Come on. Photos downstairs by the pool.”
“Already scouted locations, huh?” Beca said as she slid off the bed and perched Presley on her hip to head for the door.

“You know it!”

“Well? What do you think?” Chloe asked as she showed Aubrey the photo Morgan took of the four of them on the patio, the sprawl of Los Angeles in the distance.

“I…”

She heard Aubrey’s voice catch and reached to give her hand a squeeze.

“I look...so happy.”

“Rainbow suits you,” Chloe said as she pecked Aubrey’s unpainted cheek. “Come on; the parade starts at 11:00 and traffic is going to be crazy.”

Chloe was excited about Pride this year, too.

Last year, they were working on getting pregnant. The year before, they were in New Zealand on their honeymoon. And the year before that they’d barely unpacked in their first Los Angeles apartment, Beca working hard at kicking off her career and Chloe trying to find a career...they hadn’t actually celebrated Pride together as a couple.

It was thrilling to stand along the parade route, arms around one another’s waists, or holding hands, or hugging, or kissing and having that love celebrated by the thousands of others around them.

And to have Aubrey there, experiencing the celebration through a new lens, through a new lease on life...Aubrey cried more than once, but Chloe didn’t comment on it, and neither did Beca.
After two hours at the parade, it was unanimously decided that it was too hot and both water and alcohol were desperately needed.

It wasn’t difficult to find a bar celebrating Pride in West Hollywood; Chloe figured it would probably be easier to find a needle in a haystack than a bar without rainbow flags hanging in windows and from awnings with dance music blasting.

They drank and binged on mozzarella sticks and chips and guacamole and took selfies with each other and photos of one another as they took shots or spilled a drink, and more than a handful of times someone asked Beca for a selfie which always resulted in a lot of fake, exaggerated fawning by Chloe and Aubrey as soon as it was over to make Beca blush and shove at them and tell them to shut up before shoving another chip in her mouth.

The sun was barely starting to set when they returned home covered in glitter and sweat and free beads and bracelets thrown to them during the parade, and Chloe couldn’t remember a time they’d had so much fun as a group.

“[I’ve gotta—I’ve gotta go to bed,” Aubrey slurred with a laugh the moment they got inside. She didn’t wait for an answer, just waved and said, “Good night!” and headed for the stairs to lean heavily on the railing as she made her way up. “And don’t worry, I-I’m definitely going to pass out, so be as loud as you want, Teen Wolf.”

Chloe was still laughing when Beca shoved her back against the door to kiss her. She moaned and then pushed Beca back to slip out from under her. “Morgan, sorry...we...sorry,” she said with a hiccup and embarrassed smile as their nanny gathered her things.

“It’s okay. Everything was good. Presley’s asleep. Ate his dinner without too much fussing.”

“Thank you,” Chloe said as she had to grab Beca to pull her away from the door so Morgan could leave. “Sorry, again.”

“It’s fine,” Morgan said with a laugh. “Happy Pride.”

“Happy Pride!” Beca cheered as Morgan pulled the door closed behind her. “Happy fucking Pride,” she repeated with a growl this time as she pushed Chloe right back where she was to kiss her.
Chloe moaned again; she was already light-headed from the heat and alcohol and Beca wasn’t taking her time. She heard the scrape of metal as Beca unhooked first one strap, then the other of her overalls and they fell without fanfare.

“God, I want you,” Beca breathed before kissing her again, hands roaming like they couldn’t decide where they wanted to be until one came to the conclusion that it wanted to be between Chloe’s legs.

Her knees weakened but Beca pressed her harder against the door to keep her upright. She wasn’t being gentle—not that Chloe minded—but instead, relentless as she rubbed until Chloe reached down to pull her panties to the side and get Beca’s fingers right where she needed them.

It was all Chloe could do to just hold on, to stay on her feet, to cling to Beca and let herself be fucked in a way that was as hot as it was dirty which only made it hotter.

Beca wasn’t even kissing her anymore, every ounce of energy was devoted to her fingers and Chloe fought to keep her eyes open, to watch the feral heat in Beca’s eyes as she took her, but, “Shit,” Beca was too good and knew her too well and she couldn’t. “Shit, baby, I-I-I-”

“Come for me, babe,” Beca breathed into her ear before nipping at it.

Chloe felt it overtake her, first like the trickle of rain, then like a bolt of lightning.

It was quick but intense and when she came back to herself, she groaned at the feel of Beca’s tongue against her neck and started to slouch in her embrace.

“I’m not even asleep yet!”

“Fuck,” Beca said with a laugh into Chloe’s shoulder.

Aubrey’s voice yelling down to them brought Chloe’s mind back to clarity and she covered her face with her hands. “Oh, my gosh.”
“Not going to apologize,” Beca said when she lifted her head and pressed a kiss to Chloe’s lips. “Been wanting you since this morning.”

“You don’t have to,” Chloe mumbled through their kiss. “I was the one she heard. Sorry, Bree!” she called back upstairs.

It was only after she’d yelled back that she realized the yelling back and forth would probably wake up Presley and she froze to listen, but the house remained blissfully quiet. “No more yelling. Let’s go to bed.”

“Where I can yell?” Beca said with a grin as she detached herself from Chloe to start walking backward toward the stairs.

“You can be as loud as you want, but if you wake him up, you’re the one putting him back to sleep.” She stepped out of her fallen overalls and scooped them up to start following Beca. “Not me.”

“Something about that doesn’t feel fair.”

“Guess you’ll have to decide what you want more—to be loud, or let me make you come more than once.”

“God, I love when you say that word,” Beca said with an evil grin.

Beca turned to the door upon seeing the red light blink on the board in front of her. She smiled and waved in their temporary roommate. “Hey.”

“Hi,” Aubrey said with hesitation. “I’m not interrupting anything, am I?”

“No. Well, I mean, you are,” Beca added with half a laugh, “but it’s fine.” She paused the track and took off her headphones. “What’s up?”
Aubrey hesitated in the doorway, fidgeting. “Nothing.”

“Bored?”

“Kind of?” She shifted and started to leave. “I’m sorry, you’re busy, I -”

“I said it’s fine. You can come in.” Beca rolled a few feet over to grab one of the other rolling office chairs to swing it around to offer it to Aubrey. “Sit. I’m guessing if you’re bored, Pres is asleep?” She and Chloe were trying very hard to not use Aubrey like a live-in nanny, but it was hard not to when she insisted on helping. Chloe was at school packing up her classroom for the summer so Aubrey had shooed Beca off for personal time of her own and promised to look after their son.

“Went down a few minutes ago. But not without a fight.” She patted the monitor clipped onto the waist of her denim shorts as took the chair offered to her. “It’s so quiet in here,” she said after a beat.

Beca smiled. “Yeah, that’s kind of the idea.”

“What are you working on? The next big summer smash that I won’t be able to get out of my head for a month?” She leaned over to survey the mixing board as though it would tell her anything.

“No,” Beca laughed. “Just something I’ve been working on for a while.”

“Anyone famous?”

“Nope.”

“A new artist, then?”

“No, it’s…” she paused. “It’s me.”

Aubrey’s eyes widened in surprise. “You’re making a record?”
“No, no,” Beca said as she felt herself starting to blush. “I mean, I am. But not, like...I’m not making a commercial record.”

“Then what is it?” She gasped. “Are you recording a song for Chloe?!”

“How did...how did you figure that out in like five seconds? I’ve been working on this for going on three years and she has no idea.”

Aubrey’s excitement softened. “You’ve been working on a song for her for three years?”

“Yeah, I mean…” Beca scratched at her nose. “Yeah.”

“And she doesn’t know?”

“I don’t think so.”

“She hasn’t asked what you’re working on like I just did?”

“No. I mean, of course, yeah, she always asks what I’m working on. I just...don't tell her. Or let her hear it. I play something else if she asks to hear what I’m doing.”

Aubrey sat back in her chair, twisting back and forth. “Three years? You produce entire albums in three months.”

“This is...it’s just different. You know?” She stared at her hands where they sat in her lap. “I want it to be perfect.”

“I’m sure it’s already perfect.”

“I don’t know. It’s not bad. I just...I don’t know how to know if it’s finished. I know when other songs are ready. But this...it’s like I can’t quite get the pieces to fit.”
Aubrey started to speak again but then snapped her mouth shut, changing her mind, but Beca already knew what she was going to ask.

“Do you...want to listen to it? Maybe you’ll figure out what I’m missing.” Her palms started sweating at the thought of someone else listening to it, but Aubrey knew Chloe better than anyone else, except herself, though even that could be debated.

“It’s private, you don’t have to -”

“Please?”

“Oh...okay. Um…” Aubrey shifted closer, unsure.

