A Touch Up

by EonAO3

Summary

You're a hairstylist, landing a job on the latest Captain America film. Your chief responsibility? Keeping Chris Evans perfectly coiffed throughout the shoot. It's a rough job, but someone's got to do it.
"And cut! Alright everybody, let's reset. Where's [y/n]?” The director looked around over his shoulder as you wedged yourself forward. "Hey, good. His hair, [y/n]. Let's go more mussed up. He's been fighting, it's hot. Let's try a little more 'sweaty, hard day'.”

You nodded, glancing around for your subject. Raising on your toes and craning your neck, you spot him. There was Chris Evans, under the shade of a pop up canopy, gesturing an idea across the set in front of him to one of the stunt coordinators with a bottle of water in one hand and pair of sunglasses in the other. You made your way around the front of the cameras toward your star, pulling a spray bottle off your belt of tricks as you moved. You stood by politely, giving him a moment to finish his thoughts with the stunt guy before you’d interrupt. He turned his head to smile at you as he spoke, seeing you stop at the edge of the shade. You held up the bottle in your hand and smiled a silent apology for bothering him as he finished.

"Hey, [y/n],” he said. "Mess up again?"

"No,” you told him, stepping forward and reaching up to move aside part of his hair. "Just a quick change."

You spritzed his hair a couple of times, roughing it up with your hands to move the water around. Adding a touch of gel to your fingers, you pieced his hair a few different ways before eyeing your work over. Not quite pleased, you went in again with the water and sorted his hair around a bit more before giving a satisfied nod.

"Alright. Back to one!” the director ordered. "Slate, please."

You followed Chris back into the sun to the red tape marking his start in front of the cameras. The director came around from his monitors to analyze the new look. He patted the back of your shoulder and told you it was what he was looking for. You gave a quick smile in appreciation and started to clear off the set.

"Shit," Chris said behind you. "[y/n]! Here."

You turned around and he tossed his sunglasses to you first and then his water, not paying attention to the spray bottle you still held. You juggled the items that flew into your hands, fumbling to hold them and clutching them to your chest with a relieved sigh when you didn't drop anything. He laughed at his mistake and your temporarily panicked face before squaring himself up into the scene and clearing his throat to get rid of his smile.

His water pinched under your arm, you hung his sunglasses on the neck of your t-shirt for lack of a better place to hold them. The scene filmed another three takes. You handed him his water as he passed by to see the last take on the monitor with the director. They traded a couple of notes before Chris came back again, waiting for you to touch up his hair.

"He's starting to dry out,” the director said your way.

"Not a problem,” you told him, taking up the spray bottle again.

You wetted and reset the star's hair. He took a long drink of water before passing the bottle off back
to you. You smirked an unappreciative smile and reminded him his assistant was just over there. He shrugged walking back to his mark.

"Yeah, but that's, like, ten feet away," he explained over his shoulder with a boyish smile.

You shook your head and tucked the bottle away under your arm again. The scene taped another two rounds before the director judged the light had finally dropped too much to try any more takes. He told Chris and the others he felt like they had the scene anyway. They'd reshoot tomorrow if he didn't like the dailies. The director told you to use the current look for any reshooting and you took out your phone to snap a few reference photos to add to the book. Chris stood like a statue for you to take your pics and the director told everyone to close the set, you were moving back inside the soundstage for the next shot on the schedule.

You walked with Chris to the hair and makeup trailer. He sat in the chair at the sink for you to wash his hair without direction and waited while you warmed up the water. You handed him back his water and the script assistant came in to hand him a reference sheet for the next scene. He read over his notes while you washed his hair quickly. Holding a towel to his head to keep his costume dry, you guided him to a chair to blow out and style for the next scene. His assistant came in, handing off his phone to check messages while you gelled in a casual bedhead look, checking the angles in the mirror and peering around his head. He snorted a quiet laugh while you checked and preened and his thumbs typed out a reply to someone.

"You look ridiculous, moving around like that, staring," he chuckled, looking up through his lashes at you in the mirror with a lopsided smile.

"Yeah," you agreed, eyeballing the reflection of his hairline from behind the chair. "Well, that way you don't look ridiculous." You were pleased with your work and gave him a tap on the shoulder to release him from the chair. You remembered to hand him back the sunglasses from the front of your shirt.

He stood up with a gracious smile and held his hand over his heart. "Thank you for keeping me from looking ridiculous."

His assistant whisked him away as you stayed behind to clean up your little work area, shaking your head again to get rid of the goofy smile that crept up when he left. God, he was adorable. It was practically inconceivable how sweet and handsome he was all the damn time. And that he was always so kind to you and told you stories and jokes while he was in your chair made you feel a little special. Even though you knew he was pretty much that lovable guy with everyone, it didn't stop you from feeling a few butterflies here and there when he smiled at you or when you got the secret pleasure of running your hands through his hair. You still knew how absolutely lucky you were to have this job and to get such a personal glimpse at the people behind the scenes of some of your favorite movies. That you got such a hands on part in it all with Chris Evans was unbelievable. The trailer door opened and took your attention off your high school crush day dream.

"[y/n], I need you," Sebastian said, pointing a looping finger at his long hair. "It's doing it again."

"Sure thing," you smiled, patting the back of the chair for him to sit.

He sat down with a huff, obviously pinched for time. You grabbed a comb, tamed some tangles and gave his hair back the right amount of dishevelment in a couple quick minutes. Sebastian gave you a beaming smile, grabbing your hand and kissing your knuckles with a bow. He hurried out the door calling you "an angel!" as he left and you blushed with a sigh. Best. Job. Ever.

Filming for the day was wrapped at around 9:30. Call time for you tomorrow was a welcomed late
start at 6 a.m. The hours were murder but the reward was worth it. Who cares how much sleep you miss when you’ve made some awesome friends in the crew and the male scenery was so pretty to admire? Who can complain when Chris Evans is sitting in your chair, joking with Sebastian Stan as you wash Sebastian's hair, and clutching his hand over his chest in laughter? You smiled, obviously hearing the story but not part of the conversation. It was an odd but fun place to be.

The production assistant, who came in to hand off the call sheets to the stars for tomorrow, came to stand near you. "Hey, meet you in the parking lot. You're still coming, right?"

You nodded and said as much. The assistant left to hand out the last of the paperwork and Chris spun slowly in the chair, his smirking face watching your friend leave. He turned back to you as you were wringing out the excess water from Sebastian's hair. Chris quirked up one eyebrow and jerked his thumb behind him toward the door.

"You and the PA?" he asked, a devilish smile on his lips under curious eyes.

You felt a warmth come into your cheeks as you wrapped a towel loosely under Sebastian's head so he could sit up. You did your best to give an incredulous smile and a casual "no". Sebastian took the towel from you, walking to your chair and waving Chris out of it as you followed a few steps behind.

"The PA?" Sebastian repeated, doubtfully looking at Chris. "You're kidding right? Give her a little credit."

Oh my god. You caught a glimpse of yourself in the mirror and saw the soft flush in your cheeks. You pressed the towel around Sebastian's hair, focusing on your work and trying not to die from the embarrassment of them talking about you. You reached around for a comb from the counter as the stars went on.

"What?" Chris begged, holding out open palms. "He's a good guy. I mean, I don't really know him, but he seems nice enough."

"Don't set her up with the PA," Sebastian groaned. "She can do better than that."

A cell phone rang and you were pretty sure it was Death himself calling to say he'd meet you outside. Chris looked at the phone in his hand, scoffed at the caller ID, and silenced the ringing. "I'm just sayin'," he offered.

"She doesn't like the PA," Sebastian insisted, rolling his eyes over at the Chris reflected to him in the mirror.

"Oh my god," you muttered plaintively and instantly blushed again, surprised it came out of your mouth.

They both stopped and stared at you, Chris smiling from the next chair over and Sebastian back from the mirror. "Where you goin' with him?" Chris asked.

"What?" the question barely over a breath as you tried to sort the thoughts in your head. "Oh, some of us are getting some food and drinks after work."

Chris pouted a thoughtful frown, arching his eyebrows up. "So, it's a work thing," he half questioned, half suggested.

Sebastian shook his head just enough to not interfer with your combing as you started to dry his hair. "It's not the PA," he said, over the noise of the blow drier and giving an exhausted side eye to Chris.
Maybe you were dead. Maybe this was hell. You bit the inside of your lip as you worked. You dried
his hair just enough and set down the drier, combing out a few tangles. You hazarded a quick side
eye toward Chris and saw him watching you work with that boyish smile. *Yep,* this was hell. You
focused your attention on parting Sebastian's hair again and he gently brushed your hand away.

"Think I'm just gonna tie it up tonight," he told you.

You nodded, stepping around the chair to the counter and laying down your comb. You rummaged
through a drawer to find him a hair tie. When you couldn't find one in the first drawer, you rolled one
off your own wrist and handed it to him. He sat forward in the seat and gathered his hair up to knot
himself, with a smooth, "Thanks, doll."

*Sweet Christ, kill me now.* Were they trying to kill you? You busied yourself, distractedly tidying up
your work station to be ready for tomorrow morning. Sebastian stood up, turning his head to check
himself in the mirror before he smacked Chris on the knee and thanked you again.

You smiled politely at his reflection in the mirror in front of you. "No trouble."

Sebastian started from around the chair, easing past Chris for the walk to the door. "So where's this
place at?" Chris asked, holding his phone between his fingertips and twisting his wrists so it tipped
up and down lopsidedly.

Sebastian stopped, rolling his eyes as his head lolled over his shoulder to stare at Chris. "None of
your business," he told him.

Chris held up his hands, shrugging his shoulders. "Why not?" he asked, defiantly. "I like food. I like
drinks."

"You don't get to ask any more questions until you stop being an idiot, now come on," Sebastian
said, sweeping his hand from Chris to the door.

"What'd I do?" Chris asked defensively, standing up to do as he was told.

"Good night, [y/n]," Sebastian waved.

Chris stopped at the door, one foot hanging down over the step. "I'm hungry," he told Sebastian.
"Let's get some food."

"You guys are welcome to come with," you offered. The words came out of your mouth before you
even knew what happened. And when you did realize, a lead weight fell in your stomach and you
tried to be cool. What the hell was wrong with you, anyway? You swallowed, waiting, figuring they
wouldn't be interested in mixing with the lowly crew anyway.

"Sure," Chris replied.

"Are you sure?" Sebastian checked, politely.

*Shit. No.* "Yeah, sure. Why not?"

Why not? A million reasons why not, moron. Uh, number one- because it's probably taboo. Number
two- you have a huge crush on Chris Evans and you know *that's* a big no, no. And three- do you
really need to keep listing the reasons it's a bad idea to go out drinking with the talent??

"Well, okay," Sebastian shrugged, hesitantly. "Meet you somewhere?"
You rattled off the name of the pub and some half-ass directions. You'd only been there twice and you hadn't been driving. Sebastian assured you he could find it and sent Chris out the door ahead of him with a foot planted lightly to his ass to push him down the steps. As they left, you heard Sebastian tell Chris he owes him one. "For what?" "We'll see." The door shut and you were alone again and free to have a heart attack.

You caught up with your ride a few minutes later, the PA, a girl from wardrobe, and one of the stunt choreographers waiting to crowd into the rental car and finally eat dinner. You casually mentioned that Chris and Sebastian might make an appearance on the way over. Brian, the stunt guy, didn't mind- he could list himself as, at the very least, a work friend of Chris' from all their pre-production training. Emily, from wardrobe, was instantly excited and Jeff, the unwitting PA, thought it might be cool. Your stomach was in knots.

Walking into the pub, Tom Petty played from the speakers and your mouth watered at the smell of food. You followed at the back of your group of friends to the far corner of the room where the tables were longer and the booths deeper. As the pack parted to fill in seats, you saw Chris and Sebastian were already there. The waitress came over with extra menus as you took an empty chair a space down from Chris and diagonal to Sebastian. They seemed to be blending in well with the others and you started to think This might not be so bad.

Everyone put in their orders and the conversations dotted around the tables pressed together to accommodate the group resumed. A detailed chat about tomorrow's fight sequence for Brian, Chris and Sebastian with some interested parties hanging on, a gossipy half-volume rant between Wardrobe and Makeup, and some rowdy laughter from the far end of the table you hadn't heard a reason for. You feigned interest in the gossip, sipping your cocktail through the thin straw and trying not to notice Chris' adorable smile ghosted over his lips while he talked enthusiastically with Brian. At least hell had a bar and good music.

Conversations carried and moved over dinner. You hadn't eaten since around 1 o'clock and a burger and fries never looked so good. You ate, finally relaxing and realizing that this would actually be a cool story to share with your friends at home later. The waitress began bussing away empty plates and an uproar came from Chris' seat down the table. You looked around your neighbor to see what the commotion was.

Chris raised his hands over his head, index fingers pointing back down at himself. "I am the flip cup champion," he boasted loudly. "No one, I mean, no one."

Brian waved his hand dismissively in Chris' face. "All talk and no game," he said, blowing him off.

"Any one of you," Chris challenged, pointing a daring finger along the far side of the table. "Let's do it, right now!"

"No flip cup," Brian grimaced. "You have a 7 a.m. call and you gotta fight all day. So, no. No flip cups."

"Aw, come on, mom," Chris taunted.

"7 a.m. call?" you smirked to Emily. "I'd crush that and be 'bells on' at 6."

"Ah-ha!" You'd been overheard and looked up over the edge of your cup to see Chris pointing you out with an excited open mouth smile. "There's a taker. Right there!"

"You really shouldn't encourage him," Sebastian smiled, shaking his head. "He'll be a fuckin' hung over baby all day tomorrow."
"You too," Chris insisted, swinging his finger to Sebastian. "Gimme one more."

Sebastian straightened up in his seat, leaning onto the edge of the table. "One and done," he said, pointing back at Chris from his elbow. "We're not doing this all damn night. Come on, Brian. My team. Don't need any farm team, bench warmers."

"You're with me," Chris announced, leaning around Jeff on your left and pointing your way.

"Oh, no. No no no no," you shook your head. "No way."

"Yes way," he nodded enthusiastically, pushing back his chair and standing, finger still at you. "Somebody get the cups and clear the table. This is happening."

Oh, great. Hell has team sports, too. You'd have protested more if the table hadn't come to life, scooting chairs and pushing dinnerware aside. Someone brought a stack of plastic cups from the bar and a pitcher of beer. Chris grabbed hold of your elbow to tug you up out of your chair. He dragged you down to the far end of the table, putting his hands on your shoulders to place you at the end in front of the first cup.

"You go right there," he told you. "And I go here." Chris turned to face off across the table.

The cups were filled and lined along the table edges. "Rules," Brian announced.

"No rules," Chris declared, swiping at the air in front of Brian. "We know how this works. Cah'mon. Quit stallin'."

Your palms were sweating and you pressed them against your jeans to wipe the nervousness away. How had this happened in the first place? Oh, yeah. You opened your big mouth and now you were playing flip cup with Captain America and The Winter Soldier in a bar in Atlanta.

"Alright, alright," Sebastian said, rolling up his sleeves. "Calm yourself, Evans. Somebody's gotta call it."

"On three," Jeff said.

"You're going down," Chris promised, staring and smirking at Sebastian while he turned his Red Sox cap around backwards. "Best two outta three."

"Three?!" you almost choked.

Chris put his hands on your shoulders, giving them a squeeze and shake to rile you up. "Come on," he encouraged. "We got this. Team Cap!"

Sebastian scoffed. "You're gonna be such a brat tomorrow."

"You're gonna be my bitch," Chris corrected, raising his chin and looking down his nose at your opponents. "My pretty boy, Romanian bitch."

"Aw, come on now," Sebastian grimaced in disapproval. "You wanna start talkin' shit?"

You don't know Romanian, but you could tell from the tone and Sebastian's facial expressions that it was probably best left said in another language with ladies present. Chris insisted all trash talking occur in English because 'Merica and you were still trying to figure a way out of the current situation. An eager cheer came from your friends around you as Jeff counted down. Traitors, all of 'em. You flinched on three when Chris nudged your arm, yelling for you to "Go!" and realized Sebastian
already had a cup to his mouth.

_Dammit._ You grabbed a cup and shot the beer, balancing the cup back on the table and giving it a flip. You missed and Chris yelled out in pain. Sebastian was righting his cup for a third attempt and you stuck your flip on the second try. Wiping at your chin, you watched Chris grab his cup and Brian follow only a second behind. You moved to Chris' right, fighting the anxious flutter in your gut and readying for your next turn. They each needed a pair of flips to finish their turn. Your friends cheered both teams on in a roller coaster of excited and heartbroken yells as the game inclined along the table. Brian got hung up on his second cup and you had several seconds of lead on an impatient Sebastian. Another pair of turns for you and your team mate and you were holding your own. Your last turn caught the perfect flip on the first try and Chris was onto the last cup as Sebastian threw back his beer. They each landed their flips but the other team was still left with a cup of beer on the table at the end.

Chris threw his fists into the air in victory, turning to your spectating friends and yelling a "woohoo" in triumph. He spun back to you and gave you a hi-five that stung your palm from its enthusiasm. You couldn't help but laugh. You were pretty proud of your win and relieved this turned out to be a good night for you and flip cup. You had had your fair share of shameful losses.

"Two outta three," Sebastian reminded your cocky partner. He leaned forward over the table. "Two out of three."