“Thanks. Uh, here, wear these.” She handed Aubrey her headphones and turned down the volume a bit while she cued up the most recent version of the track on her laptop. “Just, like...be honest. But...be gentle?”

“I’m sure I won’t have anything negative to say,” Aubrey said with a smile as she slipped the headphones on and closed her eyes with a nod.

Beca held her breath and started the song. It was hard to sit there in silence—though she knew every single note, beat, and breath by heart and knew exactly what Aubrey was hearing—and watch her experience something she’d poured herself into for so long.

“Is this you playing guitar?”

Beca nodded.

“I didn’t even know you could play.”

She didn’t bother explaining she’d always known how to play. She didn’t really like to play it, though not for any particular reason other than it ripping up her fingers since she didn’t play
enough to develop calluses. She didn’t even own a guitar. Any time she needed to re-record it, she had to borrow one from a friend.

“But you do live in a great big mansion,” Aubrey said with a smile as soon as the lyrics started.

She waved her hands. “Just, shh!”

They sat in silence, then, Beca playing the song back through her mind as she watched Aubrey listen to it, the first time anyone else had listened to it.

When Aubrey opened her eyes when Beca knew the song had ended, tears escaped and she brushed them away quickly before removing the headphones to hand them back. “Beca…”

“That bad, huh?” she said with a self-deprecating laugh.

Aubrey shook her head. “You know that’s beautiful, right?”

Beca shrugged and set the headphones in their open case nearby. “I told you I’m not happy with it.”

“I almost forgot how pretty your voice is. I haven’t heard you sing in so long.”

“Um, thanks.” Beca shifted in her seat. “But...any criticism? Constructive, preferably?”

“Just one thing.”

“Oh, God. What?”

“Stop doubting yourself. Chloe will love it.”

Beca groaned. “That’s not helpful!”
“What do you mean it’s not helpful?” Aubrey said with a laugh. “I said it’s beautiful and she will love it! Did you want me to tell you it was terrible and you should completely rewrite it??”

Beca threw her hands in the air and spun in her chair. “I don’t know, dude!”

Aubrey caught the back of her chair as it passed and turned her back around to face each other. “I don’t think you need to change a thing, but you’re the only one that can decide if it’s finished. You’ve been tinkering with it for three years - how much more do you really think you can do with it?”

“I don’t know.”

Aubrey sat back and looked at her squarely. “Then tell me what you do know. Why did you decide to write her a song?”

“Because I loved her,” she said with a shrug.

“That’s all?”

“I wanted her to know how much. And, you know...sometimes I suck with words and feelings.”

“No you don’t,” Aubrey said warmly. “Not anymore. You’re not the same person you were when you were 18. I should know. I remember what it was like dealing with 18-year-old you. You were a prickly little pipsqueak”

“Hey!”

Aubrey clapped her hands. “And now you’re a soft little pipsqueak!”

“Fuck you,” Beca said, finally laughing.
Aubrey laughed, too. “I’m serious, Beca,” she said once they quieted. “Don’t doubt yourself. You know how to write a song. And you tell Chloe you love her all the time. Stop overthinking it.”

Beca sighed and rubbed her hands over her face. “You’re right, aren’t you,” she said with fake bitterness.

“You know I am.”
Home Invasion

“It’s up to you; whatever you want,” Chloe said as she gave Aubrey her phone to scroll through the food delivery app.

Not only was it Father’s Day, but it was once going to be Aubrey’s wedding day and Chloe and Beca had agreed to do their absolute best to make the day bearable for their friend. They let her sleep in and had breakfast waiting for her. They brought in a masseuse, an esthetician, and some of Beca’s glam squad to give them all massages, facials, and mani-pedis and to give Aubrey’s hair a proper blowout.

Chloe wanted her to feel spoiled and pampered, and she hoped it wouldn’t feel too much like getting ready for a wedding that wasn’t happening.

To try to avoid that, they’d had upbeat pop music playing throughout the house, a playlist Beca had curated at Chloe’s request to harken back to their college and teenage years with plenty of songs from the 90s and past Bellas’ setlists so they could have a good reason to coax Aubrey into joyful song and herky-jerky renditions of the choreography they somehow still remembered though with less precision than they once had.

“No, no! Spin left!” Chloe said with a laugh as Beca collided with her, having spun right and also laughing.

“Shit, sorry! I mean, shoot! Dang it!” Beca clapped in frustration. “I don’t know why I even try,” she said as she lifted Presley out of his playpen to prop him on her hip and dance with him. “Curse words are just words and he’s going to learn them anyway.”

Chloe tsked at her. “Until society stops thinking they’re impolite to say, we need to lead by example.”

“But if no one ever changes, how will society stop thinking they’re bad?” Aubrey countered.

Chloe opened her mouth to answer her and then realized, “Um…I…”

“See? For the sake of society as a whole, we should work to normalize cursing until it’s not considered cursing anymore.” Beca grinned at her and kissed Presley’s cheek, finishing by blowing
a raspberry against it to make him giggle.

“I can’t believe you’re taking her side, Bree,” Chloe said with a fake huff.

“I’m not taking any sides! I’m only participating in the argument for the sake of practicing arguing in court.”

Beca laughed. “Lord help anyone who tries a case against you. I can vouch for your tenacity.”

“I’ll be sure to list you as a reference for the State Bar of California. I’m getting hungry. What are we doing for dinner tonight?”

“It’s up to you; whatever you want.”

“Then I guess we’re having Thai,” Beca said as Aubrey took Chloe’s phone to pick something to order.

Aubrey made a face at her.


“No,” Aubrey grumbled before sticking her tongue out at her petulantly.

The doorbell rang.

“That was fast,” Aubrey said in surprise as she broke out from their danceathon to answer it. “My place takes twice as long.”

“Yeah, we have pretty good delivery guys around here.” Chloe smiled at Beca as they followed Aubrey to the door.
“I wonder if they’ll deliver to—OH, MY GOD!”

“SURPRISE!!” rang out, engulfing them all and sending Presley into a frenzy of motion in Chloe’s arms and Aubrey into a burst of tears.

Emily, Cynthia-Rose, Amy, and the rest of their Bellas rushed forward to dogpile hugs onto Aubrey in a mass of squeals and chatter.

Beca smiled at Chloe from where they stood back a few feet and Chloe returned a happy wink.

“What are you guys doing here?!?” Aubrey finally managed once Fat Amy peeled herself from holding onto her like a koala with the declaration of needing a drink and/or snack.

“We all had the time off work already, so we changed our flights to come here instead of—well, instead,” Emily said with a giddy bounce.

“I’m not going to pass up the opportunity to spend more time with my girls,” Stacie chimed in before hugging Aubrey again.

“Even though we just saw you bitches two weeks ago.” Cynthia-Rose high-fived Beca as she followed Amy into the house.

Aubrey was still wiping tears off her cheeks with one hand, the other held by Emily. “And you two knew?”

“Maaaaaybe?” Chloe said with an innocent twist of her hips.

“That these weirdos were going to invade our home again? If I didn’t know, I’d be furious.”

“Thank you.” Aubrey hugged Chloe tightly and then gave Beca’s hand a squeeze before leading the group toward the kitchen.
Amy and Cynthia-Rose already had the blender going with a shout announcing frozen margaritas were about to happen at the pool.

“We’re going to get Pres changed into his swimming gear,” Beca said as she led Chloe upstairs. “He’s shorter than my arm but takes three times as long to get him ready for some reason. There are extra towels in the pool house.”

“I don’t think they’re listening, baby,” Chloe said with a laugh as she looked over the railing at her second family doing their best to make it look like a tornado had ripped through the kitchen.

“Figures.”

“Who has him now?” Chloe asked when Beca turned around empty-handed.

Beca nodded across the pool. “Legacy.”

Chloe watched their youngest Bella play with their youngest honorary Bella, sitting in his tiny unicorn float with his still-a-little-too-big rash guard covering most of his sensitive skin and a bucket cap on his head. It hid most of his face from her view but she could tell he was smiling as Emily pulled him around in slow circles through the water while she talked to him and made funny faces. She could hear him laughing.

“She’s a natural,” Beca said with a smile while they watched. “Maybe I should ask if she wants to ditch her pop star career and be our new nanny.”

Chloe slapped Beca’s shoulder. “Don’t you dare.”

Beca laughed and shooed Chloe’s hand away only to grab it to use it for leverage to pull herself closer into Chloe’s space until her arm was around Chloe’s waist. “She’s going to be our bread and butter next year. I would never. That would be taking money out of our pockets. Literally.”

Chloe rolled her eyes. “You’re terrible.”
Beca grinned up at her, and though her oversized sunglasses hid them from view, Chloe knew her eyes were sparkling with mirth. “But you love me.”

“Are you sure about that?” she teased back while wrapping her arms around Beca’s waist, only to grab her shoulders a second later and jump to dunk her without warning.

Beca resurfaced swearing and sputtering, her sunglasses barely hanging on. “I want a divorce,” Beca said after coughing the water out of her lungs.

“Have your people call my people.” Chloe pecked her cheek and then launched herself backward to float her way across the pool to Aubrey and Stacie who were caught up in a quiet conversation. “What are we talking about?” she asked once she was back on her feet in the deeper end of the pool, water up to her chin. Neither of her friends answered and the silence stretched on way too long. “Am I...sorry, am I interrupting something?”

She watched them exchange glances and then Aubrey was laughing her high-pitched, shrill laugh that always betrayed her confidence for nerves. “Of course not! I was just noticing that our glasses were empty and was about to fetch refills.” Aubrey grabbed the plastic water bottles that were doubling as margarita glasses (they were usually used by Chloe at the gym) and waded back to the shallow end to climb up the stairs and over to the umbrellaed table near the house that Cynthia-Rose and Amy set up as a drink station.

Chloe looked back at Stacie who smiled at her and adjusted her sunglasses. “What was that about?”

“What was what about?” Stacie asked with an unwavering smile.

Chloe pulled her own sunglasses down so she could narrow her eyes at Stacie. “You hurt her, you’re excommunicated from this family.”

Stacie held up her hands defensively. “I didn’t do anything!”

“What didn’t you do?”
Chloe turned to see Beca swimming up to them, try to stand and touch the bottom but the water went up to her nose so she kicked over to hold on to the edge.

“Stacie and Bree were having a hushed, private convo when I came over here and Bree rushed off in a tizzy when I asked if I was interrupting something.” She looked at Beca.

“Nothing was going on!” Stacie said, this time loudly enough to get the attention of the rest of the girls who turned in curiosity, only to be distracted two seconds later when Flo splashed Jessica and a splash fight broke out. Emily shielded Presley from the storm, guiding him out of the war zone.

Beca stared at Chloe for a minute and then turned back to Stacie. “I swear to God if you fuck on my table -”

Stacie cut her off with a burst of laughter and then sank below the surface of the water to swim away and escape, popping up several yards away safely ensconced amongst the other girls.

“Am I burnt?” Beca asked as she untied her bikini top to let it fall off. “I feel sunburnt.”

Chloe took a step back to look. Beca definitely had tan lines on her back. “You’re a little pink, but I think you’ll be fine tomorrow. I’ll put aloe on you before we go back downstairs. Turn around?”

Beca turned and Chloe tutted. “What?” Beca looked down at her chest. “If my back’s not bad, my boobs shouldn’t be either.”

“Oh, they’re absolutely toast. I’m definitely going to have to rub aloe on them.” Chloe winked and yanked her in with a hand to her waist to kiss her. Beca smelled like chlorine and coconut and it made Chloe want to breathe her in. She kissed her harder and let her hands slip down the back of her bikini bottoms to squeeze the cool, damp flesh there and pull their hips together.

Beca hummed into the kiss and parted her lips to let Chloe in, her arms wrapping instinctively around Chloe’s neck. “Literally everyone is in this house right now,” she mumbled when they parted to take a breath.
Chloe dragged her fingernails gently across Beca’s lower back and hip until her hand was slipping down and between her legs to make Beca gasp and arch into her. “Then I guess you’ll have to keep it down.”

Beca nodded and kissed her again, backing up and pushing down her bottoms until she was sitting on the bathroom counter between sinks, Chloe between her knees and hand between her thighs.

“ Took you two long enough,” Stacie said with a sly smile from the floor once Chloe and Beca made their way downstairs, showered and dressed in comfy shorts and tank tops. “Nice to know that you still have the hots for each other after all this time.”

The girls were camped out in the living room, extra pillows and blankets folded into pillows were everywhere and someone had figured out how to turn on their overly complicated television. Presley was still solidly under Emily’s care, falling asleep where he laid in her lap, head on her arm.

“We’ve been together for three years, Conrad.” Beca shoved her way onto the couch next to Lilly, Jessica, and Ashley. “Would be pretty sad if I stopped wanting to fuck my wife after only three years.”

The room groaned at Beca’s crassness and Chloe hid her blushing face with her shirt for a second until everyone quieted. Beca was smiling at her when she resurfaced and Chloe took a seat on the floor in front of Beca’s feet.

“I didn’t mean you shouldn’t still be getting it on; I was being genuine. It’s nice to know you still get it on all the time. It’s hot. I still think about that time in Copenhagen when we were at that club and -”

“Who wants popcorn?” Chloe held up the giant bowl of the snack someone had made in their absence. She didn’t need Stacie regaling the room with the tale of how she and Beca had all but had sex on the dance floor of a club while Stacie watched and entertained a pair of suitors of her own.

“And what?” Aubrey asked and Chloe shot her a look, only then realizing she was sitting next to Stacie. Aubrey clocked Chloe’s look but reached out her leg to poke at Stacie’s back with her toe. “And what, Stace?”
Chloe grabbed a handful of popcorn and threw it at Aubrey, making everyone laugh and flinch in case they were next.

“And those two were all over each other in the club and made out for me.”

They broke out into oohs and whistles Chloe let her head fall forward into her hand, the other digging in to grab another handful of popcorn if she needed it.

“Excuse me?” Aubrey said with a laugh of disbelief.

Beca shrugged like it was no big deal. “We were really drunk.”

“But what does she mean you ‘made out for her’?”

“Yeah, Red—spill,” Amy said as she sat forward for the gossip. “Just how kinky is Bloe?”

Chloe heard Beca mutter something under her breath about not looking in their bedroom drawers and chose to ignore it. “Like Beca said, we were really drunk,” Chloe said with a shrug to match Beca’s nonchalance, but she knew her irritation was obvious when Beca started playing with her hair to make her relax.

“You were really drunk,” Cynthia-Rose prompted, “aaaand…?”

“You guys are pervs,” Beca said. “We were, like, brand new together and drunk and I got handsy on the dance floor.”

Aubrey leaned over to look between them and Stacie. “And what does Stacie have to do with this?”

“I had my own handsy partners and we were all dancing in the same area and I could see these two getting down, and we just...had a moment. I told them to kiss, and they did. And it was hot.” Stacie reached out to grab a handful of popcorn and tossed a piece into her mouth dismissively.
“So did you guys, you know,” Cynthia-Rose clicked her tongue at them and waggled her eyebrows.

“With Stacie?” Beca said and Chloe could tell she was taken aback by the suggestion by the way her hands pulled on her hair. She tried not to be affected by the sensation. “Dude, no. We left to do our own thing. Who was sharing a room with her that night? I remember someone getting kicked out.”

“Yeah, that was me,” Jessica said with a frown. “I really didn’t need to hear Stacie and her three-way so I spent the night in Lilly and Flo’s room.”

There was more laughter and teasing, but Chloe heard a quiet, “You had a ménage à trois at Worlds?” from Aubrey and suspiciously not a lot of gloating from Stacie who, any other time, would have really embellished the story.

Chloe decided that meant it was time to change the subject, pronto. “What’s college for if not experimenting, right? Now, who’s in charge of the drinks around here?”

“That’d be me, capitán!” Flo hopped to her feet and headed toward the kitchen. “Beca, do you want anything?”

“What’s on tap tonight?”

“You ran out of tequila so now we have daiquiris.”

Chloe turned to warn Beca about mixing rum with tequila. “Oh, baby, you don’t want to -”

“I know,” Beca said with a tug on the ponytail she’d pulled Chloe’s hair into. “There should be a few beers in the fridge if you guys didn’t already drink them. We’ll take those. You guys better not puke anywhere in this house except into a toilet. And Legacy, I don’t want to see you with another drink in your hand if you’re still holding my kid. It’s one or the other— got it?”

Emily gave a little salute and didn’t speak up to ask for another drink. “Got it.”

The motion sparked something in Chloe, a hundred thoughts flooding her all at once. “Oh my gosh,
why did we never do a military-themed performance?!” She whined at the missed opportunity.

“What, like marching around in fatigues?” Cynthia-Rose asked. “I don’t need more of that in my life.”

“Yes,” Chloe affirmed, “but like, bedazzled!”

“Ooh, and cute Breton stripes!” Emily added. “I’m going to tell the girls; they can do it next season.”

The excitement bubbled through the room like old times of putting together a set—what would the costumes be, and how the choreography could go, and everyone verbally jabbing at Beca for what the perfect song would be until she finally yelled that it should be “Cheap Thrills” and suddenly Emily was on the phone with the girl she’d crowned new captain of the Barden Bellas after her recent graduation to suggest it as their Southeastern Regionals performance.