Chris reached out his hands to smoosh Sebastian's face and repeated his words back in a mumbled baby talk. Sebastian gave Chris a friendly slap on the cheek and Chris let him go. The cups were refilled and placed back in line. Chris held out a palm for you to hit.

"Alright, [y/n]," he encouraged, bouncing excitedly on his toes. "We got this. Here we go."

"Settle down there, princess," Brian warned. "That was practice."

"I don't need practice, sweetheart" Chris said, raising his brow to Brian. "This is 'A' game, son."

"Oh, my god," you muttered, wincing as the countdown started again,

You were on point this time. You and Sebastian reached for your cups in perfect unison, swallowed fast and hit the flip on the first try. The energy from your fans was electricity in the air and you were finally excited about what was happening. You were playing flip cup with Captain America and The Winter Soldier and, as Chris stuck his first flip, you might actually win. You were on your second cup and second flip when Sebastian took his next drink. Your partner's frantic yells didn't help your concentration as Sebastian started his flips. Your fourth flip landed just a half a second before Sebastian's cup stood upside down and you were racked with the nervous thrill of competition. Chris drank fast and tipped another perfect flip while you raced Sebastian for the next drink. You practically tied, your cup making a gut wrenching wobble before settling still and allowing Chris and Brian to push on. You almost screamed from the tension, watching the two men fight gravity and physics, Chris yelling disapprovingly at himself as he fumbled to reset his cup. You were pretty sure your heart actually stopped when Chris' cup rattled on its top and Brian's bounced off the table.

Chris threw his hands up with a triumphant yell. The applause and ruckus from your group had to have been annoying the shit out of the other patrons. Chris turned to you with an exuberant smile and wide, joyful eyes. He gave you a celebratory hug, picking you up off your feet for a moment. You were surprised by the move and felt the heat come back to your cheeks as you held on. He set you back down, keeping an arm around your shoulder and fist pumping into the air again. You were a little ashamed of yourself at the mental note you made about how he smelled like fresh laundry and cologne.
He let you go, turning to gloat and jab arrogant fingers at Sebastian and Brian across the table. "That's two!" he told them.

"I am gonna kick the shit outta you tomorrow," Sebastian warned, batting Chris' finger from his face. "A few punches might actually slip tomorrow."

"Yeah, yeah," Chris nodded.

You slid back to the safety of your group of friends. You hoped the redness in your cheeks was attributed to the beer and thrill of competition. There were congratulations from all around. Sebastian came around the table to shake your hand and accept defeat with humility while Chris continued to celebrate with only a hint of dignity.

"Good game, [y/n]," Sebastian said. "You're a little too good at that for a hairstylist." He winked as he let your hand go and you blushed again. "And I'm sorry you had to be on that side of the table with that obnoxious frat boy."

"Hey!" Chris snapped. "Don't try and steal my partner, now."

"She's too good for you," Sebastian told him with a shake of his head and a charming smile to you.

The waitress came with a round of beers for the group and everyone settled back around the table. You had to sit next to Chris. He insisted. After all, you were his partner and helped him defend his self-declared title of flip cup champion. You couldn't lie, you enjoyed the seat of honor beside him.

How could you not? And his absentminded arm across the back of your chair? Well, that was just a byproduct of the euphoria of winning. Right?

By 1:30 a.m., even the most irresponsible in the group admitted it was time to call it a night. Some of you had to be at work in less then five hours. Bills paid and tips left, you shuffled to the door with the rest of the herd. Jeff signaled overhead from the front of the pack for you to find your ride home with him. Everyone was shaking hands and bumping fists as good nights were said. Sebastian touched your arm in the thinning crowd.

"Hey, [y/n], thanks for having us out," he smiled.

"Oh, no problem," you told him. "Glad you guys came. You really livened up the party."

Chris came to stand beside Sebastian, twirling a set of car keys with a rental tag around his finger. "Some of us did, anyway," Chris snarked, elbowing Sebastian.

"Swear to god," Sebastian promised. "You're gonna catch one in your perfect teeth tomorrow."

"Yeah, yeah," Chris griped, pushing playfully into Sebastian's shoulder and moving him aside. "Sore loser." He cocked his head to the side, looking at you with a boyish smile on his face and eyes crinkled with smug happiness. He hugged you. "Winners get hugs," told you.

All you could manage was a surprised "oh" as you hugged him in return. The shame came back for the extra sniff you took while your head was pressed to his strong shoulder. You smiled a tight lipped smile when you stepped away, trying not to grin like the schoolgirl you felt like. You gave the stars a good night wave as you turned toward the parking lot and your friends. You stole a look over your shoulder and saw Sebastian and Chris still there. Sebastian was saying something and Chris was watching you walk away, the piece of brow under the edge of his fitted cap knitting in mild confusion. When you rounded the corner into the lot, you caught a side eye glimpse of Sebastian pointing your way and smacking Chris up the side of his head, upsetting his cap. You figured there was probably some discussion about appropriate behavior with the crew and imagined there was
trouble coming down the road from the studio for fraternizing with the talent if word got around about flip cup games after hours.

"[y/n]!"

You stopped mid-stride and leaned back around the edge of the building at hearing your name behind you. You saw Chris walking your way, settling his cap back on the right way and waving a hand up to hold you there. You came back from the corner, taking a few steps to shorten his walk. He pocketed his hands stiffly, his straight arms pushing his shoulders up a little and making him look even more adorable, if it were possible.

"Hey," he said, off the end of a breath.

"Yeah?" Perfect time for the butterflies to show up and, good. There they were, right on cue.

"So, you and the PA?" he lead in. "That's not a thing?"

Suddenly feeling a little stupid, you shook your head with a confused expression before you managed, "Um, no."

"Cuz Sebastian says," he started, tipping a raised shoulder backward to Sebastian who was waiting down the sidewalk behind him. "Well, he said you're a little sweet on me."

You choked. Literally, you choked, letting out a disbelieving cough and the red rushing to your face. You put a hand to the top of your chest, trying to compose yourself and remember how to breath. You spied Sebastian for a second around Chris as he moved to reach out a concerned hand to your shoulder. You couldn't hear the laugh, but Sebastian's nose and face crinkled in the way that told you your near-death experience looked hilarious from where he was standing.

"You alright?" Chris asked, his face a little worried and hand still comfortingly on your shoulder.

"No. Yeah! I mean, fine," you stammered, fanning for a second at the heat in you face.

Chris snickered and took his hand back with a quick pull, like he realized it might be inappropriate. Inappropriate or not, you missed it when it was gone. You cleared your throat uncomfortably and moved an imaginary stray hair behind your ear as a way to occupy your fidgety hands.

"So, I kinda feel like an idiot for not noticing," Chris told you.

He looked a little sheepish. _Holy crap._ Was he apologizing to you? For not knowing you had a crush on him? You couldn't fault him. Half the population of the planet probably crushed on him for one reason or another. You couldn't expect him to have any reason to notice yours.

"Oh...well," was all you came up with to say and shrugged as if it were nothing.

There was an awkward pause and you both chuckled quietly- at yourselves? Maybe at each other? Who the hell knew.

"Oh...well," was all you came up with to say and shrugged as if it were nothing.

"Oh, for cryin' out loud!" Sebastian complained loudly, from down the block. "Just kiss her or give her your number or something already! It's late. Let's go."

"Alright already!" Chris groaned over his shoulder. He turned back to you, a little bashful, his chin tilted down and looking up at you from under his cap through his lashes.

_Shitshitshitshitshit._ Is this real life? The butterflies had apparently changed their tune and were now
all but a mosh pit in your stomach. You realized you'd been holding your breath since you heard Sebastian yell. You blinked and took a deep breath. Chris held out an empty hand and you stared at it, wide eyed.

"Can I borrow your phone?" he asked, smiling coyly.

"My what?" you asked. God. You had to pay better attention but- *He's so pretty.*

"Your phone?" he tried again.

You shook your head clear and fished your cell phone out of your pocket, looking at it dumbly before you handed it over. He handed it back, asking you to unlock the screen for him. You let the phone read your thumb and apologized before mentally kicking yourself for apologizing. *Geez.* He laughed quietly and typed something in before turning the phone back around to lay in your palm. Before you knew what was happening, Chris leaned in, giving your cheek a quick peck. He straightened up, flashed a giddy smile, and turned on his heel to walk back to Sebastian.

"I'll see you later," he called, turning to walk backward a few steps to see you again. "Maybe we can grab dinner after work tomorrow."

You looked down at the screen glowing in your hand. Your phonebook was open and you saw he'd added a number with the name "Flip Cup Hero*. *Holy shit.* You blinked and looked back up after him. Sebastian waved goodbye again with a smile. Chris turned to look over his shoulder and flashed you a charming yet humble smile as he and Sebastian headed across the street to their car. You stood there, dumbfounded for a moment, processing everything that had just happened. This was definitely better than a cool story to share with your friends. And forget best job ever. Best. Night. Ever. ...Yet?

Chapter End Notes

Can my little fangirl self just gush about Tony's comment in the Civil War trailer about punching Steve in his "perfect teeth"? I love that that turned up. This has been sitting in my drafts since early November before I published and I about died when I heard Tony say something I imagined. Granted mine was Sebastian to Chris (as my nod to his dad being a dentist and his beautiful smile)- but still. How fun is that? Thank you Russos! Lol
Chapter 2

A request for more from the lovely @almondbuttercup on tumblr

Thirsty Thursday isn't what it used to be. By the end of the day, it had evolved to a running joke about how much coffee and water and "oh, thank God, is that a Red Bull?!" you could find to keep you running. You had gotten into bed just after two in the morning, the evening's flip cup frivolities still making your heart race and goofy smile shine when you thought of them made it a little hard to fall asleep. The blasphemous screech of your alarm clock at 5 a.m. was like a kick in the face and it took a pair of resentful smacks of the snooze bar to get you going. Rushing through a quick shower and a couple indiscriminate pulls from the clean laundry basket on the floor and you were on the curb with your roommate from Wardrobe, waiting for your ride by 5:35. Breakfast could be scrounged at work.

Huddled along the craft services tables with your coworkers and jockeying for position to get at the quickly disappearing pastries, you scored a warm muffin to go with your scrambled eggs and fruit and filled your travel mug with what you were sure would be the first of many cups of coffee for the day. Breakfast and a quick meeting about the schedule for the day out of the way, you headed off for your station in the Hair trailer. Your counterpart for the chair next to yours was already there.

Karen was cool. She had several years on you, an Aerosmith tattoo on her shoulder, and somehow always smelled like lilies and cherry blossoms despite smoking like a chimney. She was good company on those busy days when multiple stars made runs on your trailer. On days where the full or majority of cast was shooting, you primarily took care of Chris and Sebastian but also worked on Emily Van Camp and Frank Gillo. Karen was in charge of Scarlett Johansson, Elizabeth Olsen, Anthony Mackie, and Marisa Tomei as they came through. You two helped with extras as well. If it weren't for Karen's wonderfully innapropriate, and randomly profane, sense of humor and endless supply of Red Vines, you'd probably have taken hostages a long time ago. Thank god for Karen, because today was gonna be one of those days.

"I saw Grillo here already," she told you, as you stashed your bag under the counter of your work station. "Good lord, I would climb that man like a tree."

"Oh, my god, Karen," you chuckled, pulling your combs, clips, and other tools of the trade out of the drawers as you set up for the day.

"Listen, [y/n]," she began with a tone suggesting motherly wisdom was coming, "when you get to be my age, there's no time for pussyfooting around. You say and do what you want cuz, before you know it, your boobs are hitting your knees and the pizza guy expects you to pay cash for the delivery."

"Karen, honey, you're only 38," you reminded her.

"My point exactly," she agreed, gesturing a hand at you for emphasis.

You were mid-laugh when the trailer door opened and Sebastian poked his head inside to look
around. He smiled as he came in and wished you both a good morning. You hurriedly finished setting up your supplies as he sat down in your chair. Grabbing a quick sip of your coffee before you began, he tipped up his own styrofoam cup of joe to you in a silent and commiserating toast to tiredness.

"What's got you two giggling this morning?" he asked, as you started a comb through his hair.

"Frank fuckin' Grillo," Karen said, matter of factly and with a hint of forlorn lust at the end.

"Karen!" you scolded, mortified, as Sebastian sputtered into his coffee and wiped at his chin.

"Jesus Christ," he laughed. "Warn somebody first."

"That's what I'm saying," Karen shrugged.

You could have cried you laughed so hard, when Sebastian almost did a spit take again. He shook his head and gave up on his coffee, setting the cup down on the counter in front of him. You sighed to let the laughter go and compose yourself again. Thank God for Karen.

Sebastian's look worked best without a wash in the morning and he was set in less than ten minutes. He sat in one of the sink chairs, talking with Scarlett about the shoot for today when she had perched herself in Karen's chair a minute later. And so began a game of musical chairs for Sebastian and the cycling through of most of the principle cast through your morning. Sebastian, Scarlett, Frank, Anthony, and then Chris.

Karen undressed Frank with her eyes while you washed his hair and Sebastian flipped a bobby pin at her from your chair when he noticed. Scarlett was curled and on her way before Anthony came in and began cracking jokes with Frank and Sebastian. Sebastian was able to finish his coffee this time and you smiled along, listening to the stories as you styled. When Chris lightly bounced up the steps of your trailer just before eight o'clock and already in his Captain America costume, minus a few accessories and costume pieces, the butterflies kicked up in your stomach and you felt a little awkward as you finished smoothing Frank's hair.

Is he going to say something? Do you? What? No! What would you even say? "Oh, hi. Just wanted to say thanks for making my heart melt last night and completely wrecking any chance for me to sleep." Yeah, that would sum it up.

Frank stood up and purred out a "thank you, sweetheart" with a smile for your efforts. He dusted off the back of your chair and gestured for Chris to take a seat. Anthony was finished and leaving. He gave a wave to you and Karen and a tough guy finger point to Sebastian to say he had an eye on him.

"It's going down today," Anthony told Sebastian as he opened the trailer door.

"Bring it on, bird brain," Sebastian taunted him.

"Oh, I got your bird brain. I got it right here. You're gonna be..." His voice trailed away to nothing as he went down the stairs and the door shut behind him.

Everyone chuckled and Frank dismissed himself to go to Makeup. He gave Sebastian's hand a shake and Karen's arm a pat as he squeezed by her on his way out. The door shut and Karen looked at the place on her arm where Grillo had touched her and excused herself for a cigarette. You and Sebastian burst into laughter as she grabbed her smokes from her purse and took a break outside. Sebastian sat in her chair as you picked up your comb and Chris looked confusedly between your reflection and Sebastian's in the mirror.
"She's crazy," Sebastian said, through a laughing sigh. "I love it."

"What was that about?" Chris asked.

Sebastian waved a hand. "You had to be here."

You caught Chris' eye in the mirror and he smiled at you, a little boyish and shy. No, this wasn't weird already. Not at all. It was quiet for a moment as you pulled out a few tangles in Chris' hair and Sebastain checked messages on his phone. Sebastian must have looked up to see your nervous half-smile back at Chris' reflection.

"Well, thank God this isn't awkward," he smirked, eyes on his phone.

Oh, God. It really was, but thankfully somebody said it before you did. It didn't stop the faint shade of pink coming to your cheeks or the small titter from your mouth, but at least it was out there. It was somehow relieving. Chris laughed, a bit nervously, and gave you a bashful smile.

"I didn't mean it to be," Chris apologized.

"What'd you expect it to be?" Sebastian asked, tipping his hands up in question and wrinkling his brow at Chris. "It feels like high school in here."

"It's not that bad," you said, smiling at the comparison.

"Almost," Sebastian said, raising an eyebrow. "You already asked her to prom and she said 'yes'. What's the big deal?"

"You know," Chris said, looking at Sebastian from the side of his eye, "you're not helping."

"It is kinda funny," you noted.

Sebastian held out his hand toward you and widened his eyes. "There. See?"

The three of you chuckled and you felt a little more at ease as you styled and smoothed Chris' hair back. It didn't need a wash. He was going to be wearing his helmet most of, if not all of, the day anyway. Sebastian put his phone away and slouched comfortably back in Karen's styling chair.

"So, what are you two gonna do anyway?" he asked.

Chris' eyebrows rose up his face and you looked at each other's reflections like a pair of deer in headlights. Chris flashed a crooked smile and shrugged. You shook your head, pretty helplessly. You had nothing. In fact, you were still reeling a bit from the night before. How could you be expected to think about now or later? You took up your coffee as a crutch and leaned into your counter now that you were finished. Sebastian looked back and forth between you two as you looked at each other to see who had an answer first.

"That's hilarious," Sebastian said, his mouth slacking open for a long moment in a smile and cough of absolute amusement.

"Well, we could grab a bite to eat after work," Chris suggested, over his shoulder to Sebastian.

Sebastian scoffed and waved his hand at Chris. "Don't ask me," he insisted, with a laugh. "Ask her."

Chris looked at you and smiled. "I mean, if you're not too tired later," he offered to you.

Tired? Run down, beat, exhausted, spent. Pick one and you were there already. On the one hand,
you had no right to complain. You might have gotten to bed at a reasonable hour if you hadn't
invited Chris and Sebastian along to dinner last night. It was pretty much your fault that everyone
had such a great time that no one cared about clock watching. On the other, you hadn't stopped
thinking about going back to bed since the moment you got out of it.

"No. Yeah," you said, surprising yourself at how energetic that came out. "Sounds good."

"There. See?" Chris parroted and looked back at Sebastian.