“Is it weird that I don’t miss being a Bella as much as I think I should?” Aubrey asked when the room calmed down while Emily used the phone.

Chloe turned to sit on her hip so she could face her best friend. “What do you mean? We’re always going to be Bellas.”

“I don’t mean that I don’t miss you girls. I mean...it was so stressful, the competition and rehearsals, even when I wasn’t the one running things anymore. Law school is less stressful, I think,” she said with a laugh. “All I mean is that I’m glad we can just have fun together without the threat of national embarrassment constantly looming over our heads.”

“Riiight…” Beca drawled. Chloe could hear the smirk in her tone.

Amy cleared her throat. “Why do I feel like that was a not-at-all veiled jab at me?”

“Because it was,” Aubrey said in clear voice. “And I’m grateful we can spend time together now and I don’t have to worry quite so much about what you might do at any given moment.”
The room was silent save for Emily’s voice distant in the kitchen and Chloe was relieved when Beca finally spoke up and said, “Well, thanks, Aubrey. That was sufficiently awkward and only mildly insulting to everyone here. Now, who wants to pick the movie? Because you won’t like it if it’s up to me.”

Chloe saw the understanding of how her words might have been interpreted pass over Aubrey’s face and reached out, though they were too far apart for her hand to touch her. “It’s okay. We know.”

“I’m sorry, I didn’t…”

Beca tossed the remote across the room to land near Aubrey, making those around her jump in surprise. “It’s fine, blondie. Pick a movie.”

Chloe woke with a start. The room was quiet save for whatever was playing on the TV—*Steel Magnolias*, by the look of it. She glanced around. It was dark but she was able to see by the light of the TV. Jessica and Ashley were asleep under a blanket on the floor a few feet away. Flo and Lilly were absent, as were Amy and Cynthia-Rose; Chloe suspected her bed upstairs was now occupied by some combination of them, if not all four. Beca was still on the couch, evidenced by her leg serving as Chloe’s pillow. She could hear her steady breathing and knew she was asleep.

Emily was gone, as was Presley, and Chloe made to get up to check on them, only to stop once she turned.

Aubrey and Stacie were curled up together in a chair, Aubrey tilted a little onto her side to fit in the narrow space available. Her head rested on Stacie’s shoulder, hands limp in her own lap. One of Stacie’s hands seemed to rest conspicuously close to Aubrey’s.

They were both sound asleep.

Chloe gave Beca’s thigh a gentle squeeze to get her to stir, only to immediately shush her when she started to sleepily grumble and then point toward the women. She heard Beca’s thoughtful, “Hmm,” and then patted her knee.

“I’m going to check on Pres and see if we have a bed to sleep in,” she whispered to Beca and then
unfolded herself to stand up and stretch. Her back was sore, and she figured falling asleep slumped
on the floor probably wasn’t the most ergonomic. She weaved her way around furniture and feet
until she was climbing the stairs. She stopped at the nursery and, as she’d expected, saw Emily
asleep on the chaise. She crept in to find her son asleep in his crib; they hadn’t transitioned him yet
to sleeping in it overnight as it was considered better for babies to sleep in their parents’ room for
the first year, but he was asleep, and wasn’t alone, so she let them be.

She felt a hand at her back as she started toward their bedroom and reached back to take Beca’s
hand.

“Those bitches are going to be in our bed, I just know it,” Beca whispered.

It made Chloe giggle and she covered her mouth to muffle it.

They crept into their bedroom and Beca made another whispered wisecrack about how they should
just turn on all the lights and jump around on the bed to kick them out. Instead, when they made it
close enough to the bed to see, they found it empty.

“Guess they know what’s good for them,” Beca said and immediately climbed into bed and over to
her side of it.

Chloe smiled and shook her head and left to walk the rest of the hallway. She wasn’t surprised to
find her missing friends sharing the two guest rooms. She closed their doors, mostly so they
wouldn’t have to listen to Amy snore all night, and returned to her room to crawl into bed next to
Beca and wrap an arm around her waist.

“I swear if they fuck on our table…” Beca grumbled.

“Jessica and Ashley are still down there; they’re not going to fuck on our table.”

“Since when has that stopped Stacie?”

Chloe drummed her fingers on Beca’s stomach for a second. “They better not fuck on our table.”
“Will you help me find an apartment?” Aubrey asked over breakfast a week later.

Chloe looked up from the bowl of mashed sweet potatoes Beca had made Sunday night, along with a handful of other homemade baby foods. “Are you sure? You’re welcome to stay here as long as you like.”

Aubrey took a sip of her coffee. “I can’t live here forever.”

“It’s nice having a live-in nanny,” Beca said over her own cup of coffee as she scrolled through Instagram on her phone.

Aubrey ignored her. “I should find a place and get settled before the Fall semester. I don’t want to try to be moving when I’m pulling all-nighters.”

“In that case, of course, I’ll help you. Near campus, I’m guessing?”

“Not on campus, but near it, yes.”

“You’re going to make Chloe drive through Beverly Hills to see you? The rods in her closet already hate you.”

Chloe kicked at Beca under the table and Beca only laughed and kicked her back until she had Chloe’s foot caught between her own. “Hush, you.”

She couldn’t help but wonder what changed for Aubrey in the past few days to make her suddenly ready to reestablish her life.

Something told her she already knew.
Chloe woke to the feeling of soft kisses trailing up her arm to her shoulder, along her collarbone, and up her neck until warm breath washed over her ear and a tongue traced its edge.

“Happy birthday,” Beca whispered before sucking on her earlobe, a hand gliding over Chloe’s stomach and until fingertips were circling her left breast.

“Why don’t you wake me up like this every day?” Chloe mumbled as she turned onto her back to let Beca have better access to her body.

“I wake you up like this plenty.” Beca took quick advantage of the offer and moved to straddle her hips, lips now at work on Chloe’s neck. “But if I did it every day, I’d have to think of something else for your birthdays.”

“Wouldn’t want that, now would we?” Her breath caught as Beca’s teeth pressed into her skin.

Beca hummed in agreement and made her way down Chloe’s body until she had her legs comfortably over her shoulders. “No. Because I definitely want to do this. Maybe like birthday spankings, I could get you off once for every year?”

Chloe burst out laughing and then groaned happily as she gave Beca’s hair a playful tug because she knew Beca would do it if she agreed. “I might die if you make me come 28 times.”

“I’ve made you come hundreds of times.” Beca grinned up at her proudly. “Maybe thousands.”

Chloe laughed again and started to sit up. “You know what I mean. But I won’t say no to that spanking.”

Beca nipped at her thigh. “Turn over and get on your hands and knees.”
Chloe couldn’t stop giggling to herself as she buckled Presley into his car seat. “Ready to go surprise Mommy?”

Beca was working despite it being a holiday—Halloween, but a holiday nonetheless. She’d apologized to Chloe profusely via text that she might miss their planned night of handing out candy to the kids who lived in their neighborhood while marathoning *Friday the 13th* movies. Chloe understood and wasn’t mad, though she couldn’t help but be disappointed.

Which was why she decided to take a little bit of the fun to Beca.

It was a short drive to Record Plant Recording Studios which was wonderfully convenient for Beca when she ran perpetually late and Chloe was grateful for it tonight as she was too excited to deal with traffic for more than 20 minutes. She parked in the lot across the street, checked herself in the rearview mirror to make sure her hair was still tied back neatly, and hopped out to haul Presley out of the back seat and sling the garment bag over her shoulder. She straightened his outfit on her way in best she could with her hands full, double-checking everything in the reflection of the glass door before she rang the buzzer. The electronic lock popped and the young man Chloe knew to be an intern at the studio—much like Beca had been in college—let her in.

“Hey, Mrs. Beale,” he said with a nod as he let her pass.

“You know you can call me Chloe, Todd.”

“Sorry, Mrs. Beale.”

She shook her head and smiled at him. “Still in two?”

“Yeah. Can I get you anything?”

“I’m good, thanks,” Chloe said with a smile as she made her way down the hall.
She paused outside the door of Studio SSL 2 to watch through its small window. Beca was seated in front of the massive console (three times the size of the one in her home studio) fiddling with one slider and then another, sometimes several at the same time with both hands, then pressing buttons that made some things light up and others turn off while she nodded along to a rhythm. There were few things Chloe loved watching more than Beca at work making music. The way she moved was hypnotic, confident, fluid and in-charge, almost like a queen holding court.

She could see Emily, too, through the plexiglass window of the ISO booth on the far side, headphones on and singing, and she felt even giddier than when she’d left the house. There was something so special about Beca and Emily working together and it warmed her heart. The Bellas truly were a sisterhood for life, and she was eternally grateful.

But Beca wasn’t alone in the control room and something about that made Beca even more attractive to her. There were people there who reported to Beca for all intents and purposes, who were effectively employed by her or otherwise dependent upon the success of this project. They were there to listen, or to assist, or to learn, and all of it was for—or because of—Beca.

It was so hot.

Chloe had watched Beca work enough over the years to recognize the pattern of cutting a take to stop and talk to her artist. She waited for that, for Beca to slide one side of her headphones off her ear, and rang the doorbell to make a light in the room flash.

She wasn’t surprised to see Beca gesture for someone else get up to answer it. As soon as the door opened she shushed the girl from saying anything and shooed her aside. It took a second for her to get the hint but she finally moved so Chloe could sneak in before Beca got curious. She hung up the garment bag in the lounge and returned.

“Just like we practiced, okay?” she whispered to Presley as she held up her hand, having to raise and lower it a few times before he finally mimicked her and held up one of his own. “Trick or treat!” Chloe cheered as she struck her pose behind Beca.

She heard Beca’s squawk of surprise before she turned with a smile that immediately fell to nothing, then burst into one of the biggest grins Chloe had ever seen from her.

“I’ve got the magic in me!” Chloe sang.
“Oh, my God, what is happening right now?” Beca said as she pulled off her headphones and turned quickly to punch a button. “Legacy, take five. Chloe’s here. The rest of you can take a break, too,” she said to dismiss her staff as she rushed over to Chloe and Presley. “Where the hell-heck did you find this?” She tugged on Chloe’s burgundy necktie and then swooned over Presley’s matching tie. “And this! Oh, my God. Where do you get a velvet blazer this tiny?!” Beca plucked Presley out of Chloe’s arms to prop him on her hip and fawn over his costume. “I seriously never thought I’d see the day that my son was a Treblemaker. Or my wife, for that matter. Traitor.”

Chloe bounced on her toes, overjoyed that Beca was so tickled by their costumes. She’d asked Benji who the Trebles bought their trademark coats from to get one for herself in what had started out as an idea for roleplaying that she thought might be toeing the line between sexy and weird, but when she’d gone online to place her order and found child sizes, she’d been unable to resist.

“We said, ‘Trick or treat.’” She smiled at Beca and held out her hand.

“There’s candy in the lounge if you really want something,” Beca said with a laugh while she played with Presley.

“I don’t want candy.” Chloe dropped her voice as she said it and it got Beca’s attention. “I want a treat.” She snagged Beca’s sleeve and tugged her over. “Come here and kiss me.”

“Oh. Gladly,” Beca said as their lips met. It wasn’t hot and heavy but it made Chloe’s pulse race nonetheless. Beca looked dizzy when she pulled back. “Whoa, I’m—I think my brain is confused about how it’s supposed to react to kissing you when you’re dressed like this.”

“Because it knows you should have been kissing me that night,” Chloe answered with a wink and a poke to Beca’s stomach.

Beca frowned at her and poked her right back. “You’re never going to let that go, huh?”

“Nope,” Chloe grinned. “So how’s it going? I know you said you had to stay late, but any chance we can steal you?”

Beca sat back down and shifted Presley to sit in her lap; she took care to keep his hands away from anything important as she pushed more buttons to start playback for Chloe to hear. “We’re in a really good groove right now, so - ”
“O-M-G, O-M-G!”

“Nevermind.”

“Did she bring—she did!” was the way Emily made her entrance into the room. “Give him to meeeeee,” she said in a playful voice as she rushed to snatch Presley away from Beca. “Why are you dressed—is this your Halloween costume?!” She looked at Chloe and almost shrieked. “This is the cutest thing ever!!”

“Thanks,” Chloe said with a laugh as Emily bounced around the room dancing to the song playing through the speakers. “You sound great, by the way, Em.”

Emily rolled her eyes at the compliment. “Thanks for showing up. My voice is tired but I didn’t want to say anything.”

“What?!” Beca said as she spun in her chair. “You gotta tell me these things, dude. I can’t have you lose it; we’ll fall behind schedule and this is already a really aggressive roll-out.”

“Sorry,” Emily said with a meek shrug before going back to her dancing.

“Okay, then I guess yeah, I’m getting out of here as soon as everything backs up.” Beca punched more buttons and typed something into her laptop.

“Awes!” Chloe said excitedly. “I brought your costume, too; it’s in the lounge.”

“My costume?” Beca stood up and headed for the other room. “Should I be nervous?”

“No. Go change. We still have time to trick-or-treat at Bree’s before he gets too cranky.”

“If this is what I think it is, she’s going to have a coronary.” Beca said as she stepped into the adjacent lounge. She only half-closed the door and Chloe stole a selfish glance or two while Beca unzipped the bag to examine its contents, shake her head, and start to undress.
“Do you want to come with us or did you have plans tonight?” Chloe asked Emily. “I can’t imagine you don’t.”

“The label’s having some kind of party and this guy asked me to go, but...eh.” Emily shrugged and pulled another face to try to get Presley to smile for her photo. “I need to save my voice. I don’t want to get -”

“Nodes, right,” Chloe finished sympathetically. “You really, really don’t. Make sure you steam as soon as you get home.”

“I will. I’ll come with you guys, though. At least I’ll get a little Halloween fun until I go to bed before midnight. What’s Beca’s costume? Is she going to be a Treble, too?”

“I hate you,” Beca answered as she re-emerged. “I feel like we sold our souls.”

Emily squealed and Presley echoed it—any reason to make noise was a good one for him.

Chloe turned and took in Beca in the black button-down, burgundy tie, and matching blazer she’d brought for her and was so taken aback she had to sit down. “Oh, wow.”

Beca tugged at the knot on her eye to loosen it a bit. “What?”

“I’m so glad you got that rule vetoed about sleeping with Trebles.”

Beca laughed and gestured at Chloe. “Same.”

“Ahh! Ew!” Emily cried as she covered one of Presley’s ears and pressed his other to her shoulder. “There are children present!”

“I think you’re old enough to have The Talk, Legacy,” Beca said as she started to disconnect her computer from the console. “You see when two people love each other very much…”

Emily laughed. “Stop! Okay, I can’t be the only one without a costume if we’re going trick-or-
treated. Don’t suppose you brought a spare?”

Chloe had to fight her intense need to grab Beca by the tie to pull her onto her lap. “Oh, no! I didn’t!”

“I left my flannel in there,” Beca said with a tilt of her head as she finished packing up her things. Chloe watched her fiddle with the strap of her bag until she was holding out her hand, her yellow Bellas scarf in her fingers. “Go as me. Let’s really twist this up.”

Emily’s squeal was tight-lipped as she lit up. “Then I have to fix my makeup. I hope I have eyeliner with me.” She passed Presley back to Chloe, grabbed her purse, and disappeared into the lounge.

“I don’t even wear that much eyeliner,” Beca huffed through a smile as she plopped onto the couch to wait.

“Maybe not anymore.” Chloe got up to join her and settled alongside Beca with Presley on her lap, nice and cozy, to finally wrap her fingers around that tie and pull her in for a kiss.

A few minutes later, a polite cough interrupted them and Chloe looked up to find Emily waiting awkwardly. She was dressed in Beca’s purple and black flannel, left unbuttoned with the sleeves rolled up—presumably because it was a size too small for her—over a black tank. She’d darkened her eye makeup and changed the part in her hair from the center to the left and Beca’s scarf was tied around her wrist. She slouched purposefully and rolled her eyes.

“Nice, Legacy,” Beca said as she peeled herself off Chloe to leave. “You’re hot.”

Emily frowned. “That’s weird. Don’t do that.”

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**November 2018**

“Chloe!” Beca’s voice rang down from somewhere upstairs.
Chloe didn’t bother looking up from the assignments she was grading. It was adorable, really, reviewing her little kindergarteners’ projects that had them gluing Mr. Potato Head-like cut-out shapes of eyes, noses, mouths, and feet onto an outline of a person. Sometimes she wished life could be as simple as having to learn the names of body parts. “What?” she yelled back.

“Get up here! Right now!” Beca’s voice grew shrill and impatient; whatever it was was important. “Hurry!”

Important or serious. Was she hurt? Was Presley? Was he sick? She dropped her pen and took the stairs two at a time. “What’s wrong?” she shouted, heart in her throat. “Where are you?”

“In here, in here!”

She skidded to a stop in front of the nursery, eyes searching frantically for Beca until she felt something swat at her calf and then squeeze it. She looked down to see Beca on her knees in the doorway with her phone extended in front of her.