"Alright," Sebastian conceded, sitting up to lean his elbows on his knees. "Where are you gonna go
that no one's gonna tip the paparazzi on you and some cute, little blonde out canoodling
somewhere?"

"Ohh," you said quietly, clutching your warm coffee a little closer for comfort.

Chris' mouth pushed to one side in thought and you felt your stomach sink. Oh, yeah. Paparazzi.
That was a thing. Wait- Did Sebastian just say "canoodling"? Your cheeks flushed at the thought of
Chris and your cute, little blonde self canoodling. An almost imperceptible smirk came to your face
as you realized you weren't actually a blonde. If memory served, you were actually a brunette. But
you've also been strawberry red, blue, and, for one St. Patrick's Day weekend in college, green, just
to name a few. You wondered for a moment if it mattered.

"Lemme think about it," Chris decided, bringing your attention back to the conversation. "We'll
come up with something. We got all day."

The door opened and Karen came back in. "Grab your garters," she warned. "The AD's calling for
everyone."

Chris checked the time on his phone and snapped up out of the chair. "Oo! Shit!"

"Gotta go," Sebastian said, popping up to follow Chris out of the trailer.

The day went by painfully slow. It was too hot for coffee and if you tried to drink another energy
drink you'd probably throw up. Waiting underneath the shade of a pop up canopy, you were
practically useless. Frank and Chris were in helmets for the most part, except for breaks and quick
run troughs before putting a scene on film. Sebastian's hair needed little attention as he was
supposed to look a little messy. Lunch was spent with Karen and a few people from Makeup and
Wardrobe filling out your picnic table while the talent ate in their air conditioned trailers. You ended
up preening the extras more than you did your stars and filled the in-between time watching take
after take of pretty and sweaty men fighting each other. All in all, despite the improbable number of
times you yawned, not a bad day.

Filming wrapped just before ten. Putzing around in the Hair trailer, you arranged your tools and
products for the next morning. You hadn't heard anything more from Chris about dinner. When you
were close enough to talk, someone was always close enough to hear. You had his number, but
didn't know if you should message or call him. It'd be weird if you texted him first- right? You had
his number but he didn't have yours. It seemed a little stalker-ish somehow. Desperate? Too eager?
You figured if he didn't show up at the trailer for an end of the day shampoo that you would just
catch your ride home and get some much needed rest.

When the trailer door opened and Chris came in with an easy smile, you were simultaneously
relieved and anxious. Oh, sweet little butterflies- welcome back. He was out of costume and in jeans
and a t-shirt. His hair was damp, but combed, and you knew he'd showered and wasn't there to help
you earn your pay. You hooked your thumbs into the back pockets of your shorts in an attempt to
look casual and smiled back when he said 'hello'.

"Hey, [y/n]," he began. "Sorry we didn't get a chance to really talk today about...well, anything." He snorted a little laugh and you smiled at the cute noise and apologetic grin. "But, hey, if you're not busy now, or you're not too tired, I thought maybe you'd still wanna grab some food?"


You're a dirty liar. You could probably fall asleep on your feet if it were quiet enough. But there's no way you'd miss out on a chance for dinner with Chris Evans.

"Good," he said, maybe seeming a little relieved. "I know it's late, but I figured maybe we could just grab a burger or something and hang out for a bit. I promise, I won't keep you out late. I know your days start wicked early."

Good lord, that man was thoughtful. You accepted his offer with a nod and he motioned for you to follow him out the door. You grabbed your bag from under your counter and snapped off the trailer lights as you left. Walking along toward the parking lot, you texted your ride home that you didn't need them tonight. You kept a respectful distance between you and Chris. Nope. Nothing to see here. Just two people who happen to be walking in the same general direction.

Chris opened the car door for you, shutting it with a small bend at the waist and a smile. He had an idea to track down a food truck instead of going into a crowded restaurant, thinking maybe no one would notice him and attract any attention. Besides, he'd heard about this one that kept late hours and made these incredible grill cheese sandwiches. You had to admit, it sounded like a good plan. You weren't exactly dressed to impress with shorts, a t-shirt, and gym shoes. Low key, comfort food out of a truck sounded right up your alley.

You guys found the truck, with a little help from your cell phone, and parked a bit further away in the lot than necessary. Hiding underneath a ballcap, Chris stood in line with you and shrugged when you noted his super good disguise. But hey, "It worked for Cap", so he figured it was worth a shot. Warm, gooey cheese sandwiches and sodas in hand, you ate at the car, perched side by side on the trunk of the dark blue Impala the studio had rented for him. Paper trays with French fries between you, it wasn't a completely awkward silence as you two ate. The crooked smiles you shared when one of you caught the other looking with a mouthful of food were adorable.

"So," Chris began, around a half chewed bite of melted gourmet cheese before swallowing. "What made you wanna do hair?" You snickered at the out of the blue question, even though it was a good start, and his own giggle hitched. "Wait. Was that lame? I mean, I was just tryin' to-"

"No, it's cool," you smiled, thumbing at the tab on the top of your drink. "I just...I like fashion and beauty and I was always doing something weird with my hair in school, like, these crazy braids or different colors. I've just always had fun with it, you know? So, why not try and make a living at doing what you like?"

"It's worked out so far," he noted, with a nod. "How'd you get to Hollywood then?"

"Oh, this is a good story," you promised, inching back a little and putting you feet on the bumper as if something amazing were coming. He straightened up, eager to listen. "Totally original...I just went West and hoped somebody would give me a job."

He looked at you, eyebrows raised expectantly. "That's it?" he asked, coughing out a short laugh behind the question. "You just- No plan, nothing."
"It's worked out so far," you shrugged into a bite of your sandwich.

He laughed and you smiled. "So, how'd you end up in Atlanta?"

"My first, like, legit good job was doing Kiele Sanchez's hair for the first season of Kingdom," you explained. "No idea how I lucked into that, but I met Frank Grillo there and he talked me up when I mentioned I submitted my resumé."

"No shit?" Chris said, with an approving pout and nod. "Thank you, Frank Grillo."

Chris raised his soda can in a toast and the aluminum made a dull "thunk" when you tapped your drink to his. Now that you say it out loud, it is a little ridiculous and completely improbable that you ended up in a parking lot, sitting on the trunk of Chris Evans' rental car, eating grilled cheese sandwiches and French fries, in Atlanta at almost midnight, with this dreamboat Hollywood actor. Honestly, who makes this shit up?

You talked some more about your job, your long term goal to open up your own salon and maybe parlay your film experience into high end fashion and celebrity work where you can really have some fun. He told you about moving to New York for Strasberg and his first bit roles on tv before getting into film. It was like a lot of other first dates you'd had, where you sit around after the food is gone and share just enough about your personal life to hopefully not scare the other person away too soon. It was fun and seemed to be going well and you were a little disappointed when he realized the time and suggested you guys should call it a night.

You pointed out turns and landmarks in between the light conversation that continued as he drove you home. You pulled into the parking lot of your four story, extended-stay hotel. You giggled behind a tight lipped smile to watch when he hopped out of the car to open the door for you. Chivalry was alive and well thanks to this charming Adonis. Standing on the sidewalk near the lobby door, you felt your heart beat a little faster when you saw the shy smile pull back the corner of his mouth when your eyes locked for a long, quiet moment.

"Nice place?" he asked, a little sudden and an obvious ploy to break the tension.

"Yeah. Not bad," you said, with a bob of your head and small wince. "My roommate snores sometimes and there's someone down the hall this week who, I swear, has steamed cabbage every night for dinner, but, yeah. It's nice."

You both laughed until it withered down to a sigh from each of you. His hands went to his pockets and you popped up once on your toes as you looked around. This was awkward.

"This is awkward, isn't it?" he asked from under a squinting eye and with a nod to answer his own question.

"This is awkward," you agreed, with a nervous titter.

He hissed in a breath. "Yyyeah," he said, slowly, as he wiped his fingers down the sides of his mouth. Chris' brow perked up and his eyes brightened. "But this was fun. Right?"

"Yeah," you nodded, enthusiastically. "Great."

"Good. So, maybe this is something you wanna do again," he suggested, raising his shoulders and holding out an open hand with the offer. "Maybe when you have a night off, so we're not so rushed and we can spend more time being awkward in parking lots."

Being awkward in a parking lot with Chris Evans sounded like a great idea. Of course, you nodded
and said 'yes'. Who wouldn't?

"Okay, then," he agreed with a broad smile.

Your heart threatened to punch its way out of your chest when he bent down and graced your cheek with a soft kiss. He smelled like soap and clean laundry and good lord- Why is it so hot in here?! You let out the breath you held with an unquestionably girly giggle when he stood up again. Where did that sound even come from and who is this nervous mess standing in your shoes? Your cheeks warmed for the umpteenth time in the last 48 hours and you prayed- Please, let him think it was cute and that you weren't an absolute disaster. Thank God he was still smiling down at you.

He took a step back and smiled with a nod- at what? You had no idea, but it was with a smile and he wasn't running away as fast as he could. Chris walked around the front of the car to open the driver's door again and flashed a smile at you over the roof of the car. He leaned into the door frame and folded his hands on top of the car to watch you as you turned to go inside. You stole a look back over your shoulder from the middle of the lobby and saw him drive off. Upstairs, your roommate snored quietly and you fell face first into bed with an enormous smile on your lips. Seriously. How is this happening? When the alarm clock screamed at 5 a.m., you still had your shoes on.

Waiting out front for your ride to work in the morning, you snacked on pinches of dry Frosted Flakes from the miniature cereal box you picked up in the hotel dining room. You took shelter from a light rain under the hotel awning while your roommate, Emily, scrolled through her Facebook notifications. You let out an exaggerated yawn, because somehow being obnoxious about it helped wake you up, and she asked where you disappeared to last night. You managed to BS your way through a convincing story about drinks with some random extra and earned a high five for being a "hussy"- said with the utmost love and respect, of course.

Inside your humble work trailer, rain drummed on the roof and you were on a two hour delay until the next weather update. Armored in a hooded, khaki colored rain coat and pale yellow rain boots with grey polka dots, you and Karen made a run on the craft services trailer for snacks and ended up playing War with a deck of cards from Karen's purse while you sat crossed legged on the counter behind your styling chairs. With your iPod coming through the sound dock, you were practically robbing the studio for your payroll. But with crazy long hours and an impossibly hot and humid work environment, you didn't feel guilty. In fact, you deserved a rainy day of slacking.

Slapping cards on the counter and mumble singing along to Radiohead's Let Down, you didn't hear the trailer door open. It was Karen looking up that made you turn and freeze, long end of a Red Vine hanging from the corner of your mouth and color fading from your face in embarrassment at finding Chris looking at you with a goofy smile. He made a joke about it being a picture worthy moment and you snapped off the licorice in your mouth as you and Karen hopped off the counter. Flustered, you fumbled with turning off the music and stashed the candy in your hand behind your back until you could side step to the garbage can and drop it in. Chris chuckled, watching Karen scoop up the loose cards to dump in a drawer.

"Am I interrupting something?" he asked, quirking up an eyebrow.

"Union meeting," Karen answered. "Pretty important stuff."

Chris slumped down in your chair, spinning around to face out from the mirror and shoulders heavily spotted with rain. You grabbed a comb and Karen made a good show of readjusting bottles and products at her section of counter.

"You can relax," he told you. "They pushed back another two hours. May end up losing the day."
"Huh," Karen mused, putting her hands on her hips. "Well, fuck it. I'm getting another bagel." She grabbed her cigarettes and pointed at you. "Want somethin', babe?"

You thanked her anyway, but declined the offer. Chris chuckled and shook his head when she pointed at him. He waved to Karen as she left and spun his chair to face you. You smiled shyly, when he flashed you a toothy grin. Was he ever not adorable?

"I was going to call or something, but I don't have your number," he pointed out, holding up his empty palms with a helpless shrug.

"I know, yeah," you said. "I thought about that."

"Can we fix that?" he asked. "I'm not saying I mind the walk over here, but it might make things a little easier."

He was already digging out his phone and you recited your number when he was ready. He sat there for a minute, his thumbs hovering over the keyboard and eyes staring curiously at the screen. Chris smirked to himself and nodded as he typed. You tried to peek over and see what he was doing, but he folded the phone away from you and wagged a finger your way.

"What was that?" you asked.

"Had to pick a name," he told you, pocketing his phone in his jeans.

"Pick?" Curiosity and cats be damned, you were itching to know now.

"Red Vine," he announced, a bit smug.

"You're not serious," you breathed, a little aghast.

Chris nodded, small and quick, with a giddy smile and plainly proud of himself. "Yyyep," he said, popping his 'P' at the end.

Aaand that's what you get for eating licorice like a five year old. You huffed with a pout for a moment and accepted your fate. What the hell. He was still 'Flip Cup Hero' in your phone. It was kinda cute and who else could say Chris Evans had given them a nickname.

"Anyway," he said, sitting up in your chair. "Cornhole at Mackie's trailer. You in? Told them I can't play without my partner."

Aww. His "partner". You smiled at the idea. But still, be cool.

"It's raining," you reminded him.

"We've got umbrellas," he noted, as if it weren't a problem. "Besides, I saw you running around in your little rain boots. You look pretty set."

You hid your face in your hands and groaned. You knew you and your boots were cute, but in that way girls don't judge each other for being practical. A far cry from alluring to the male of the species, in your opinion. So far, with your shorts and t-shirts to survive life in Hotlanta, you hadn't exactly been putting your best style foot forward.

"What?" he laughed at you. "I think they're cute. You and you're little polka dots."

"Oh, that's not helping," you whined, shaking your head.
"Come on, Boots," he insisted, standing up from your chair. "Let's go kick some ass."

"Boots?" you repeated. How could this simultaneously be getting worse and better?

"Yeah," Chris nodded, sighing at the end like he shouldn't have to explain himself. He swept his hand toward the door. "Get your stuff and let's go. They're waiting."

You laughed and kicked off your slip-on Sketchers and hopped back into your rain boots. Chris grabbed your coat off the rack by the door and handed it to you as you headed outside together. You followed along, jogging a step behind as he lead the way, dodging rain drops, across the lot to Anthony Mackie’s trailer. Waiting outside and sitting in a pair of director’s chairs under the awning of the trailer was Anthony and Sebastian. Spaced out across the side of the trailer was a plastic cornhole set. Sebastian and Anthony smiled their hellos.

“Good mor-ning,” Anthony sang, the words dipping and rising. He looked between you and Chris, his mouth puckered in a giddy smile that looked like he was having trouble keeping his composure.


“I’m not starting,” Anthony promised, raising both hands up in surrender. “I just think it’s cute.”

You deserved a free blush now that people were apparently hearing about you and Chris. You didn’t know what to say or even if there was something to say. Anthony pointed you out, tucking his chin to his shoulder and pouting at you from the side of large doe eyes.

“See that?” he asked about your blush, sounding amused. “That’s adorable...I’m gonna give you a hug.” He stood up and did just that, indifferent to your wet coat. “You’re gonna need it.”

“Don’t worry,” Sebastian told you. “We’re not gonna tell anybody.”

“No, you’re not,” Chris agreed.

There was that infamous want for privacy you’d heard about. You wouldn’t argue. Besides, there really wasn’t anything to technically make a fuss over. You certainly weren’t interested in him for the attention and were a little afraid a fling with the star of your film could get you a reputation or, worse, cost you your job. It was uncharted territory for you and privacy was your new favorite word ‘til you could figure this out.

“So, we gon’ do this or what?” Anthony asked, clapping his hands and rubbing his palms together.

Chris grabbed a black golf umbrella standing up against the side of the trailer and popped it open. He tugged your coat sleeve and inclined his head to the board behind you. Anthony and Sebastian opened up their own umbrellas and moved to their ends of the game, Sebastian with you and Anthony down with Chris. You asked which color your team was and Chris said “Blue, of course.”

All three gentlemen decided ladies should go first and you tossed your first bean bag directly into the hole for three points.

You threw your hands up in excitement and Chris fist pumped with a grunting "yeah!". Sebastian dropped and shook his head. Anthony's mouth formed a silent "O" and he looked as if he'd just been stung.

"You brought a ringer?" Anthony yelled at Chris, with an accusing finger pointed in his direction.

Chris' eyes crinkled and his shoulders shook with a stifled laugh and innocent smile.
"She's a ringer at everything, apparently," Sebastian complained, gesturing a helpless hand at you.

In a brief moment of introspection, you realized- you really were good at pub games. You wondered if there was room on your résumé to add a couple extra talents as Sebastian picked up a beanbag for his first play. The bag slid to a stop, hanging over the lip of the hole for a moment before gravity pulled it in. Chris groaned and turned away from the board for a moment. Anthony was pretty smug and Sebastian was feeling cocky.

"Shit just got real," Anthony declared. Pointing a finger between his heart and Sebastian, he nodded and added, "That's it right there. We gon' hold this down. You feel me?"

"We got this," Sebastian nodded back, confident.

"It's still early," you noted, putting up a hand to stop them. "It's still early."

"That's right," Chris seconded, as you made your next toss.

Cornhole was a slow play game. You and Sebastian were pretty well matched and he managed to hold you and Chris down 2-1. After Anthony and Chris' round, you guys were up 4-3. It was a tiny tug of war for the first game. In the end, Anthony and Sebastian squeaked by with a narrow 2 point win and you felt like you'd let Chris down he looked so defeated. Luckily, the rain still fell and the game went on. You and Chris had a decisive victory in the next game with an impressive 21-17 win.

You quickly figured out much of Sebastian and Chris' friendship seemed to revolve around things being settled best two out of three times. By the third game, the trash talking was frequent and everyone had stooped to dancing behind the boards, waving and jumping, and perfectly timed loud outbursts before throws to try and distract each other. It was the most juvenile behavior you had ever witnessed, and participated in, during a sober game of cornhole and it was glorious.

Biting your thumbnail and frozen solid with worried anticipation, you watched wide eyed as the last blue beanbag flew from Chris' palm. The bag sailed through the air, carrying all the hopes of you and the pleading expression on Chris' face with it, and slid to a stop to half hang on the board after knocking Anthony's point away. Mouth hanging open in an exuberant smile, Chris dropped his umbrella and ran over the 30 foot gap between him and you. Your hands raised in triumph overhead as you jumped up and down in the small puddle at your feet, he hooked an arm around your waist as he scuffed to a stop and swung you around in a circle with him, your feet stuck out and water flying off your polka dotted boots.

"They cheated," Anthony declared.

"It's the boots," Chris told him, putting you back down.

"The boots," Sebastian and Anthony groaned in unison, as if the answer were in front of them the whole time.

Despite the damp chill in the breeze, you felt warm feeling Chris' arm folded over your belly as he stood behind you. So, this is heaven? Nice.


Chris answered back. "Oh, we got your three outta five."

"Forget three out of five," Sebastian said. "How 'bout lunch? I'm starving."

"Yass," Anthony hissed in serious agreement and patted his stomach. "Fooooood."
"What are we eating?" Chris asked, letting go of you and stepping over to push his way under and share Sebastian's umbrella.

"Gotta fight later," Anthony pointed out. "Better be good."

Sebastian held his hand out from under his umbrella to gather some rain. "We're not fighting today," he said, pretty sure of himself.

"Pizza?" Anthony suggested.

"Pizza," Chris and Sebastian agreed in chorus.

Sebastian pushed Chris out into the rain and walked toward the trailer door with his umbrella alone. You wondered for a moment if you should go back to your work trailer. Chris held out a hand, flapping his fingers into his palm for you to come along. That settled your internal debate of whether or not you were still part of this rainy day adventure. You smiled and headed for the protection of the awning again and you felt Chris' hand lightly touch the middle of your back as you two hurried out of the rain. You hung your rain coat to drip dry over the back of one of the chairs outside and Anthony held the trailer open for you like a world class doorman. He let the door half shut on Chris as Anthony followed you in, chuckling at his own childishness.

Inside, you didn't know what to do with yourself. This was not your world and it felt beyond strange to be standing in the living area of the wide and well appointed trailer of a movie star. Fidgeting with your hands, picking at your thumbnail, you took a quick look around you. There were some family photos, some books and magazines lying around a few places, small plants along the window, and a couple pieces of clothes thrown over the back of a chair in the corner. The trailer was bright and the furniture was plush, a leather couch along one wall and matching chairs across the length of the trailer moved through a dining area with a small kitchen and, presumably, back to a bathroom and bedroom.

Sebastian fell back into the couch, letting the breath knock out of him, and patted the next cushion for you to sit. You sat down, carefully, not sure what to do next. There had to be a limit on the amount of awkwardness one person could feel in their life and you were pretty sure you had to be close to maxing out yours. Chris leaned up against the kitchen counter after fishing out a bottle of water from the fridge and Sebastian pulled out his phone to read. Anthony rummaged around through a short stack of mail and papers and found a menu for a nearby pizza place. You sat with your hands folded over your knees.

"What do we want?" Anthony asked, menu and phone in hand.

"Deep dish," Sebastian began.

"Anything meat," Chris added.

"No fish or fungus today," Sebastian seconded.

"Extra cheese," Chris requested.

"Of course," Anthony nodded, beginning to dial the number he read off the flyer from the mail.

"That cheesy bread," Sebastian threw in.

"Oo. Get a thing of those garlic fries," Chris said quickly.

"And a thing of your nasty ass fries," Anthony begrudgingly agreed, with a roll of his eyes. "You
better apologize to her right now for that," he added, tipping his head at you on the couch.

There were a lot of things happening in your life lately that you wouldn't have seen coming. Anthony Mackie making jokes about Chris Evans kissing you with bad breath was definitely one of them. You ducked your head a bit and, beside you, Sebastian snuffled a laugh to himself. Chris shrugged an apology for Anthony and you smiled shyly.

While food was on its way, you finally relaxed enough to sit back on the couch. It was as comfy as it looked and you were a little envious of how the other half sat. Putting your second-hand couch at home to shame or not, it was the seat to have. Sandwiched between Sebastian on your right and Chris on your left, you laughed along as they fought it out on the racetracks of Forza Motorsport 6 on the Xbox under Anthony's big screen tv. Lunch came and everyone refused to let you chip in a few bucks toward the meal. Right around noon, an off tune chorus of ringtones and vibrations began as the three stars received a message that the shoot was cancelled for the day due to weather.

Reading the preview on his phone with one hand and biting into a slice of pizza folded in the other, Sebastian piped up. "Told you so."

"What? Did you see that in your magic eight ball?" Anthony joked.

Sebastian kicked lightly at Anthony's leg, trying to upset the plate he balanced on his knee. Mackie leaned away to save his lunch and Chris laughed. These guys were fun. You had a hard time picturing this little group having a bad day, or ever not getting along, and were thoroughly amused by what you were seeing.

"So, what do you guys do when they cut you loose like this?" you asked, in between bites.

"Sleep," Anthony said, right away.

Everyone laughed and Sebastian chimed in. "I never know what to do. It's so rare to get a day like this to just screw around."

"I still vote for sleep," Anthony said.

"What do you do?" Sebastian asked, turning to look at you.

"Oh, well, I don't really get a day off," you answered. "If we've got people set, like extras and stuff, we stick around to help get them squared away, get ready for the next day, wash towels and stuff. Even if I were done early, I carpool so I'm kinda at the mercy of everyone else's job, too."

"That sucks," Sebastian noted.

"Yeah," Anthony nodded. "Way to bring down the room, fun killer."

You snorted a laugh while you went back to eating and the others snickered along. You could admit, it was a little bit depressing.

"We can't all sleep all day like you, Mackie," Chris pointed out.

"People would be a lot happier if they did though," Anthony said.

You finished the last bite of your food and stood to take your paper plate to the trash. You wiped your mouth with a napkin and excused yourself. "I should get back and see what I can do to help out."
"That's right," Anthony told you in jest, flipping a limp hand toward the door. "Take your cornhole cheatin' ass outta here."

Sebastian and you laughed. Chris stood up and pointed a silent finger at Anthony, his look saying that he was watching him. Chris put his food aside and followed you out the door. He grabbed your raincoat off the chair back and held it up for you to slide on. Jacket shrugged up onto your shoulders, you turned around to see him again and he pulled your coat hood up, setting it carefully over your head with a smile. Diabetes. You were seriously going to get diabetes from how sweet this guy was.

"We're probably gonna just screw around here for a while," he mentioned. "You should gimme a call, or whatever, when you're done working. If you don't have better plans, maybe we could find a parking lot to hang out in."

"I'd like that," you nodded, backing away and into the rain to go back to work. "I'll call...or whatever."

"Looking forward to it," he smiled, waving as you headed off.

You caught up with Karen, who gave you a mischievous look but said nothing about your disappearance for the morning. Together, you shut down your trailer and floated around helping Wardrobe or whoever else needed a non-technical hand to close shop for the day. You were back in your rented room before 5 p.m. and took out your phone to message Chris. And by message you meant stare at the blank new message box and blinking curser on your phone, absolutely dumbstruck for what to type. The screen timed out and locked three times while you typed and erased several efforts at a breezy hello. Surely Shakespeare never had so much trouble. You hit 'send' and crushed your eyes closed, waiting. Your eyes opened wide in anticipation of the message that chimed back a moment later.

You: Hi! It's [y/n].

Flip Cup Hero: I know who you are...red vine

Welp, shit. That wasn't going away anytime soon, was it. Still, you giggled quietly and your heart fluttered seeing the little bubble at the bottom of your screen tell you he was writing again. You sat cross legged on your bed, hunched over your phone with your elbows on your knees, figuring the smaller you were the easier it'd be to contain your giddiness.

Flip Cup Hero: Are you home now?

You: Yes. Just got in

Flip Cup Hero: How was the rest of your day?

You: A little soggy but good

Flip Cup Hero: But the boots helped

Hello, warm cheeks! How I missed you.

You: The boots always help.

Flip Cup Hero: :)

Flip Cup Hero: Grillo's wife came into town and some of us are going to have dinner at the hotel.
Want to join us?

You had met Frank Grillo's wife on the Kingdom set and liked her and, obviously, Frank was cool. Okay- math. So, add two more people to the list who know why the girl from the hair department is here. But who else would be there? On one hand, it was another opportunity to hang out with Chris. On the other hand, the number of people who knew was racking up fast and a hotel restaurant at a table full of celebrities would have a lot of eyes on it. But on the other hand, he didn't seem too worried, or maybe not at all. And even if- wait. That's already too many hands. This should not be this hard.

**Flip Cup Hero**: Still there?

Whoops!

**You**: Sorry. Had another message.

Dirty liar. Have you no shame? How dare you lie to Captain America! Somewhere, a bald eagle just flew headfirst into a tree in disappointment at you.

**Flip Cup Hero**: Hope it's not a better offer

Like there was such a thing!

**You**: Nope

Ah, what the hell.

**You**: What time?

**Flip Cup Hero**: 6:30 know where we are?

**You**: Yep:)

**Flip Cup Hero**: Ok see you then.


You looked up the hotel restaurant on your phone. It struck you as business casual- not too fancy, but definitely better than polka dot rain boots. Not that you had much of a wardrobe to pick from. You hopped into the shower, shined yourself up with a little makeup and your face framed by a couple well placed, wispy tendrils from an appropriately messy sock bun. You tugged on a pair of skinny jeans with your sheer and fluttery button up over a snug cami. You stepped into a pair of flats and bummed some cash for a taxi from your roommate- to meet that extra you saw last night, of course.

The ride to the hotel wasn't bad. It was the arrival at the curb that twisted you stomach with nerves. Debating whether or not you were brave enough to actually go inside, the cabbie had time to tell you twice how much your fare was. Now or never. *Shit.* Now. You paid the man and slid out of the taxi with a quick look around. Why? Because absolutely no one knows who you are? Come on. Get it togehter.

With a deep breath, you headed inside. You checked your phone. Traffic and the rain had you almost 15 minutes late. In the far corner of the lobby, you spotted the entrance to the restaurant
and got in line at the hostess station. Looking over the tables, you spotted a waving hand from Anthony seated at a large round booth in the corner and you politely declined the hostess' offer for help as you had seen your party. "Your party". Ha! Who would have thought you'd ever say that and be talking about a table full of top billed actors? You were greeted at the table by a mix of warm smiles and hellos. Frank's wife, Wendy, reached a hand across the table to squeeze yours as she told you how nice it was to see you again. Anthony stood up to let you slide into the booth next to Chris. Sebastian was MIA and there was a lovely woman on the far side of Frank and his wife, a friend of Wendy's who made the trip, to round out the table. Chris flashed a smile and leaned in as Anthony pushed a menu your way.

"Thought maybe you weren't going to make it," Chris said.

Was he worried? Should you have texted? Would he have been disappointed if you hadn't shown? For an ego boost, you decided the answer was yes, to all. "Traffic," you shrugged helplessly with a smile.

Dinner was delicious and the conversation seemed effortless. You felt welcomed and like a part of the group instead of the lowly hairstylist interloper. Wendy mentioned Frank was back to filming Kingdom soon and asked if you'd be back on set. You explained you weren't rehired because you accepted your current position and felt the love when Frank offered for you to let him know if you wanted to come back to the show. Seriously, though- what lottery had you forgot you bought a ticket for and won? Your stomach did an excited flip when Frank told you, "Yeah. Just have Chris give you my number later." Um, okay. Wow. A couple meals with Chris Evans and your next job offer? #winning.

Over dessert, it finally came up. "So, how long have you two been dating?" Wendy asked, looking between you and Chris.

You both looked at each other, the simultaneous panic in your faces evident when Anthony dropped an arm around your shoulder. "We haven't really defined the nature of the relationship just yet," he explained for you. "But we like her. We see some potential."

The whole group laughed and you appreciated his jumping in to save you. You also liked the idea that you were meeting people's approval. And the notion that you had potential? You couldn't even right now, even if your life depended on it. Chris gave you a lopsided smile and it was a pleasant change to see a faint blush in his cheeks this time.

A round of coffee and cocktails came to the table after the meal. The conversation kept going- something about the movie, a bit about Kingdom, some thoughts on the weather and work tomorrow, a few stories of shenanigans from Frank's sons while he'd been away. You spent most of the time sipping your coffee and enjoying the atmosphere, chiming in here and there and laughing at funny jokes and stories. When it was all over a surprisingly fast couple hours later, Frank bought dinner for the table because what the hell, he was in a good mood. You filed out with the group to the front of the restaurant and felt your stomach drop when you noticed a small group of fans in the lobby vying for a glimpse inside the restaurant door whenever it opened. Chris looked at you, an apologetic wrinkle in his brow and the start of a helpless shrug before an explantion you cut off before he could begin.

"I'm just gonna...ya know," you fumbled, jerking your thumb toward the door, "let you do what you do."

He smiled appreciatively. "I'm sorry," he told you. "Sometimes-"

"Oh. No. I mean, yeah, who wouldn't," you told him, tipping your head understandingly toward the
group outside and dismissing the need for further explanation.

Let's be honest. You couldn't blame them. You completely understood the draw for the chance at an autograph or a selfie from any of these guys. You couldn't be jealous. After all, you were on this side of the doors with them. If anything, they would envy you. Wendy tugged on your sleeve and said she and her friend would walk you out while "the boys" did their thing. Wendy made the rounds for hugs, getting a peck from Frank and promise to see her upstairs. Her PDA with Anthony and Chris opened you up to the same. Chris gave you a brief hug. More fresh laundry and soap and you have no shame. Stop smelling this man, for Pete's sake! He told you he would talk to you later and you nodded your approval. Anthony tipped his head and gave you a level eyed look and pout, holding his arms open and waiting. He gave you a bear hug, tipping from one side to the next and telling you, "Let's make it look good. Don't want anybody to think you got a favorite." You got a quick half-hug from Frank, whose other half was preoccupied with holding his other half, and a reminder to "get that number". The ladies escorted you out and the men followed a moment after to greet their waiting fans. You hopped a taxi back to your little hotel. About an hour after you had left dinner, your phone chimed for your attention.

**Flip Cup Hero:** Sorry to ditch you like that. I feel like a jerk

**You:** No! You didn't ditch me.

**Flip Cup Hero:** I still feel bad

**You:** You shouldn't. I get it. And you're not a jerk. Believe me- I know jerks

**Flip Cup Hero:** Lol thx

**Flip Cup Hero:** At least we figured out one thing.

**You:** ??

**Flip Cup Hero:** That we can be awkward in places besides parking lots:)

**You:** LOL!

**Flip Cup Hero:** This opens up a whole new world of possibilities of places to be awkward

**You:** So true

**Flip Cup Hero:** That's pretty exciting news

Are you too young to need a cardiologist? Probably, but the workout your excited heart was getting would be worrisome nonetheless.

**Flip Cup Hero:** We should put our schedules together and see when's the next time we can be awkward.

Hello? Is this 911? Yes, I'd like to report I'm having a heart attack.

**You:** Ok

**Flip Cup Hero:** Ok

**Flip Cup Hero:** We'll catch up at work tomorrow
You: Ok

Oh, my god. Stop writing "Ok". What are you? 12? Use your big girl words.

Flip Cup Hero: Ok:)

But "Ok" works, too.

Flip Cup Hero: Have a good night

You: You too:)

Chapter End Notes

Comments/feedback welcome! Please feel free to add here or comment/message on tumblr @whostheblondegirlwriting
Happy New Year, everyone! Enjoy this next chapter as a parting gift to 2015.
Please pardon any grammatical goofs, etc. as this is a hasty post before a busy day begins.

You know what's weird? How shy eyes are. Like when that guy you like is in the room and you want to look so you do, but other people have eyes too and they're looking at you too and, all of a sudden, your eyes aren't brave enough to look at any of them, least of all him? Yeah, that. That's weird. As much as you enjoyed looking at Chris, the downright cowardice of your eyes wouldn't let it happen unless he was involved in a scene or you absolutely had to look at him to do your job. As if somehow you taking a peek in public would give away your secret.

The light rain shuffling the shooting schedule put you inside today. Thankful for the climate controlled dryness of the soundstage, you were checking Facebook while the scene filmed. You stole the occasional glance up from your phone to watch Chris deliver his lines. You smiled at the seriousness of the dialogue coming through with the slightly lowered register of his voice. Mm mm mm. Good lord. You could listen to that man talk like that all day. You pocketed your phone and worked your way forward with a girl from Makeup to touch up Chris and Sebastian as the director cut the scene. Sebastian gave you a large toothy grin while you carefully pulled some stray hairs off his sweaty brow and tucked them back in place.

"What did you do last night?" he asked, quietly enough to be a private conversation with you.

Your smile was pulled back tight against your teeth, trying not to let it overtake your face as you worked. "Had dinner with some nice people," you said, casual and nondescript.

"Mhmm," he hummed, nodding along with a knowing grin on his face. "How was dinner?"