“C’mon! That’s it—you got it!”

“What -”

That’s when she saw him.

Her little boy—somehow not quite so little anymore, yet still so small—in his Paw Patrol-patterned diaper and nothing else because letting him feed himself ravioli in tomato sauce had sent his white T-shirt straight to the trash—standing a couple feet away focusing intently on his stuffed pink and purple hippopotamus that was placed on the floor with apparent purpose in front of Beca.

He’d figured out how to pull himself up two months ago during a screaming tantrum involving Chloe unwittingly picking up one of his blankets cast aside on the floor and putting it on the couch and him noticing her taking it away from him. He wanted it back.

Last month, he’d worked out how to put one foot in front of the other if he was holding on to the edge of the couch so he could get to Beca and the bright red bottle of Gatorade dangling in her hand while she chatted with Emily’s manager and Luke on the phone to start informal negotiations for Beca to produce Emily’s sophomore album. Chloe had come in from work just as Beca was helping him to take a drink from the bottle and Beca’d had to make her calm down about letting
him have something so sugary (“It was one sip, Chlo. He practically walked over to me!”); once Chloe had realized what had happened they’d hugged each other and hugged him and spent the next several days further baby-proofing their home.

For the last two weeks, he’d trusted their hands instead of the solid furniture and been able to take a few wobbly off-balance steps before the coordination fell apart and they’d scoop him up or let him down gently to sit and crawl or try again.

Their friends had begun to tease Beca on Instagram about posting so many photos of him standing on his own or following Chloe hand-in-hand. (Her fans did their best to defend her.)

She couldn’t contain her squeal of excitement and she regretted it when she saw it distract him. He looked up from the hippo, startled, and started to fall.

But he caught himself on his hands and straightened his compact little self and zeroed back in on the toy.

And he took a step. It was more like a stomp, really, and it only moved him forward an inch or two, but it was a real step.

Presley’s very first.

“Oh, my gosh,” she whispered, tears already filling her eyes. She wanted to crouch down and hug Beca while they experienced it together but she didn’t want to distract him again. He was trying so hard.

“That’s it, buddy, just like that.” Beca nudged the hippo toward him a little more and his other foot stomped forward.

Chloe held her breath, hands over her mouth to contain the excitement desperate to burst forth, and settled for bumping Beca with her knee over and over until Beca waved for her to stop because she was trying to record it all. “Sorry, oh, my gosh,” she whispered again.

It was three-and-a-half steps, but it was enough for him to reach his goal (with a little help from Beca nudging the hippo closer to make up for that missed half-step), and Chloe nearly fell over Beca as they both rushed to sweep him up into their arms at the same time. Beca won by default,
already being in front and at his level, so Chloe glommed on from behind to wrap them both up as tightly as she could.

“When did you get so big, huh?” Beca asked as she peppered kisses into his dark hair. “Who said you could start growing up?”

Chloe squeezed them tighter, overrun with emotion as tears fell. “I don’t think I’m ready to have a toddler.”

Beca chuckled and leaned back into her for a moment before bending to set down their wiggling, protesting *toddler* so he could get back to his very important job of waving around Henrietta the Hippo and yelling, “Ah!” over and over again. “I don’t think we have a choice.” She turned in Chloe’s arms and leaned up to kiss her. “I love you.”

Chloe held Beca close by her waist, overwhelmed with emotion. “I love you, too. I’m so happy.”

Beca smiled at her. “Me, too.” She pecked Chloe’s lips again. “Now grab him and come help me in the kitchen. I want to try doing the turkey with a new marinade recipe this year and I need a trial run so I don’t disappoint your parents. Roasted chicken for dinner tonight.”

“Wait, no, baby, send me that video first; we have to send it to our parents! And the girls! And put it on Instagram! I need to brag that he started walking so early!”

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**December 2018**

“No, no, no! Presley, no! Baby, grab him, the tree -.” Chloe watched it happen in slow motion. She was stuck at the top of the ladder in their living room with a hammer in one hand and a fistful of nails in the other, unable to climb down quickly enough. She heard Beca swear and watched her drop the red and green storage tub on her own feet, swear again, and then stumble over it to run the four steps needed to scoop Presley up in one arm around the middle like a football, hands and feet dangling, and throw her other hand out to stop the Christmas tree from crashing on top of them.

It was five seconds of chaos followed by stunning silence.
It was broken by a peal of laughter and Chloe exhaled in relief as she rushed down the ladder to take Presley from Beca so they could untangle her from the mess.

“Let go. Let go,” Beca pleaded. “Sweetie, let go. Let me have it.” Beca tugged at the string of silver garland in his fist that caused the near-collapse until he released it.

He was still laughing at the explosion of activity as Chloe set him in his playpen to keep him contained, now sure he was fine after she looked him over; if he wasn’t, he’d be screaming, not laughing. She hurried back to help Beca.

“Are you okay?” she asked as she reached through branches to find the tree trunk and tip it back into place with Beca’s help.

Beca extracted her arm gingerly with a wince. Her forearm was covered in scratches, several of them starting to seep blood. She looked at her arm and sighed and then let Chloe take it to examine it, too. “The Christmas tree didn’t crush our kid, so, yeah, I guess I’m fine.”

Chloe chuckled and kissed her hand, cautious to avoid the numerous wounds. “Come on, let’s get you patched up.”

Beca followed her into the kitchen and dutifully washed her arm fingers to elbow and let Chloe pat it dry with a paper towel. “I guess today’s lesson is to anchor the tree like it’s a bookcase.”

“I’ll run some string around it and hook it to a bolt in the wall.” Chloe pressed down on a couple scratches that were still streaking crimson on the towel and felt Beca’s hand tuck into her rear pocket to squeeze.

“My very own Bob Vila,” Beca said with a crooked smile.

“And you’re my very own Wonder Woman.” Chloe grabbed the Band-Aids from where she’d learned it was good to keep a box: in the cabinet above the counter where they did most of their slicing and chopping. “That was like the scene in the movie where she catches the tank and throws it back at the bad guy. Except it was hotter because you saved my baby and not a mad scientist.” She split open the packaging on a bandage to apply it to the worst scratch—the only one that didn’t want to stop bleeding.
“You keep talking like that, I’ll have to use my Lasso of Truth to tie you up later.”

Chloe finished smoothing the Band-Aid over Beca’s arm and gave Beca’s cheek a pat. “Nice try. After that heroic performance, you’re mine tonight.”

“Chlo, he doesn’t need anything else.”

Chloe shrugged and put the box containing what promised to be an educational—and not at all headache-inducing—drum into the shopping cart Beca was pushing through Target. “This is for his birthday.”

“He has enough for his birthday, too.”

Chloe was ready to argue about it but when she looked at Beca and saw the amusement on her face, she dropped her defense and instead teased, “Half the stuff in this cart is from you. How many Little People sets do you think he needs?”

Beca started walking, pushing ahead toward the next aisle in the toy department. “What was that? I can’t hear you.”

“You wanna lick the bowl?”

“Mm, babe, I thought you’d never ask.”

Chloe looked up from the mixing bowl in front of her on the counter. There was a dollop of chocolate chip cookie dough left in it and the house was filled with the aroma of freshly baked cookies. Beca was sitting on the other side of the counter smirking at her. “I don’t know how you made that dirty.”

Beca shrugged and held out her hand. “You’re the one who said it. I didn’t make it dirty. It’s
dirty.”

Chloe slid the bowl across the countertop to her. “We are baking cookies for Santa. Stop being inappropriate.”

Beca dragged her finger through the dough and brought it to her mouth. “You won’t be telling me to stop later.”

“I don’t even know what it means,” Chloe said with a playful huff. She had a few ideas of what it could mean. All of them, paired with Beca’s demeanor, were promising.

Beca made a show of licking the dough off her finger before going in for a second, more G-rated helping. “Trust me. You like it.”

“Okay, stop being a perv,” Chloe said after tamping down the arousal trying to blossom to start cleaning up the mess she’d made while mixing up the cookies. “We need to finish baking these and you still have a bunch of stuff to wrap before we can go to bed.”

“Correction: we have a bunch of stuff to wrap.”

“No, you have a bunch of stuff to wrap. I already wrapped all my gifts.” Chloe snagged the bowl back from Beca to start washing it. “Will you set the timer for eight minutes? I forgot.”

She heard Beca get off her stool followed by the beeps of her setting the timer on the front of the oven. “Okay, it’s way too quiet in here. I’m going to go investigate.”

“Holler if you need help.” She was almost finished scrubbing the bowl when a pinch on her rear made her yelp. She spun with a laugh and flicked water at Beca who was already out of range.

“What? It was an elf.”