"Good," you nodded, eyeing his hairline and giving it a quick shot of hairspray. "I had the chicken. It was delicious."

Sebastian laughed, his chest shaking as he held his amusement behind tight lips. "I'll have to try it," he said as you stepped back to give Makeup some room.

You went over to Chris and began to fuss over his hair as he stood patient and still with a small smile at the corner of his mouth. He said hello quietly and you did the same. You hadn't said much more to each other all day. The trailer was busy for the morning call and with the crew packed in around the edge of the indoor set, there wasn't much opportunity for privacy.

"What's Stan laughing about?" Chris asked, his eye brows peaking in curiousity as you brushed at the side of his head.

"Nothing," you said. "Just gave him a recommendation for where to get some good chicken for dinner."

"Oh, yeah?" he smiled, coyly. "Any place I know?"
"Doubtful," you told him, deadpan as you gave his hair a final once over. "It's a pretty exclusive place. Gotta be somebody to go there."

He laughed out loud and into a sigh, the corners of his eyes crinkling with his smile. "Oh, I see. It's like that, huh?"

You gave him an innocent and apologetic shrug as you stepped backward off set. Settled back into the shadow behind the lighting rigs, you smiled to yourself, giddy at having made him laugh so fully. Karen came up silently beside you as the director was calling everyone to order and places again. She stole you away to help out with the extras at the other end of the sound stage and kept you busy until the set closed for the night. Back in your trailer studio by 10 that night, you straightened up from the day's work, ready for a Sunday off of sleeping in past sunrise. When no one came for a final wash by 10:30, you closed up shop and went to the parking lot to meet your ride. Standing by the car, your phone chimed in your pocket.

Flip Cup Hero: It's dangerous to be in parking lots alone at night

You looked up from your phone and around but didn't see anyone nearby except your friends coming to meet you.

You: Well it wasn't creepy until now. Thanks!
You: Where are you?

Flip Cup Hero: By the gate.

You looked over and spotted him leaned against the side of his rental car at the far end of the lot. You thought you saw a small wave from him but it was hard to tell.

You: Ah-ha
You: Stalker

Flip Cup Hero: You know us and parking lots.

You: Lol

Flip Cup Hero: Going home?
You: Yup

Flip Cup Hero: Plans tomorrow?

Your friends caught up and said their hellos. The car unlocked, you slid into the back seat with your roomie, Emily.

You: Sleep in

Flip Cup Hero: The Anthony Mackie school of days off
You: You've heard of it? ;)

Flip Cup Hero: I have. Big fan.
Flip Cup Hero: When you're done sleeping we should do something

Your stomach sank and you were relieved to see no one heard your distressed groan over their chatter and the radio on. You were already committed to the day with some of your work friends for Emily's birthday. The day was kicking off with an afternoon Braves game, then booze, dinner, and dancing. You only had the one day off for the week and everyone had planned a couple weeks ago to celebrate this Sunday. It was as close as you all could get to having time off set, even though it was a few days late of her big day.

You: Can't. Plans all day. Sorry:(

Huh. Never thought you'd say 'no' to Chris Evans, but there it was. There was a short delay before a reply came back and you bit at your thumbnail while you nervously watched your phone. Was he mad? Was he just busy or distracted for a minute? And, honestly, what the hell? Why do you even feel bad? You have a life. You had plans before he asked. It happens.

Flip Cup Hero: That's okay. Some other time

You: Yes. Definitely

Damn you, text messages and your lack of discernible inflection! Oh, well. What could you do? You definitely knew not to read too much into it. Even if he was a little put off or let down, he was allowed to be. In fact, the idea that he was disappointed to not be graced with the pleasure of your company was a bit of an ego boost and you liked it. Besides, you can't make it too easy, right? Hard to get- is that still a thing? Does it still work?

Flip Cup Hero: Have fun tomorrow. Gotta drive. Talk to you later

You: K. Good night

Flip Cup Hero: Good night.

Emily's birthday was an epic success. Nobody necessarily was a Braves fan, but in Atlanta and with a couple of overpriced beers, you all decided to root for the home team. Your adopted sons winning their game made Emily's afternoon "cocktail party" at a bar near the stadium even more delightful among a pub packed full of sunburnt and beered up true fans. A quick wardrobe change before dinner, and you were set to dance the night away downtown with several of your closest buddies from work. Selfies puckered up to Emily's tiara crowned head and shot glasses in hands, sweaty bouncing and writhing to the club beats with your friends, a confidence boosting free drink from that handsome brunette in the booth next door, and you were loving life.

Returned safely home by your designated driver, you and Emily walked arm in arm back to your room were you both fell out exhausted into your beds. Emily was passed out in no time. You, being the sweetheart, and slightly less drunk, that you are, put her tiara on the nightstand and took off her shoes before pulling the sheets over her. Midnight snacking- okay, two in the morning snacking- another piece of birthday cake, you set the alarms on your clock and phone for work in the morning as loud as possible before you crashed yourself.

Eyes burning and feet aching, you and Emily wrapped a miserable arm around each other as you trudged your way across the lot at 6:45 in the morning. Praise the lord for a "late" 7 a.m. call and curse Jose Cuervo for being so damned likable. Karen loved you and filled your large travel mug with coffee for you and catered you a breakfast of warm cinnamon muffins and a bowl of fruit with a

Sitting in Karen's chair, she braided your ponytailed hair out of boredom while you nibbled at a muffin and scrolled through the photos you were tagged in from last night. You recounted your night, fondly and with surprisingly little regret considering your current state of exhaustion, and she laughed at the post that showed your group's bar receipt as she noted the round of "blow jobs" you all shot. Alright, you had a little bit of shame. Because, face it, nobody looks good when "7" shows up next to the words "blow job" on a receipt. You ducked your head and blushed, deservedly. Lucky for you, you snapped your screen locked before the trailer door opened and Chris and Anthony came in. Karen let go of your hair and you stood up quick to go to your station while you and Karen snickered before regaining your poise.

Anthony hummed behind a curious smile. "What's going on ladies?"

"Nothing," Karen shrugged as the men took their seats. "Just talking about blow jobs."

Oh, God dammit, Karen! It didn't matter if you could have blushed from absolute embarrassment, because all the blood had left your face. If ever you wanted to die, now was the time. There was a stunned moment of silence as Anthony and Chris stared at your reflection in the mirror. Oh, My God. Where's an ax murderer or lightning strike when you need one? Anyone or anything to put a quick end to this disgraceful moment. Anthony sputtered with laughter at your horrified and pale face and Chris' eyes crinkled and shrank to nearly closed as he struggled against a large smile and held in a shoulder shaking laugh.

Karen gave Anthony a small slap on his arm to scold him. "The drinks, you morons," she groaned.

"I know the drink. This was your fault," Anthony argued, pointing a finger at the Karen in his mirror. "You know what you did...You need church."

Chris laughed and you were still wishing for the sweet relief of a quick demise. "Oh, my god," you whined, quietly, as you forced yourself into action, grabbing a comb, and trying to remember how to be a professional.

"Somebody had fun last night," Chris mused, making Anthony snicker.

You finally felt the blood come back to your face in a less than helpful flush. All you could do was shake your head and work. It didn't help that anytime you glanced at the mirror to check your work Chris flashed you an amused smile. Your face was beginning to ache from the amount of time you spent pressing your lips together, unable to shake the mortification of about ten minutes ago. Chris was finished and he and Mackie were on their way out as Sebastian and Frank rolled in. You breathed a sigh of relief and prayed everyone had a short memory that morning.

By the end of the night, you had managed a poker face for the whole day and no one had mentioned the questionably named shots. At ten o'clock, you were officially over the long and hungover day. Sebastian was ready for an end of the day wash and Chris followed him into your trailer. The trailer was a little quieter than it had been the last few days. Tonight you didn't mind. Your head was beginning to pound and you didn't think you could take another heart attack at one of Karen's off-color remarks. You couldn't stay mad at her, even if you wanted to. She gave you a hug and left a faint lipstick stained kiss on the cheek before she left for the night, knowing you still loved her.

"She's a trip," Sebastian commented as he transferred himself from the sink to your chair and you wiped the kiss mark from your cheek.

"She's something alright," you agreed with a warm smile.
"So, last night got a little crazy," Chris suggested, under an eyebrow arched in mischief.

You felt a soft warmth come to your cheeks. "I regret nothing," you replied, taking ownership of your barroom adventures in the hopes of it giving you a little control of your embarrassment.

Chris nodded and Sebastian chuckled. "Famous last words," Chris noted.

"You know how to party," Sebastian added with a smirk.

"Oh, Jesus Christ," you groaned, your hands falling to your sides with a small slap. "Does everyone know?"

The men laughed at you. "Sounds like Karen's not the only one who needs church," Chris slid in.

The flush in your cheeks rose to all out red and you gave up on combing Sebastian's hair. Your bright face only fueled their laughter more and you threw your hands up in frustration, your comb falling near your feet. "Oh, come on!"

Sebastian grabbed your hand in his right and patted it with his left. "The first step is admitting you have a problem," he said, supportingly, and staring deeply into your eyes.

You pulled your hand away and pointed firmly toward the door with the full length of your arm. "That's it. Out," you told them as they cackled like hyenas, Chris clutching his hand over his left chest as he folded over in Karen's chair.

"But my hair," Sebastian laughingly protested, nearly in tears as he stood up to go.

"Nope," you said, solid and shaking your head.

He grabbed Chris by the arm, pulling him up as they both sniffed and sighed loudly for their composure. "I'm sorry. Give us another...shot," Sebastian snickered which only spurred Chris back to another fit of laughter.

You picked up your comb and tossed it in their direction. Their faces lit up in surprise as they scrambled for the door yelling apologies. You heard their laughter fade the further they got from the trailer and suddenly you found yourself creating a short list of people to murder. Number 1: Karen.

You were tucked into bed when your phone lit up beside you on the nightstand and chimed the arrival of a text. You grabbed your phone quick, hoping not to disturb Emily as she slept.

**Flip Cup Hero**: You still mad?

You groaned quietly to yourself while you debated the answer.

**Flip Cup Hero**: 0:)

**Flip Cup Hero**: 0:)

You: No

Dammit. He was cute. How long could you stay mad at the guy sending you haloed smiley faces anyway?

**Flip Cup Hero**: Sorry. That was a bit immature
You: It's all good

Flip Cup Hero: I won't keep you. Just wanted to let you know I'm sorry

You: Thanks. It's ok. I know. It's kinda funny

Flip Cup Hero: Ok

Flip Cup Hero: Good night [y/n]

You: Good night

There surely was a god, because by the next day, everyone seemed to have forgotten about your ill named drink choice from the weekend before. Or, at least they elected not to mention it for fear of what you might hurl in their direction next. It was Frank Grillo's last day on set. Shooting was wrapped ahead of schedule and your phone buzzed in your pocket while you were cleaning up from a day's work at 7:30.

Flip Cup Hero: Hi. Busy?

You: Nope

Flip Cup Hero: Grillo's last night in town. Going out for dinner and drinks. Can you come?

Another dinner with your celebrity crush and his Hollywood buddies? Yes, please.

You: Sure. When?

Yeah. Casual, not too eager. Smoooth.

Flip Cup Hero: 8:30 same place

You winced, checking the clock on the wall. You had no idea how long you might be waiting for your ride to be ready to go. And there's no way you're going without a shower and a change of clothes. Atlanta heat and humidity had not been kind today and you suspected you probably looked, and smelled, as grimy as you felt.

You: I'm still at work. Don't think I could make 8:30 :(

Flip Cup Hero: No problem. You can just catch up when you can

You texted your ride for an guesstimate of when you could leave.

Flip Cup Hero: I'm sure Frank and Wendy would like to see you before they go.

You: Checking on my ride now

Flip Cup Hero: I'd like to see you too.

Ohmygodohmygodohmygod! You let out a tiny squeal and bit your lip. You fanned at the heat in your face as you let out a long breath. What do you even say, type, whatever, to that? Your driver messaged you back, telling you to be ready in fifteen minutes.
You: That's sweet

Yes. Good reply. Simple, yet effective. Could be talking about the Frank comment or his. Either way, appreciative and one way, flirty. Yeah, that works.

You: I should be home in about 30. Prob won't be too late

Flip Cup Hero: Good:) See you soon

You used your "extra" excuse to dismiss yourself out of dinner with your fellow commuters. Without your roommate in, you managed to shower and change in record time. You called ahead to have a cab on its way for you, getting a call that the driver was downstairs just as you were zipping up your jeans and smoothing the hem of your pink, sleeveless top with the cowl neck that dipped just enough to advertise there was cleavage to be had but not enough to be shamed by your mother for. In the cab, you sent a courtesy text to say you where on the way. Chris replied they were in the lobby restaurant in the far corner.

At the hotel, you bypassed the hostess station and made a beeline to the large table in the corner of the dining room. Lined along one side was Frank and his wife, Sebastian, and Anthony. On the other, was Scarlett, Wendy's travel buddy, and an empty chair at the end next to Chris. Everyone said hello, Scarlett with a raised eyebrow and smirk. Chris half-stood to slide back your chair for you. At your place setting was the chicken dinner you ordered the other night. Chris mentioned they put in the order when he got your message and assured you it had just come out and was still hot. You thanked him and took up your fork as the conversations at the table resumed over everyone's meals.

Chris leaned over. "I think maybe you show up late because you like to make an entrance," he suggested with a smile.

You chuckled, taking a bite of dinner. And, what do you know, it was still hot. "Well, some of us are just more in demand than others," you quipped.

He grinned and nodded, his chest popping out and head tipping slightly in a stifled laugh. "Well, we appreciate you making time for us."

"But of course," you smiled.

Dinner was delicious and you shared a small laugh when you noticed Sebastian had ordered the same chicken dinner you enjoyed and had "recommended" earlier. After the meal, the group ventured across the lobby to the hotel bar. Chris dropped his credit card with the waitress to open a tab for everyone to appreciative applause and cheers from Sebastian and Anthony. You took over a large booth along the back wall with a pair of chairs on the front edge of the table to accommodate everyone comfortably. The waitress delivered everyone their beers and cocktails and Sebastian leaned in to the table toward you.

"Hey, you wanna order some shots?" he asked with a fiendish smile.

With your lips pressed together tightly in a smile that sarcastically tolerated his question, you shook your head. "No. I'm good. Thanks though."

Beside you, Chris burst into laughter. That is, until he saw the corner of your mouth pulled aside in bored disapproval. He put up his hands and raised his shoulders as he failed miserably at not smiling. "I'm sorry," he told you, still smiling like an apologetic goof. "That wasn't funny."
You rolled your eyes and gave him a gentle elbow in the ribs as you shook your head with a smile. "It was a little funny," you admitted.

With an amused chuckle, Chris put his arm around your shoulder and gave a second apology that actually sounded sincere. His smile had shifted from goofy to kind and you smiled your acceptance. You smiled a little longer, enjoying the warm weight of his arm on you. His arm stayed there for a wonderfully long while until he straightened up in his seat to trade his empty glass for a fresh beer when the waitress brought the second round. Damned waitress- doing her job, ruining your moment.

Chris’ arm didn't come back when he settled into the booth again. But, as the world's best consolation prize, his hand did rest comfortably on your leg a little while later. And it stayed there, through a joke from Anthony and a summary of the next season of Kingdom. Through Wendy and Scarlett trading a story about their kids and Sebastian replying to a text, his hand was there. It's the little things that can set the world on fire and, by God, was it hot in there. He shifted again, reaching out to turn Sebastian’s phone to a better angle to see the photo he was showing him, and the hand was gone. Thank God there was a drink to put to your mouth so no one could see the tiny pout at his leaving you again.

By midnight you were up one arm around the shoulder, three (possibly) accidental knee brushes, and two hands on the leg. You weren't sure if the second time his hand was on your thigh that he knew he was lightly scratching a finger occasionally or if it was an absentminded tick. He didn't make a show of looking for a reaction or anything, just kept talking or laughing with everyone else. Either way, it sent a thrill to your gut and you appreciated the dim light hiding your pink cheeks every time it happened.

Reluctantly, you had to cut your night short. You have got to start getting more sleep. Dragging ass all day was starting to wear thin, and if you left now, you could squeeze in a measly four-ish hours before you had to be at work again by six. Chris gave you a pouty frown and slid out of the booth with you to escort you out. You parted ways with the others, smiles and hand squeezes or half-hugs from all. You wished Frank and his wife a safe trip home and good luck on the next season of Kingdom. With an stern finger point, he reminded you to call him when you got back to LA.

Taking your hand in his, Chris led you behind him to the front of the bar. The gesture was demure and exciting at the same time, the innocent PDA coming with the danger of being noticed. Stopping just before the entrance and harsh light of the lobby, he turned to you. His thumb swept over the back of your hand and you bit at the inside of your lip to keep from smiling too broadly.

"I'm sorry," he said, a little regretfully. "I'd drive you home, but- the beers. I shoulda thought of that sooner."

"Nah. Don't worry about it," you told him, with a small wave of your hand to dismiss the unnecessary apology and to distract you from the fluttering in your stomach at the thumb smoothing back and forth on your hand. "I planned on a cab. I wouldn't want to take you from your party anyway."

Ticking up his brow, he pouted thoughtfully with his head tipping to the side. "Still," he said. "I woulda done it."

Honestly, you'd never met a guy who was so endearing. You smiled shyly at his chivalry and nodded your agreement that he would have. There was a short pause between you and Chris looked around, a little distracted. You could add a hotel bar to the list of places to be awkward in.

"C'mere for a minute," Chris said, stepping past you.
You turned to follow, curious and taking a quick step to keep up or risk your hand falling from his grasp. You stopped in the shadowy hallway of the emergency exit. He gave your hand a tug, pulling you forward as he moved to meet you. Your hand held tightly in his against the side of his leg, his free hand found the curve of your waist. He bent his head down, placing his lips tentatively to yours for a chaste moment. When he leaned away, his face lingering mere inches away, his eyes moved back and forth between yours, perhaps looking for a reaction.

_Ho-ly shit._ You blinked. That just happened. Your mouth slacked open slowly and a whispered "whoa" left your lips on a gentle sigh. Apparently, that was the reaction he was hoping for, because a charmed smile curled up the corners of his mouth and he kissed you again. If the first kiss had asked your permission, the second was taking it out for a test drive.

His lips were soft and warm, pressed gently but firmly to yours. His hand slipped round to find the small of your back, pulling you close. Your chest and hips finding his, your breath hitched and an excited tingle went through you. You breathed deep, inhaling his cologne and reveling in the heady scent. There was a subtle kind of hunger to this kiss and you parted your lips, inviting him in. A small smile tightened your lips when he tasted like beer and, for a split second, you wondered if you tasted like amaretto to him. Your arm laid along his and your fingers curled themselves around the strength of his tricep as if it were the only thing that could keep you from floating away. It may have been true. When he pulled back, you took in a deep breath, collecting yourself before you opened your eyes again.

You had no idea how long the kiss lasted, but, holy Jesus Christ, you were acutely aware of the heat on your skin and the drumming of your heart in your chest. His hand withdrew from your back, opening the space between you again. His eyes crinkled and a smile, that one could almost call bashful, played at his lips. Biting your lower lip, you smiled back. His thumb moved across the back of your hand, tenderly. You forgot for a moment how words worked and hoped the affection your saw shining in his eyes wasn't just the suggestion of one too many drinks. Your hand slipped from his arm and back to your side. Good lord, he was-wait. Weren't you doing something? Oh, yeah. Going home...alone...because stupid job. Dammit.

"I should, um-" you began.

"Yeah," he nodded, sounding a little reluctant. "You should get some sleep."

_Are you kidding?!_ Sleep? Who the hell could sleep after that? Sleep? -No. Die? -Yes. With a light squeeze of your hand, he lead you back out of the hall and to the front door of the bar. He reached out his free hand in front of him to pull open the door when you pulled your hand from his and he stopped to look at you.

"Maybe I should go by myself," you suggested. "You know, just in case..."

You trailed off and he nodded his understanding. "Let me know you got home okay?" he asked, taking a step back to you.

"Sure," you promised before he lightly put his hand on your arm and placed a quick kiss to your cheek.

Chris stepped back and opened the door for you. You squinted an eye at the bright light of the lobby and sent him a parting smile over your shoulder. The valet outside hailed a cab for you. You slumped into the back seat as you gave the driver your address. You'd be shocked, and admittedly proud, if you could fall asleep fast enough to make sleeping worthwhile at all. You saw another long day of coffees and energy drinks in your future. Totally worth it.
Life with butterflies can be delightful. Nothing says "budding romance" like the tickle in your stomach when the handsome man of your hopeful dreams walks into the room and your eyes meet. It's charming and thrilling and all together energizing. And it was the new habit in your life. Chris walks into the trailer for the first time in the morning- butterflies. Chris smiles at you when you touch up his hair on set- butterflies. Chris accidentally brushes his knee across your leg when he's in your chair, or his chair on set, as you work- those damned, kamikaze-ing winged devils. You were becoming quite the master of keeping your cool in public while you secretly squealed with girlish excitement in your head.

Okay, so there hadn't been any legitimate, physical contact with him since you left the hotel bar last week after Grillo's last night in town, but the memory of it set you on fire thinking about the possibility of more. If only your work schedule afforded you the luxury of time to meet him again. The next few days were going to be hell. The production called for a huge number of extras on set daily. Your call time moved up to 5 a.m. to start work on the nameless fillers. Once you finished with your principle cast responsibilities each morning, you were back at it with the other departments prepping the people of the background action. It was a vicious cycle that left you dragging so pathetically by day three that you could scarcely manage to laugh out loud at Karen's jokes- and that's saying something. What you did have was brief text conversations with Chris, usually in your last few minutes of consciousness in you bed while your roommate snored softly nearby.

**Flip Cup Hero**: Not too many long days left. You'll make it.

**You**: Here's hoping

**Flip Cup Hero**: I believe in you:)

**You**: Well, if Cap believes...

**Flip Cup Hero**: We both do. Me and Cap

**You**: Nice. I can die happy

**Flip Cup Hero**: No dying

**You**: But then I can sleep

**Flip Cup Hero**: How about you just sleep and live to fight again tomorrow? Gotta have a day off coming

**You**: Monday. If I make it that far x_x

**Flip Cup Hero**: See now you're just being dramatic

**You**: Too much time with Hollywood types I guess lol

**Flip Cup Hero**: Hey. Easy now:)

**Flip Cup Hero**: Wanna come spend some time with me on Monday?

**You**: Maybe
Look who's playing coy. You lil devil, you.

You: What'd u have in mind?

Flip Cup Hero: Got a box for the Sox/Braves game

Hmm. In public with Chris Evans, in broad daylight, in view of tens of thousands of people and a television audience? Um, gulp! But, ohhh- Chris Evans. Mmm.

You: Sure

Dumbass.

Flip Cup Hero: Great. We'll hash out details later. Go to bed

You: Already there

Flip Cup Hero: Well ok then. Go to sleep

Flip Cup Hero: Good night [y/n]

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A brilliant lyricist once said, "Come Monday, it'll be alright". Turns out, Monday was a little bit of alright. You slept in till 10 o'clock, went for a short run, had a completely necessary and oversized brunch with Emily, and killed the afternoon with her watching reruns of Friends on TV. By 5, you were lacing up your white, low top Chucks while you waited for the text from Chris about your ride to the stadium. You tugged your ponytail tight and tucked in one corner of your half buttoned, white collared shirt into the waist of your cutoffs- casual chic. Giving "the girls" a last tuck and lift and adjusting your red cami over your cleavage, because obvious reasons, you gave yourself an approving pout in the bathroom mirror. Hot, but not trying too hard- achieved. Rolling up your sleeves to your elbows, your phone chimed in your back pocket.

Flip Cup Hero: Just pulled in

Grinning from ear to ear, you sent back a one letter reply and grabbed your keys and sunglasses from the end of your bed. Emily wished you good times with the extra you'd made up, and, thank god, she was still buying, and you were out the door. Skipping down the steps and hurrying across the lobby, you spotted his blue Chevy outside the door. He looked up from adjusting the stereo when you opened the car door and dropped into the seat beside him. He gave you a wide smile, the apples of his cheeks rising into the bottom edges of his aviator sunglasses below his backwards ballcap, and you were on your way.

Watching a ball game from a private, luxury suite was the way to go. You'd highly recommend it to anyone with the chance. You'd add two very enthusiastic thumbs up if they had the chance to do it with Chris Evans, his brother Scott, Anthony Mackie, Sebastian Stan, and a handful of the Evans boys' friends from Boston. Besides the free food and open bar, the company couldn't be beat.

You spent warm-ups standing around the countertop buffet, snacking away and listening to Chris and Scott catch up. You sipped a beer with Anthony at the end of the box, looking over the wall's edge and around the stadium while you chatted about his early life in NOLA and his recommendation for a visit at least once before you die. The seats nearby began to fill with spectators and you two retreated back inside the air conditioned suite. Chris held out an arm to welcome you over and you were pleasantly surprised the invitation meant standing hip to hip with his arm around
your waist while you joined the group listening to a story from one of his friends. Yep. This was the way to enjoy baseball.

Having sung along to the National Anthem, you found yourself sitting in the seats outside with your knees bent up and heels planted on the concrete wall of the front row. This time you knew to cheer for the Red Sox. With a view skewed just a bit toward the first base line and with Sebastian on your right and Chris on your left, you were holding the ticket for arguably the best seat in the house. Chris' hand was on and off again with your thigh for the first several innings. You belted out a heartfelt rendition of "Take Me Out To The Ballgame" with a slightly tipsy Anthony during the seventh inning stretch that had Chris and Scott rolling with laughter. Your performance was rewarded by a high five from Sebastian and a peck on the cheek from Chris in a half hug as he hoisted his beer to howl his approval with the rest of his friends. You liked baseball before. You were loving it now.

The Sox may have lost, but you felt like a winner. You all hung around in the suite for the crowd to thin out. You got the offer to join them at the hotel bar to wallow in the misery of defeat, but declined with another early start at work in the morning. Chris' family and friends were as handsome and affable as him and you were treated to friendly hugs goodbye from most and "nice to meet you"s from all. Escorted by security to the parking lot, Chris held your hand in his as you walked and he waved to the others that he would catch up after taking you home.

On the ride home, you talked about the game and Chris' brother and friends. He insisted you hadn't seen a Red Sox game until you saw it in Fenway and you mentioned you'd always thought it would be fun to take a summer to see a game in every ballpark. Before you knew it, you were back in your hotel parking lot. Chris stopped along the curb near the lobby entrance and dropped the car into park. Slipping off your seatbelt in anticipation of him coming around to open the door for you, you were caught off guard when he leaned his elbow into the console between you and reached over to turn your face to meet him in a kiss.

You smiled your surprise with a small giggle in your throat and felt his lips smile back against yours. His left hand gently cupped your face in the tender moment. You both drifted back slowly, his forehead touching yours as you looked between each other's eyes, you much shyer than him. Chris' hand slipped round to the nape of your neck and pulled you back in for another kiss, this one stronger than before. Both of your mouths parted with a sense of urgency when his right hand came up to replace his left behind your head and his left hand dropped to lay along your leg. It didn't take a written invitation for your arms to find their way around his neck and, all of a sudden, you could have been back in high school, making out with the popular jock in his car behind the gym. You drew in a deep breath, feeling his thumb slide along the frayed hem of your shorts and his fingertips knead into your skin.

You broke apart with a pant and a startled look out the back window as an insistent horn from the car behind you destroyed the moment. Chris ducked his head, trying to stifle his laughter after his own quick peek. You couldn't help but snicker yourself. It was like getting busted by the teacher. His hands disappeared from you and he straightened up in his seat with a quiet clearing of his throat. You fumbled for the door handle behind you and retreated backward out the door with a bashful smile. Chris thumped his head back into the seat and lollled over against the headrest to look at you with a small grin on his lips and eyes that ran up and down you once before coming back to yours. God, that man.

"Good night," he said, sounding a little let down.

"Good night," you smiled, hanging onto the door. "Thanks for the game. It wa-" The impatient driver behind you tapped the horn again. "Hold your fuckin' horses!"
"Jesus, [y/n]!" Chris laughed, twisting to look back and wave an apology to the driver with a smile and wince.

Okay. Maybe you'd had a bit too much liquid courage. But, then again, no. That guy deserved it. Ruining your moment. Fuck that guy. You shot the driver a dirty look. A-hole.

"G'night," you said again.

Chris’ eyes were still crinkled with laughter as he shook his head at you. "Good night, [y/n]."

You shut the door and the car shifted back into gear. Chris reached his hand over to wave to you as he drove away and you headed inside, thinking better of starting a fist fight with the cranky driver in line along the curb. Live to fight another day.

Another few days, in fact. You survived the hell of the earlier morning calls. High five yourself, because damn, that was brutal. Saturday night, at the the end of the day in the trailer, Karen was folding towels from the laundry and you were blow drying Sebastian's hair. With a final run of your comb, Sebastian was finished when Chris knocked on the door and hopped up the trailer steps.

Flipping his keys around his finger and his hat on backwards, Chris gave you a smile before he looked at Sebastian. "You done?" he asked. "Joe's waiting."

Sebastian ran a hand through his hair, looking it over in the mirror. "Yeah," he nodded, grabbing his jacket from Karen's empty chair. "Let's go." He turned to nod at you and Karen with a handsome smile. "Ladies."

Chris snorted a laugh and gave you both a wave. You got a second quick smile as he made his way back outside behind Sebastian. Karen cleared her throat obnoxiously behind you. As you turned around to see what the fuss was, a warm ball of fluff smacked you square in the face.

"The hell, Karen," you complained, managing to catch the towel before it hit the floor.

"Are you fucking Captain America?" she asked, completely sober.

"What?" you coughed, doing your best to be offended instead of excited by the idea.


"Ha!" you scoffed. "I wish."

You did. That much was true. You'd thought about it at least. Hey, you're only human, and he's...well, look at him. Like sex on a stick. Who wouldn't?

Karen nodded, the way she did when she called someone on their bullshit. "Yep. You are," she sighed, looking and sounding a little disappointed in you.

"I'm not," you protested, folding the towel and adding it to the pile of clean laundry.

Karen stopped, letting her towel and hands fall into her lap and giving you a knowing look. "Of course you are," she told you. "Two things." She held up her fingers for illustration. "Number 1-congratulations. And, number 2- knock it off."

"Really, nobody's-" you tried again.

But she put up a hand to stop you. "[Y/n], sweetheart, naive and innocent child, please stop," Karen began, motherly wisdom sure to follow. "What on Earth do you think is gonna come out of this?
"Spend, like, all of my time in LA," you grumbled, reluctantly, and fell into your chair.

Karen tossed you a wad of dryer fresh towels to fold. "He's pretty, babe," she noted, "but they're not worth the heartbreak."

You folded one towel and moved on to the next. "But it's not even like we've slept together," you tried to explain.

"Good," she said, eyes wide with approval- finally. "Don't. Cut bait and run. Don't walk, run. Before you get hurt."

"Oh, come on," you protested, putting aside another folded linen. "The way you go on about Grillo, and whoever else for that matter-"

"Look, but do not touch," Karen corrected, raising an interrupting finger. "I have made your mistake already. Now, I am a cautionary tale."

"Oh my god," you marveled, quietly, leaning forward and eager to hear more. "Who?"

First the first time since you'd met her, Karen shook her head and kept quiet. You felt cheated, slumping back into your seat with a dejected frown. She knew your secret and you got nothing. Life wasn't fair. Especially when you suddenly understood she was right.

"Do yourself a favor and get out now," she urged, stuffing towels into the cabinets above the sinks.

"Yeah, yeah," you pouted.

Karen moved over to take the towels from you to add them to the pile on the counter behind the sinks. "Or don't," she shrugged. "You can come cry on my shoulder later. Been there for that before, too."

"But he's so pretty," you whined. "And he's funny and nice and a good kisser..."

"They all are," she agreed, wistfully. "They're actors, honey. They know how to get what they want."

God dammit, Karen. She was right and you were disappointed. For several reasons, actually. First, and foremost, he was a great guy. He was all those good things you said and, you suspected, even more. You were a good person. Didn't you deserve a good guy? After all, you liked him and he seemed to like you and- God fuckin' dammit, Karen! What if it was just part of some game?

Needless to say, getting to sleep that night was near impossible. You frowned at the ceiling, sighing occasionally and glad your roommate wasn't awake to question your troubled breathing. Your restlessness was doubled when your phone lit up and buzzed beside you on the nightstand. You stared at its subtle vibrating journey along the tabletop, hesitant to pick it up. You figured you knew who it was. Your snorted contemptuously when you finally tipped the phone on its edge to see the screen. You must be psychic.

**Flip Cup Hero: U up?**

Without much logic behind it, you scowled at the display before it blacked out. It was 12:53 in the
morning. What was this? Some drunk dial, booty call? *Can't even take the time to spell "you"*. You scoffed. Oh, come on now. That wasn't fair. He hadn't drunk dialed you before and you definitely hadn't had the prerequisite carnal knowledge to qualify for a "booty call". Damn you, Karen, for turning you into a pessimistic brat.

The phone buzzed again in your hand, reminding you that you hadn't acknowledged the message yet. Your lips pushed to the side in a contemplative frown. If you just ignore it, he'll think you're sleeping. Yeah. That's a good plan.

**Flip Cup Hero**: Just saying hi. Let me know if you're free tomorrow. Talk to you then

Aw, dammit. "Just saying hi"? That's no booty call. Why was he so cute? Why was Karen right? You huffed out an angry breath and set your phone aside. Ignore it. Maybe things will look better in the morning.

Staring at your phone over a bowl of cereal at the kitchen counter, things looked exactly the same. You hadn't even unlocked your screen for fear of somehow accidentally triggering the "read" notification in the message. Instead, you mentally abused yourself, systematically reviving the screen whenever it blacked out with no clear plan of action beyond that. One thing you did know, your cornflakes were soggy. You were spooning out the banana slices from your bowl to eat when your phone chimed. You eagerly grabbed the device to read.

**Kare bear**: Morning love. Just checking in and reminding you to be strong. <3

You sighed fondly. God bless Karen. You sent back the fist emoji with a "thanks" and dumped the remainder of your mushy breakfast in the garbage. She was right. You could do this. Be strong. Resist temptation. Save yourself the heartache. You nodded at the affirmation. You got this! At least you did for the next two hours before your phone dinged a new message and challenged your resolve.

**Flip Cup Hero**: You can't still be sleeping

*Be strong. Be strong.*

**Flip Cup Hero**: Wake up sleeping beauty

*Gah!* Damn. He's smooth. And your will broke. You unlocked your phone and opened the message. You'll probably hate yourself later.