“I’m not going to forget that you just called yourself an elf!”
Chloe couldn’t help but snap a photo of the scene in front of her.

She’d gone upstairs to check on Beca’s progress but she wasn’t prepared for what she walked into.

Beca was in the middle of the floor of their guest room—the official present-hiding room—surrounded by an even mix of packaged children’s toys, gift-wrapped boxes, discarded crumples of paper, and a dozen half-used rolls of wrapping paper, some glittering, some metallic, some covered in cartoon Santas and penguins and snowmen and reindeer. At the moment, she was trying to make the piece of paper she’d cut fit on the box containing a lamp that would cast animal-shaped shadows onto the walls as it rotated, though it was clear she’d cut it inches too short.

“Damn it,” Beca muttered to herself as she gave up and tossed aside the paper to start anew.

“Baby.”

Beca glanced up and noticed Presley on Chloe’s hip. “Sorry. Wait, hey, get him out of here, he’s going to see!” Beca snatched the discarded paper and tried to toss it to land over the unwrapped toys, only for it to roll up into itself and reveal the surprise.

“Oh, he’s fine,” Chloe said with a teasing smile as she ducked her head down to get Presley’s attention by blowing a raspberry against his cheek. It made him shriek with laughter and latch on to a lock of Chloe’s hair. He didn’t pull, so she let him play with it. “See? So fickle.”

The warm smile suddenly vanished from Beca’s face like she’d been caught, and she turned stern, but it was a comical attempt. “Don’t you dare get him all riled up before bedtime. I don’t want to be up all night.”

“Looks like you’re going to be up all night anyway,” Chloe said as she nodded at the pile of still-unwrappred gifts.

Beca groaned and threw down the scissors in frustration. “I suck at this.”

Chloe offered a coo of sympathy as she weaved her way further into the room, stepping around boxes and bags and bows. “Tell you a secret?”
Beca’s eyes flicked up at her and she went back to pouting. “What.”

“You don’t have to wrap all these tonight; save the rest for his birthday. He has more than enough gifts from everyone—especially from Santa.”

She watched Beca’s frown deepen. “This is one of those times I feel like I’m not being a good mom. It’s his first Christmas and I can’t even get his presents wrapped in time.”

Chloe stopped the teasing, then, and dropped down to crouch next to her. “Baby, you are an amazing mom and that has nothing to do with how many presents our son has under the Christmas tree.” She reached for Beca to frame her face with a soft touch to guide her to meet her eyes. “You are a good mom.”

Tears welled in Beca’s eyes. “I’m just so tired,” she croaked as her hands shoved at the chaos surrounding her before covering her face with a sob.

“Okay,” Chloe said as she reached for Beca’s arm to help her to her feet, “come on. You’re going to put him to bed and I’m going to take everything you wrapped downstairs and get ready for Santa to visit.” She guided Beca out of the guest room and down the hall until they were in their bedroom and she passed Presley to her with a hug and a kiss to both of them. “Come downstairs once he’s down.”

Beca nodded and held Chloe’s hug a beat longer than usual.

Chloe worked while Beca took care of getting Presley ready for bed. She stacked wrapped packages as high as she dared to carry them down and arrange them under the Christmas tree. There were already several gifts there, mailed in advance from grandparents, uncles, and friends, along with Chloe’s presents for Presley and Beca.

As she crawled around to make everything fit she found a couple gifts she hadn’t noticed before, small ones wrapped neatly and labeled with her and Presley’s names, both from Beca. She pulled them out so they wouldn’t get lost among the larger items and placed them atop the giant box containing a Power Wheels dune buggy that Beca insisted on buying. Chloe was already prepared for the number of times her feet would be run over by its plastic wheels.
It took three more trips to relocate everything from the guest room to the tree.

When she was finished she made her way to the kitchen and the freshly baked cookies. She knew Presley was too young to understand Santa and something like leaving cookies out for him, but it was fun for her. She arranged a trio of the treats on a holiday-patterned plate and poured a glass of milk and tucked a napkin under it before snapping a photo.

She returned to the living room to dim the lights and put on some Christmas music and wait for Beca. Only the Christmas lights on the tree remained on and she took a step back to admire the scene.

She smiled when she felt an arm slide around her waist from behind to tug her closer.

“Uh oh.”

“Why ‘uh oh’?” she asked as she leaned into Beca’s embrace. A dancing shadow above her caught her eye so she glanced up to see a sprig of decorative mistletoe held above her. “Oh no! That means we have to kiss!”

The mistletoe disappeared and Beca’s other arm wrapped around her. “Sorry. I don’t make the rules.”

“Ugh,” Chloe said with a scoff as she turned around to slip her arms over Beca’s shoulders. “Gross.”

Beca wrinkled her nose at her. “I know, it sucks.”

Chloe nodded and leaned in. “So much.”

Their lips grazed and she heard Beca’s breath catch the tiniest bit and Chloe’s heart skipped. It didn’t matter how many times they kissed, it could still feel like their first. Beca pulled her closer so Chloe changed her angle to capture Beca’s lips in the way she knew was guaranteed to make her moan.
“Mm, I love you,” Beca said once they parted and pecked Chloe’s lips one more time.

“I love you, too.” Chloe smiled and was about to pull her into another kiss when Beca ducked under her arm to trade places. She squeezed Beca tightly.

“This is pretty great.”

Chloe held Beca close and let her lips graze the shell of her ear as she hummed in agreement. “Feeling better?”

Beca nodded. “Sorry. I just wanted it to be perfect for him.”

Chloe shushed her and gave her a squeeze. “Don’t apologize. This is perfect.” Chloe took in the quiet scene in front of them: the tree, the twinkling lights, the ornaments that were the perfect combination of Beca’s and her collections. The stockings she’d hung on the wall, Beca’s, hers, and one bigger than both of theirs combined for their son. The quiet carols playing in the background. The love of her life in her arms. And the other asleep upstairs in his crib.

Beca leaned into Chloe and sighed. “I guess it is, huh?”

“Mhm.” Chloe kissed her cheek and slipped her hand under the hem of Beca’s tee to feel the warm skin of her stomach. “Let’s go to bed.”

Beca’s hand covered Chloe’s and guided it higher until it was cupping her breast. “Good idea.”

Chloe chuckled in her ear and kissed it again. “Okay. And baby?”

“Hmm?”

“I Googled ‘licking the bowl.’” She nipped at one of Beca’s piercings and felt her whole body tense.
With a sexy little growl, Beca spun in her arms and brought their lips together.

Chloe smiled against her heated kiss and started walking backward toward the stairs. “Come on; let me show you what I learned.”
First Day

Chapter Summary

My dearest friends,

We have been on this journey together for 3.5 years. I have poured my heart and soul into this story and have cherished all of you for taking this massive adventure with me.

But alas, all journeys must come to an end, and this dear, dear story has found its finale.

Thank you to every single person who’s taken the time to read, to share, to comment. I've made dozens and dozens of friends and am so grateful to you all.

I won't stop writing, so if you'd like to keep up with me, visit my profile and subscribe. You can also connect with me on tumblr (same name).

Thank you to everyone again. This experience has been one for a lifetime.

p.s. Remember the song Beca spent 3 years writing for Chloe? Listen to it here.

Chapter Notes

There are images used in this chapter which are important to the story; if you see holes or errors, please let me know! xo

September 6, 2023

“Baby, we gotta go!” Chloe called up the stairs.

“I know, I know!” echoed back down to her. Beca appeared a few seconds later, running down the stairs and nearly falling in her haste.

Chloe caught her at the bottom of the stairs to get her to slow down. “Whoa, careful. We don’t need you breaking your arm or something.”
“Sorry, yeah, I’m…” She took a breath. “Sorry. Nervous.”

“You’re nervous?” Chloe asked with a smile. “Not only am I sending my kid to his very first day of school, I’m also his teacher.”

“Not a competition.” Beca smiled back.

“Mooooommy! Come on!”

“Uh oh,” Chloe said with a laugh.

“Called out by a five-year-old. I’m coming, dude!”

Chloe followed Beca to the front door where Presley was waiting in his special first day of school clothes: navy blue shorts, a gray tee with a Tyrannosaurus rex on it, and brand new black Converse low-tops. His backpack, comically large on his 3½-foot tall frame, also sported dinosaurs. They were, of course, his current fixation.

Chloe wondered if this one would outlast the last three of the year: robots, unicorns, and—weirdly—corn.

She gathered her last couple things while she watched Beca crouch in front of him and adjust the straps of his backpack and straighten his shorts. “Remember what we talked about?”

Presley nodded, eyes fixated on Beca’s hands. “Be nice and make a friend.”

“And what else?”

“Listen to Mama.”