**You**: I'm up

**Flip Cup Hero**: It's about time lol

**You**: Lol yeah

**Flip Cup Hero**: Got any big plans for the day?

Ummmm, no. But... No. Be strong. Come on!

**You**: Laundry, grocery. Pretty exciting stuff

**Flip Cup Hero**: Sounds exciting. What about tonight?

You: Sorry. Got plans with some friends

Dirty, evil liar. Shame. Shaaame!

Flip Cup Hero: :( 

Aw, dammit. Could he be any cuter?! It's like he's doing it on purpose.

You: I'm sorry

You really were. Sorry he was too much trouble for your own good. Sorry he was so adorable. Sorry you couldn't see him. Well, "couldn't" is a strong word. Shouldn't is more like- And goddammit! Just stop it already!

Flip Cup Hero: That's ok. Maybe we can grab dinner after work tomorrow if it's not too late?

Shitshitshitshitshit. Hoe, don't do it. Stay calm. You got this. You've been doing good so far.

Flip Cup Hero: Saw a great parking lot on the way home yesterday we could be awkward in

Awww, maaaan. Now he's just playing dirty.

You: We'll see

Yeesh. That sounds lame.

You: :)

There. That's better.

Flip Cup Hero: Ok I'll leave you to your chores. Give me a call if your plans change

Oh. Ow. The punch in the gut. The lies. Jesus Christ. How did you get yourself into this?

You: Will do

Will do? What the hell kind of reply was that? Just put your phone down before anything else stupid comes from your thumbs. Go ahead and sigh. You've earned it.

You tossed your phone away to the end of your bed. Grabbing a basket full of dirty clothes, you headed for the hotel's laundry room downstairs. At least you weren't a complete liar. You and your roomie, Emily, did laundry and went to the the grocery as advertised. You messaged Karen and a few other coworkers who were free to join you and Emily for dinner. It made you feel better, making your excuses come true.

The next few days, Karen stuck to you like glue. Part of you resented her for not giving you a chance to talk to Chris. The other part appreciated the way she subtly ran interference so you didn't come off like you were avoiding him. Long shooting days meant you didn't really have the time to sneak off with him anyway. Keeping your distance was going unfortunately well. That is, until a car crash near the studio knocked out the power for several city blocks and cancelled production in the middle of the afternoon.

You did what you could do with the daylight streaming in through the trailer windows. When you did all of your work, you and Karen went to see what help you could be around the set to help everyone get home sooner before you met your ride in the parking lot. You were so busy, you hadn't
thought about having a bonus night off. Good thing your phone rang in your back pocket to remind you.

**Flip Cup Hero:** Still at work?

Well, shit. Now what?

**You:** Yeah

**Flip Cup Hero:** Need a ride home?

You weren't sure who, but someone was testing you. God? The devil? Hell, at this point, was there a difference?

**Flip Cup Hero:** Want to grab dinner?

Go on, smarty pants. Figure your way out of this one.

**Flip Cup Hero:** That probably reads a little pushy back to back. Sorry

Swoon. -No! Stop it!

**You:** My ride's actually waiting

**Flip Cup Hero:** I see

Aww. You thought maybe you'd hurt his feelings or something and you pictured his face frowning at you. It felt terrible.

**You:** Sorry:(

**Flip Cup Hero:** No worries. Offer still stands for dinner

Who are you kidding? That man makes you weak. Besides, you're not fooling yourself. You know this isn't going anywhere. Might as well have one last hoorah.

**You:** Dinner sounds good

**Flip Cup Hero:** Great. Let me know when you're home and I'll pick you up

You had swallowed your nerves and messaged Chris when you got back to your hotel. You didn't have much of a plan for the night, but he arrived, as promised, thirty minutes later. You met him at the lobby curb and his broad smile when you got in the car gave you butterflies for all the wrong reasons. You two drove out of the parking lot with no destination in mind. He threw out a few restaurant names nearby and suggested a movie as you drove past a theater. You had a quick debate over a movie with yourself. No talking- good. In the dark with Chris Evans- probably bad. _Ah, fuck it_. You only live once.

"I heard there's a new Avenger's movie playing," you suggested with a sly smile.

Chris laughed out loud as traffic stopped at a red light. "Never heard of it," he said, pulling back his smile and pretending not to know what you were talking about. "Heard there's a new Jurassic Park, though."

Dinosaurs and beefy Chris Pratt? You didn't need much convincing. Chris turned around in a
parking lot after the light changed and drove back to the theater. With his sunglasses and ballcap disguise in place, you bought tickets and snacks for the next showing of Jurassic World. The evening crowd wasn't too bad for a Thursday and you found seats in the middle of a row near the top of the theater with plenty of empty seats to spare. You picked at the tub of popcorn absentmindedly while you read the movie trivia on the screen waiting for the previews to start. Beside you, Chris was texting and giggling to himself.

He noticed you glance over and apologized. "Sorry," he said quietly. "Just telling Pratt we were waiting for the show to start."

"Like, Chris Pratt?" you asked in your own hushed, and a bit star struck, tone, forgetting about the Super Bowl photobomb gag a friend had sent you forever ago.

"Yeah," he whispered, checking his phone again and chuckling to himself. Chris put on his 3D glasses and turned his hat around. He handed you your glasses from the cup holder in the armrest and told you to put them on. Glasses on your face, he leaned over, touching his shoulder to yours as he held out his phone in front of you to take a selfie. His jaw fell open into an impossibly huge and dorky smile and it made you laugh along. He slid his glasses down his nose to see his phone as he typed out a message. "Told him he owes us a refund if the movie sucks," he told you, pocketing his phone and pushing the plastic glasses back up his nose.

The theater dimmed as the surround sound advertisement swelled through the speakers. You heard the buzz of his phone in the silence before the previews began and his face glowed briefly in the light of his touchscreen before he sniggered and put the phone away. You asked what what so funny and he told you it wasn't polite to repeat to a lady. Chris took a handful of popcorn and you turned your attention back to the big screen.

The previews played and the movie begun, you were completely tuned in to the story. You'd always liked Spielberg and were a sucker for the original Jurassic Park back in the day. You were also apparently a sucker for Chris Pratt and made a mental note to finally check out Guardians of the Galaxy, because reasons. Beside you, Chris Evans snacked on popcorn with, probably, different enthusiasm for the exploits of Owen Grady than you presently had. Nonetheless, his arm did find its way across the back of your seat and behind your neck. You may have indulged him, and yourself, by leaning in slightly on the armrest toward him. You were okay with that.

When the movie was done, you stayed in your seats, letting the theater empty a bit before heading out. You chatted with Chris about how you both enjoyed the movie on the way back to the car. Pulling back into traffic, you didn't have an excuse ready to get you out of dinner. You ended up at a mom and pop looking steakhouse and took a table to eat outside on the less crowded patio. After ordering dinner, Chris sent a message to Pratt, assuring him he didn't owe you guys a refund and congratulating him.

The conversation was light through dinner and, when it was quiet, the silences were still comfortable. You skipped dessert and Chris refused to let you cover your half of the meal. You know, because he didn't already have enough brownie points in your book. Walking back to the car, his hand was on the small of your back and he opened the car door for you again. Good lord, he's such a gentleman. This man was gonna be harder to let go than you thought.

It was just after nine o'clock and you were oddly relieved when he pointed the car in the direction of your hotel without any suggestion from you. The ride back was the quietest part of the evening, besides the obvious silence of watching the movie. You wondered if he was picking up on the change in atmosphere and the thought of it made your palms sweat. Pulling up to your hotel, he got out of the car to open the door for you. The worried butterflies were back as you stepped up onto the
sidewalk with him and he pushed the car door shut. You were grateful for a small group of guests who filed out the hotel door to wait for a cab. Their presence practically assured there wouldn't be another attempt at a make out session. And you were right. The evening ended on a sweet and simple kiss before he backed away with an apologetic tip of his head and raise of his brow toward the people nearby. You smiled and waved your understanding and were in the lobby headed to your room before he drove off. You'd made it!

The next afternoon at work, you left the semi-cool shade of your tree near the set to tame your stars' hair. The wind was being especially problematic for Sebastian. While you worked to untangle and set Sebastian's hair, Chris stood nearby, waiting his turn and sipping on water. You only had another five days to survive before the filming in Georgia was scheduled to wrap and you'd be heading home.

"Bet you're not gonna miss days like this," Sebastian joked, as you held your comb handle between your teeth and tried to shield his eyes from the mist of your hairspray.

"Seriously," you sighed, taking the comb back in hand and eyeing your work.

Chris had looked over his shoulder toward the monitors but snapped his head back around to look at you. "You're not coming to Germany?" he asked, seeming surprised.

"No," you confirmed, trying not to sound too disappointed and squinting in mild frustration at Sebastian's hair. "I'm done when Atlanta wraps."

Sebastian shot him a quick side eye glance as you gave his hair a final spray before moving over to Chris. It could have been the news that you were done with the production that put the wince on Chris' face, but you figured it was most likely the direct sun in his eyes. He couldn't possibly be broken up about your pending departure. After all, a few dinners and a couple minor make out sessions hardly qualified as a relationship.

Karen had grounded you back to reality and you began to appreciate her advise to keep your distance a little more each day the closer it got to you leaving. Honestly, what were you expecting? A marriage proposal? For Christ's sake- he's one of the hottest and most bankable actors in Hollywood. You couldn't actually have imagined this ending up any different than this logical conclusion. Hell, you probably weren't the first hairstylist, costumer, makeup artist or whatever he killed time with during a shoot, and you probably wouldn't be the last. Don't waste your time being disappointed. This was inevitable and you should have known better. You added a bit of gel to stiffen up Chris' hair against the steady breeze and your stars were back to their places.

When you didn't see Chris at the end of the day and your phone didn't ring before you went to sleep, you figured he'd decided not to play out the last few days of the charade. The next morning at work, he was noticeably less animated. He wasn't impolite or unkind, but he was quieter and didn't stick around long. You didn't read too much into it. He looked like he had a rough night out was all and what was the point to ask anyway? You rode out the rest of the week with that same tired air in your trailer and on set. You skipped out on the main wrap party and went drinking and dancing with Emily, Karen, and a few others you'd bonded with instead. A long night of sloppy karaoke and drunken hugs, it was a fitting farewell to Georgia and the minor heartbreak you'd leave there when you'd hop a plane for the coast the next afternoon.
Chapter 5

Home is where all your shit is. And it was good to be home. Gone almost three months, there was a thin layer of dust begging for your attention, an empty fridge, and a list of other chores and necessities waiting for you to address. The first night home, the only business you needed to attend to was picking up your soulmate and absolute BFF, Archie, from the dog sitter. The 3 year old black lab was thrilled to have you in his sights again, twisting and jumping in excited circles and his tail threatening to come unhinged. After you and Archie were back in your apartment, all was right in the world again. You ordered pizza to live on for a day until you could muster the will to go to the grocery and curled up on the couch with your loyal companion stretched along the couch on the floor beside you. It was good to be home, but tomorrow it was back to finding another job.

You made do with some odd jobs for a couple weeks. Styling models for a weekend at a fashion school design show here and a couple wedding bookings there, before a part time chair opened up at the salon that gave you your first break in LA helped pay rent. You weren't hurting. You've always been smart with your money and your gig for Marvel had paid well. If worse ever got to worst, you had family who had always offered you a hand that you never took. Back into a routine for work, you dropped résumés for more studio productions and even some theater jobs. The rest of the time you spent getting back into the swing of LA life with your friends, taking Archie for jogs, and spending a few afternoons in the surf. You literally had nothing to complain about. Everything was back on track and you were ready to move on from that embarrassing display of schoolgirl weakness in Atlanta last month.

That is, until you blindly answered your phone on your way through your apartment door from a long day at the salon. Pushing the door closed behind you and reaching down to rustle Archie's ears, you hadn't quite made out the owner of the "hi" that answered your "hello". You dropped your keys on the small table by the door and begged their pardon.

"I'm sorry," you said, stepping around Archie and sorting the mail. "Who's this?"

"It's Chris...You forget me already?"

The name and the chuckle that followed made you stop in your tracks. Suddenly, you were speechless and Archie looked up at you like he recognized the stupid in you. You took a fast look at your phone and saw the caller ID- Flip Cup Hero. Holy shit. It was him. You weren't sure how long time had stopped, but it was long enough for him to ask if you were still there.

"Yeah," you answered quickly. "Yeah, I'm still here."

"Thought maybe we had a bad connection," he suggested.

No. Actually, for a moment back in Atlanta you thought you actually had a good connection. Now, you were reduced to awkward concerns over cellular signal strength instead of moments in parking lots. Where had everything gone wrong?

"No. Everything sounds good on this end," you assured him.

And it wasn't a lie. The tenor of just his voice on the phone revived the dormant butterflies in your belly and you caught a smile coming to your face.

"I'm not bothering you, am I?"

No. Never. And even if you were, please, bother anytime you like.
"No," you said, casually. "Just getting in the door from work."

"Oh, good," he said with a hint of relief. "Well, I won't keep you, it's just- I forgot to give you Grillo's number. Don't want Frank pissed off at me."

Not a peep for almost three weeks and he calls you now because he doesn't want Frank Grillo mad at him? Okay. So you didn't exactly expect him to be calling to express his undying love for you, but he could have just sent a text. You pictured Karen slapping you senseless for the giddiness you felt at his putting in the effort to actually speak to you.

Chris asked if you had a pen handy and you rushed to the kitchen to grab a marker and write on the small dry erase board on the side of the fridge. You told him to go ahead and you dutifully copied the number as he read it out to you. You wrote Frank's name over the number and looked at it proudly. Look at you- making Hollywood connections. Whether or not you actually had the balls to call Grillo and ask for a job was another story. But, still. Hot damn! Look at that number on the side of your fridge.

"Don't tell him I forgot to give it to you," he said, playfully.

"You're secret's safe with me," you promised.

"Okay. Well, yeah," he fumbled and you bit your lip at the cuteness of the moment. "I've got to get back to work, but it was nice to talk to you again."

"Yeah," you agreed. "Same here."

"Give Frank my best when you talk to him."

You smiled and nodded even though he couldn't see. "I will."

"Okay," he said and you swore you could hear him smiling back. "Talk to you later then, [y/n]."

"Yeah," you agreed. "Bye."

You hung up the phone and Archie still sat there, judging you. Your dog could be rude sometimes. It didn't matter, your energy was up and your heart was soaring. He had called you. Chris Evans had called you. Hell, he didn't call when you were in the same city and now he called from a different country. It was like a double rainbow- what does it mean?

The thrill subsided a little while later. Alone on your couch, with a bowl of noodles for dinner and Archie curled up by your feet, you dissected the phone call again in your head, because that's healthy. He sounded more energetic, more like his usual self, than he had the last time you saw him in Georgia. Maybe that was the influence of the next girl in the Hair department. Was it a BS call or was it really somehow more convenient to make an international phone call than send a message? If he had been worried about reception on the phone, maybe it was just the safer bet to call rather than text. At least that way he knew whether or not the message actually got through and he wouldn't have Frank mad at him. Sigh. Things were complicated again.

The rest of the week went off without a hitch. And the one after that. And the next after that. And by "hitch" you meant no heartstrings tugging calls to remind you you no longer saw Chris Evans on a daily basis. You had worked up the nerve to finally call Grillo when it didn't look like your part time chair would be opening up for full time hours. He sounded genuinely pleased to hear from you and it was refreshing to feel like you still kinda belonged.
"Yeah, I thought you weren't gonna call or that knucklehead forgot to give you the number," Frank had laughed.

"No, I got the number," you assured him. "Just was a little busy getting everything started up again back home."

"No big deal. You called, that's what matters," he said. "I'm gonna give your number to Julie, see if we can't get you back in here for some work on the extras or something, work you up to get back to principles. I'm sure Kiele would love to have you, too. I'm gonna let her know you're coming back."

"Really?" you asked. It was all a bit surreal that you, first of all, even had the privilege of having Frank's number, but that he actually took your call and was going out on a limb for you for a job? Just, wow.

"Yeah, of course," he insisted. "You do good work, kid. You did right by me in Atlanta. Lemme return the favor."

"Pretty sure the favor count is 2-0 here," you pointed out.

"Nah," he assured you. "You make me look good, I make you look good. Keep an eye on your phone for Julie's call."

"Definitely."

Guess who's back to being a lucky girl. You are! Julie from the production staff called the next morning. Filming was taking a weeklong break. You were told to stop by the offices with your résumé and had a meeting with HR to get your paperwork squared away for payroll and such on Monday. You'd be ready to be back on set when shooting resumed on the 1st. She emailed you a production schedule and you coordinated working some hours at the salon, to keep your foot in the door, around the shooting when you could. The sun was shining and life was good. It was probably about time for your phone to ring and stir the pot again.

And what better time than when you were at a house full of people clad in t-shirts and bathing suits in Santa hats for the annual Christmas In July party. You hadn't heard your phone ring over the ruckus of conversations, laughter, and Christmas music. But, honestly, how could you when you were poolside in the middle of your friends giving your all to the 'Mean Girls' choreography to Jingle Bell Rock. When you were done, Karen was standing by your seat at the picnic table with your phone in hand and a half disapproving frown on her face.

"Phone call," she announced, dryly, holding your phone for you to take. You reached out for it and she pulled it back. "I face timed it for you."