“And?” She smoothed her hand over his well-gelled short, dark auburn hair but took care to not mess up the spiky parts in the front he obsessed over.
“Say if I have to go pee.”

Chloe bit her lip to keep from laughing; she hadn’t been privy to whatever school preparation conversation Beca had had with him and now she wished she had been.

“And the last thing?”

“Remember to call Mama Miss Chloe, not Mama.”

“Good job. High five,” Beca said as she held up his hand so he could smack it before she gave him a big hug. “I love you.”

“Love you,” his muffled voice replied. “Is it time for school now?”

“Almost,” Chloe said as she held up the blackboard in her hand. “Let’s go outside and take your picture.”

“But I wanna go to school!”

Beca laughed as she stood and opened the door. “Famous last words. We have to take your picture first, that’s the rule. Out you go. Go stand in the yard; Mama has your sign.”

Chloe watched Beca watch him bound out the front door and felt the emotions trying to creep up on her. It didn’t help that when Beca looked back for her she was already crying.

“Oh my gosh, don’t you start,” Chloe said with a laugh as she rushed over to hug Beca.

“This is fucking crazy,” Beca whispered into her neck as she held her. “We’re so old.”

Chloe laughed again and leaned back to kiss her. “Speak for yourself. We are totes still young.”
“True.” Beca grinned at her. “At least I’m still in my twenties.”

Chloe shook her playfully and then gave her another quick kiss. “Shut up. Let’s go; I can’t be late on our first day.”

August 2026

“Why can’t I have a dog?”

“Because you’re not old enough to take care of it by yourself,” Chloe said as she supervised Presley’s thoroughness in putting away his own clean clothes.
“But Jackson is 8 and he has a dog.”

“I’m sure Jackson’s parents help him.”

“You and Mommy wouldn’t help me with my dog?”

Chloe sighed and smiled at his big, sad dark eyes. Beca’s eyes, but he’d mastered Chloe’s art of begging years ago. “You keep Mommy and me busy enough.”

“I promise to pick up the poop.”

“A dog is a lot of work, sweetheart. Maybe when you’re older.”

“What if Mommy says yes?”

“I already said no. Now finish up; dinner’s almost ready.”

“Fine.”

“Don’t hate me.”

Chloe glanced at Beca next to her in bed. “What did you do?” she asked slowly.

“I said you can’t hate me.”

Chloe set her tablet down so she could look at Beca squarely. “Tell me what you did first.”

Beca was visibly nervous, shifty and playing with her hair. “He cornered me, okay? You know I
can’t handle it when he asks nicely.”

“Beca…”

“He asked me if we could get a dog.”

“Beca! I already told him no. Please tell me you didn’t -”

“He did that puppy-dog thing with his eyes like you and you know I can’t say no to it!” Beca groaned and hid her face in her hands.

“Then you negotiate him down from a dog to a hamster! We talked about our strategy last time he asked.”

“That was a year ago and he’s older now -”

“Was that his argument?” Chloe said with a light laugh. She wasn’t mad, but boy, was she something.

“...Maybe. But dogs are good for kids! He’s old enough that he’ll really bond with it and have a friend, and it will teach him more responsibility.” Beca looked at her and Chloe had to try to not laugh at how upset with herself Beca looked. “And you love dogs!”

“That doesn’t mean I have the patience or time to own one! You know he runs us ragged between practice and Scouts and guitar, so either you tell him we’re not getting a dog, or you’re the number one dog caregiver.”

“He said he’d clean up after it.”

“He’s 8, Beca. He’s not getting a dog. We’re getting a dog.”

A shriek from the doorway got their attention. “We’re getting a dog?!”
Chloe sighed and pinched the bridge of her nose. “Oh my…Pres, honey, why aren’t you in bed?”

“I wanted to say goodnight.”

“We already said goodnight, buddy,” Beca said. “Maybe you decided you didn’t want to be in bed?”

“Maybe,” he said as he wiggled in the entrance to their bedroom. “Are we really getting a dog?”

Chloe looked at his excitement and hope, and even Beca seemed excited about it despite her guilt. She sighed in defeat. “Fine, we can get a dog.”

“Yes! Thank you!”

The next thing she knew, Presley barreled into the room and onto their bed to throw his arms around Chloe’s neck. She laughed as she hugged him and threw a playful glare at Beca.
April 12, 2027

“Shit, I’m so out of practice.”

Chloe watched Beca struggle with getting the velcro tabs tight enough that the tiny diaper wouldn’t work its way off. “Need help?”

“I’m fine. Okay, Pres, go wash your hands and sit in the big chair in the corner.”

“Okay!”

Chloe pressed the button to tilt her bed up a bit more so she could see better; if she wasn’t already emotionally spent she would have cried at all the memories watching Beca swaddle their newborn in a blanket. She had been sure of herself even the very first time so many years ago when Presley was only minutes old. She was sure again now, and despite her frustrations, much more efficient than she had been that very first time.
“There we go,” Beca said as she lifted her out of the bassinet. She was quiet save for a few little grunts. “Are you going to be a screamer, too? I hope not,” she said as she kissed her forehead.

Presley still wasn’t back from Chloe’s delivery room bathroom so Beca took a seat on the edge of Chloe’s bed.

“How are you doing?” Beca asked, one hand on Chloe’s knee, the other holding their new addition easily in one arm.

“I don’t know if I’m more hungry or tired,” she said with a laugh that made her wince.

“I’ll make sure they bring you something to eat.”

“Did you call Bree?”

“Yeah; she’ll be by in an hour. Said she’s all set for a sleepover with Pres. I think Stacie’s setting them up to make homemade pizzas or something.”

“Oh, he’s going to love that.”

“I’m sure he’ll make something disgusting.” Beca leaned sideways, having to stretch a little, to kiss her. “I still can’t believe you did this,” she said after a minute, lifting the tiny bundle.

“We did this.”

“Okay, I washed my hands,” Presley announced as he marched back into the room. “And my arms. And my face.”

Chloe laughed. “Good job. Hop up in the chair over there so you can hold her.” She watched him hop into the chair and settle back into it, arms out expectantly.
“Okay, fold your arms like I am,” Beca said as she stood up. “Just remember to support her head and don’t hold her too tightly or squish her to your chest. And don’t bounce around.”

“Yeah, I got it, I won’t.”

Chloe watched Beca cautiously pass their new daughter to their son and somehow found more tears to cry. Beca must have heard her because she looked over her shoulder from where she was keeping watch and gave her a wink and a gentle smile.

“Hi, Stevie,” he whispered and Chloe could see the awe on his face clear across the room. “I’m your big brother, Presley, and I’m going to take care of you.”

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September 7, 2032
August 16, 2036

“Humor us. Please?” Chloe asked.

“Ma, there are people everywhere.”

“Who cares? They don’t know you.”

“That’s the point! I don’t want to look lame.”

“You don’t look lame, you look handsome. And the longer we argue about this, the longer it is until we leave. So.” Chloe folded her arms, blackboard sign and chalk in her hand.
“Presley, listen to your mother,” Beca said firmly. “Let her take your damn picture.”

“Fine,” he said with a huff and held out his hand for the sign. “At least let me fill it out myself.”

Chloe beamed and handed it to him.

“Don’t be a smartass on it,” Beca said to him as she closed the trunk of their rented Audi.

Chloe leaned on the car next to her and felt Beca’s arm slip around her waist.

“This is fucking crazy,” Beca whispered as she pulled Chloe closer. “We’re so old.”

“We are totes still young.”

“I don’t think our forties count as young anymore.”

Chloe nudged her with her hip. “I love you.”

“I love you, too.” Beca paused, then, “It’s weird to be here. Good weird, but weird.”

Chloe gazed out at the hustle and bustle of the thousands of students (and their parents) on the Barden University campus, suitcases and boxes and luggage carts moving into dorms. At their son, all but fully grown, with a backpack on one shoulder and messy hair he insisted was cool and torn jeans and a Lakers T-shirt, and she couldn’t help but think about his very first day of school. She still had his dinosaur backpack in a box somewhere.

“Why is it weird?”

Chloe glanced down at Stevie sitting on the curb playing her video game. “Because last time your mommy and I were here, we were Presley’s age, and now we’re back to drop him off for his first day of college.”
“I don’t think it’s weird. I think it’s cool.”

She felt Beca shake with silent laughter. “I’m glad you think it’s cool; maybe you’ll want to come here, too,” Beca said after a minute.

“I want to be a Bella, so I have to come here.”

It was all too much and Chloe felt the tears sneaking up on her, but Presley spoke up just in time.

“All right, let’s do this before the entire school sees me.”

Chloe clapped and grabbed her phone as he flipped the sign around and smiled.
The End

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