"You did what now?" you asked, taking the phone and nearly choking to death on your red solo cupped margarita when you saw Chris' smiling face on your phone, laughing at you. "The fuck, Karen!" you sputtered, angrily, as she walked away.

You knocked the Santa hat off your head and dropped the phone on the table while you whipped a towel over your bare shoulders at an attempt at modesty. You heard him still laughing through the speaker on your phone and ask through a wheezing sigh if he was interrupting anything.

You cleared your throat, trying to compose yourself and make up for your initial flustered reaction as you picked up your phone. "No," you smiled. Be cool, you idiot. Be cool. "Just hanging out with some friends."

"Was that a Santa hat?" he asked, incredulously.
"You already know the answer to that," you groaned, with an embarrassed eye roll. "I'm- It's a Christmas in July party. We do it every year."

"I see," he nodded, with a cheeky smile. "And do you dance to Jingle Bell Rock like that every year?"

Chris' shoulders trembled with stifled laughter and you felt the heat come to your cheeks as you looked around for Karen to send a dirty look to. *God dammit, Karen.* You hung and shook your head in shame and he let out another laugh and, on the screen, you saw him clutch his chest. Great. Now Chris Evans had not only seen your California summer sweaty self in your bikini top and surf shorts with a Santa hat, but he'd seen you shaking ass like a hooker to a beloved Christmas song. *Super.* That's just awesome. Proudest moment of your life, so far. And you're not even remotely close to drunk.

When you couldn't bring yourself to answer, he did for you. "From your reaction, I'm willing to bet you do."

"Yeah," you admitted, shamefully. "Yeah, we do. Every time it comes on."

"Gonna have to make a point to put that one on my phone," he winked. "You know, in case of a Christmas emergency."

"Oh, for fuck's sake," you grumbled, finally able to look him in the eye again. Those beautiful blue eyes over that completely adorable smile.

"Okay," he smiled. "I'll stop now...But tell Karen, thanks for answering the phone."

"Dammit," you whined.

"Okay! I'm sorry! I mean it, that was the last one," he promised, eyes still crinkled with his smile. You sighed. "Was there a greater purpose to your call, besides having me die of embarrassment?"

"Yeah," he shrugged. "That was just a bonus."

"Oh, good," you said, in mocking relief.

"I heard, from Grillo, that you're going back to Kingdom," Chris said. "I was calling to say congratulations."

"Oh." You blinked. What a pleasant surprise. "Yeah, thanks for the number. They're on break right now. I start on the 1st."

"Good," he nodded with a grin. "Good to hear things are working out."

"Yep," you nodded in agreement. "How's Europe?"

You weren't sure why you asked. Maybe just to drag out another minute of face time with him. Maybe hoping to hear the girl in the hair department doesn't make him look as good as you did. Maybe to hear a funny story from on set. You didn't know, but you missed all the fun you had working with Chris and the others in Georgia. It wasn't just missing his handsome, smiling face at work, it was all of the stories and jokes and niceties from all of them. It was honestly one of the best jobs you'd ever had.

"It's good," he said, with an approving pout. "Not as hot, so that's a perk."
"Good. Good," you nodded along, wanting to hear more than just the local weather report.

"Not as much fun as you're having," he said, quirking up an eyebrow and gesturing to you from his side of the screen.

"We do know how to party in Cali," you smugly nodded, with a tip of your head.

"Well, maybe I get an invite for the next Christmas party," he suggested, casually.

"Well, it's a pretty exclusive crowd," you teased. "We don't let just anyone in."

"Pretty sure a guy with a beer bong into his snorkel just walked by with an inflatable polar bear under his arm," Chris informed you, pointing behind you from the screen.

You nodded and deadpanned, "My point exactly."

He let out another large laugh and tipped forward in his seat, closing his eyes tight and it made you laugh in return. "Okay. Okay," he sighed, coming out of the laugh. "Lemme know who I gotta bribe to get on that list. I gotta go, but congrats again on the job."

"I will," you smiled. "And thanks."

"Anytime," he nodded. "Merry Christmas, [y/n]."

You wished him a Merry Christmas before you hung up. Beside you, someone sat down with a heavy sigh. You turned to see Karen, leaning one arm into the picnic table edge and shaking her head at you. She made a tsk-ing sound and you shrank into your shoulders.

"I didn't do it," you whined, defensively. "He called me."

"I know," she sighed, rolling her eyes. She put your Santa hat back on your head, with a pat for good measure. "At least you're not chasing him."

"I'm not," you promised. "I've been sooo good."

"You're strong, little one," Karen smiled. "I'm proud of you."

"Thanks," you smiled, sheepishly, until you remembered you were mad at her. "But you didn't have to face time the damn call."

"You're welcome," Karen smiled.

Your first day back on the production crew for Kingdom took you to Venice at sunrise. The weight pen of Muscle Beach served as the background for the day's shoot. Not only were you excited to be back to work on a hot set, but the hot eye candy around was incredible. Having set up the extras for the morning, you took out your phone for a selfie with an army of hunky body builders working out and the beach behind you. Your puckered up lips broke open to a surprised smile when Frank's smoldering face appeared over your shoulder to photobomb your shot. You laughed at being caught taking the gratuitous pic.

"Lemme see that," Frank insisted, keeping his scruffy chin hooked over your shoulder and grabbing your phone to inspect the photo. "That's a good pic. You should put that up."

"Really?" you asked, turning to see him.
"Yeah," he nodded, with a flip of his hand to go on. "Tweet that or put in on Instagram and tag me." He gave you a quick hug and kissed the air by your cheek. "I gotta go. I'll see you later."

You must have looked like a moron, giggling alone next to the pit of muscly men, as you typed in Grillo's Twitter handle to tag your pic. No filter needed, it was a great picture. His sexy stare next to your boisterous smile in the morning light was the perfect yin and yang. [First hours back & this handsome s.o.b. is already ruining my day. @FrankGrillo #KingdomTV #NavyStMMA #AlveyKulinaRuinedMyLife]. Post. Copy. Instagram, open. Paste. Tag. Post.

Working outside in the summer heat somehow wasn't so bad when you literally could put your sandaled toes in the surf on your lunch break. Your phone buzzed through the day with several congratulatory messages for the return to a studio job from friends who saw your post on Instagram or Twitter. Frank caught you for a few minutes later in the day and took you on parade to show some of the cast on hand that you were back and praised your work for him in Atlanta. He told you he was working the staff to get you back on principle hair, namely his. By the end of the day, the salty grime of sweat and sunscreen had never been so satisfying.

Showered and curled up with dinner on the end of the couch, you dropped shreds of lunch meat from your sandwich down to Archie's snapping jaws as you scrolled through your social media notifications. Your selfie with Frank had gotten some love and a slew of well-wishing remarks from your friends and family on Instagram. On Frank's page, it had garnered several hundred "likes" and some complimentary inquiries about who "this new girl" was.

On Twitter, you fared well with the Kingdom fans retweeting their excitement about filming resuming. Frank added a comment to your tweet noting [@caliStyle82 you misspelled #AlveyKulinaIsTheGreatest]. You smiled at his correction and were tickled to see a notification that Frank was among a large handful of new "followers" to your account. Your stomach dropped when you saw Mr. Evans himself replied to the photo a few hours after it showed up on Frank's page and the life the post had.

[@FrankGrillo is that my hairstylist?]

[@ChrisEvans mine now hero boy. She signed up for the big leagues #KingdomTV]

[@FrankGrillo poor girl's got her work cut out for her trying to make YOU look good.]

[@ChrisEvans beach, sun, surf & this face. Work may be hard but she's got a helluva view #CaliLiving]

[@FrankGrillo Elvis called- he wants his haircut back. Gimme back my stylist]

[@ChrisEvans fight me for her]

You literally laughed out loud, too giddy to contain yourself over Frank Grillo and Chris Evans bickering over the girl from the hair department. Archie cocked his head at you and you rustled his ears before opening your Twitter messages. You bit your lip and your eyes went wide seeing a new DM from Chris. You tapped back to your page and, yep, sure enough, Chris Evans was "following" you now, too. You went back to the message.

-Good looking morning on the beach. Is your hair pink now?

You laughed again. You had dyed the bottom few inches of your blonde locks to support a breast cancer fundraiser your salon was doing. The morning breeze on the beach had pushed the pink flip of your ponytail over your shoulder for the selfie with Frank. You dug up a link to the salon that
advertised your "Cuts for a Cure" promo and chewed on your lip as you replied: "Just the tips;) Check it out..." You pasted in the link and sent your reply. You couldn't fight the compulsion to check back several times through the night to see if there was any new activity on your picture or message from Chris. When there wasn't any before you went to bed, you shrugged it off and went to sleep excited for work the next day.

Work on the Kingdom set was good. The cast and crew were great and easy to get along with, the sets half the time were climate controlled, and, at the end of every night, you got to sleep in your own bed instead of a hotel. After a couple days, you were in sync with your schedule and were reconnecting with some workers in the crew you had befriended from the first season. You didn't get a reply to your Twitter message until a couple days later when your phone buzzed in your back pocket at work.

**Flip Cup Hero**: Pink is a good color on you

You pressed your lips tight to keep from making any excited noises on the recording set and tiptoed your way from filming to reply.

**You**: Thanks. We can hook you up if you're interested. No appt needed

**Flip Cup Hero**: Don't really think it's my thing but thanks

**You**: If you say so

That's it. That's all there was. It was a weekday and you chalked it up to him being busy on his own production. Maybe. Who even knew what time it was in Germany, anyway? For all you knew, he'd gone to bed. No hard feelings. You were busy, too. When you checked in on Twitter that night and saw yourself tagged when Chris published the link you sent, you certainly couldn't hold anything against him.

[If you're in LA, see my friend @caliStyle82 & these ladies doing good work for a good cause]

At the start of your second week of work, your lucky star kept shining. Frank caught up with you between set ups and invited you out for a drink after work to "talk shop". You met with him and some of his friends at a restaurant not too far from the set and joined them at the bar for a glass of rosé. You were floored at what followed.

"What's your feelings on New England in Fall?" Frank asked before a sip from his glass.

"I have none," you shrugged. "I hear it's nice, though."

"We start filming the next Purge in September in Rhode Island," he told you. "There's a place on the crew, if you wanna come with."

"Are you shitting me?" you asked, a little more profane than you would have liked, but, hey, you were excited.

"Yeah," Frank laughed, his smile wide with amusement at your reaction. "We're gonna be in Providence, like, 6 to 8 weeks. Won't be as much money as Marvel, but it's another studio gig, if you're interested."

Hell yeah, you're interested.
"Hell yeah, I'm interested," you told him.

He nodded at your enthusiasm. "Excellent," he agreed. "I'll get you in touch with the people at Universal and get you locked in, get going on travel and everything else."

"Wow. I can't thank you enough," you gushed. "I mean seriously, you've done-

"Nah," Frank groaned, with a dismissive wave of his hand. "You're alright, [y/n]. Good people deserve good things. You keep working hard, good things'll keep coming your way. If you're up for it, come October we'll borrow you for the Kingdom season premiere."

Frank Grillo thinks you're good people. Frank Grillo's spoon feeding you work. Frank Grillo's sipping wine with you in an LA bar. Life was better than good, it was great. This kind of steady studio work could really help you get your career going. You toasted to the show and the upcoming movie and finished the night with a proud and hopeful smile stuck on your face.

It doesn't feel like work if you love what you do for a living. You loved your adopted home of LA and loved working there even more. You got to spend a little more time on set around Frank and you were signed up as his hairstylist for The Purge 3. You were happy and having fun. You uploaded a random sunset or rise when you filmed near the beach and a great city corner in the right light. By far, your greatest accomplishment was the selfie with Alvey Kulina's reserved parking sign. Crouched down on the left with Frank on the right, you each held up a fist and mean mugged the camera behind dark sunglasses and in Navy St MMA tanks, framing the sign on the wall that read "Parking for Alvey Kulina Only! Violators will be towed skull fucked". That picture turned into your Facebook profile pic and killed on Instagram when Frank shared it with the note [My girl @caliStyle82 knows what up. #KingdomTV #AlveysAngel]. Your tags from Grillo's posts had gotten you more admirers on Twitter and prompted a text from Chris.

**Flip Cup Hero**: You've gone to the dark side. So much for Team Cap

**Flip Cup Hero**: You know crossbones is the bad guy right?

**You**: Hey now. It's Team Kulina to you sir

**Flip Cup Hero**: Yeah. I saw that #AlveysAngel. Traitor

**You**: I still got a Cap tshirt...I just happen to have a few more Navy St shirts now

**Flip Cup Hero**: You need more Cap pics and less Alvey

**You**: What can I say? Alvey's paying the bills

**Flip Cup Hero**: Ok good excuse

There wasn't much proof, but you preferred to think Chris was jealous of the fun you were having on the Kingdom set. You didn't hear anything else from him for a while, but you had also cut back your posts as taping wound down and you got things in order for your trip to Rhode Island. You knew the principle photography had wrapped at the end of August on Chris' movie and the thought of being so close to Boston almost made you send him a message to say you would be in the neighborhood. The warning Karen gave you back in Georgia told you not to. What would even be the basis for such a call? You barely spoke since June and, when you did, there was more friend zone flirting than anything with actual sentiment attached. What was the point?
You were absolutely stoked for the first night of filming in Providence, though. Somehow, even the late night schedule for part of the script couldn't ruin your mood. You'd shifted your sleep for the last couple nights to accommodate all the p.m. call times coming up and were surprisingly full of energy. The whole set was buzzing. The first day was always exciting on a new project. Grillo commemorated the start of the shoot with some set pics and a group shot of the cast on set while you happened to be passing in the background. It wasn't quite the same as working with the lively ensemble in Atlanta, but it was a close second and you enjoyed every minute.

The first week had a lot of good footage already in the can and the buzz online that followed Frank's tweets and posts was positive. He read you some of the better comments while he sat in a director's chair on set and you touched up his hair before the next scene was set up. Goofing around in the down time, you put on one of the rubber masks you borrowed from one of the actors and posed for a selfie with Frank for his Instagram page, laughing at yourself because you smiled for the photo even though you knew your face was completely covered.

At the end of the week, you were loafing around in bed at noon. The debate of whether to eat breakfast foods or lunch items for your first meal of the day was a serious conversation with yourself daily. Settling on having lunch today, you had barely thrown the sheets aside when your phone chimed from the nightstand.

**Flip Cup Hero:** How come you didn't say you were in New England?

You were more than a little unprepared for the question and tried to come up with a good answer as you sat up in bed. How about: because I know better? No. That would be rude. And, come on. Did you really? After all, if you really had any conviction, you'd have stopped talking to him after you got back to Los Angeles. Yet here the two of you were, him still cold calling you and you not blocking his number. Yeah. Some strength of Hercules you got there.

**Flip Cup Hero:** This is you right?

He sent you two pictures. The first was Frank's group shot you blurred through the background in and the next was your selfie in the mask with him. You chuckled to yourself that he had apparently been checking Frank's pages and spotted the inch or so of hair sticking out from the neck of the mask.

**You:** What makes you say that?

Oh, you're so clever and playful, aren't you?

**Flip Cup Hero:** The hair

The noise that came out of you was hard to categorize. Somewhere between excited squee and girly giggle? Either way, you were glad you didn't have a roommate for this job.

**You:** Stalker

**Flip Cup Hero:** So that is you

**You:** That's me 0:)

**Flip Cup Hero:** I'm a little offended. You show up in my back yard without even saying hello

**You:** Sorry. Been busy
What else could you say? You even shrugged at your phone, you were at a loss for a better excuse or apology.

**Flip Cup Hero:** Got any time off coming? I'm in Boston this weekend

Well, that was fast. Let's not waste anytime. Let's just jump back in where we left off.

**You:** I'm off this

*No! Delete! Come on now. You've been doing so good. Don't fall for this song and dance again.*

**You:** Not really. We're scheduled for a lot of nights and my sleeping is pretty jacked up.

More lies. The only truth was that you essentially worked third shift for part of the shoot. You had plenty of daylight work and even some late evenings free. Sure, you flipped sometimes between days and night, but you still had days off and were sleeping fine.

**Flip Cup Hero:** That sucks

**You:** Tell me about it

*Good.* He bought it.

**Flip Cup Hero:** There's gotta be something. You can't be this close to Fenway and not see the Sox play

He sent you a link to the Red Sox home game schedule.

**Flip Cup Hero:** There's gotta be one you can make. How long are you in RI for?

*Good lord. He was persistent.*

**You:** 5 maybe 7 more weeks

**Flip Cup Hero:** Got a little bit of time. Just say when and I'll make it happen

*Aw, come on! Give a girl break!*

**You:** I'll see what I can do

**Flip Cup Hero:** That was enthusiastic

*Uh oh.*

**You:** Sorry it's just I work a lot of nights on this one

**Flip Cup Hero:** Is something wrong?

Shhhhhhit.

**Flip Cup Hero:** You seem a little off or something

**Flip Cup Hero:** I kind of get the impression you're trying to avoid me

*Shit! Think fast. He wasn't wrong, but you didn't want to be mean.*
You: No I'm not trying to avoid you

Yes, you are.

Flip Cup Hero: Did I do something wrong?

Oh, God, no. You're perfect. He's too perfect, in fact. Like astronomically out of your league perfect.

You: Of course not

Flip Cup Hero: So we're good?

You: Yeah

Whatever the hell that meant. You were pretty sure whatever it was, you two were using two different definitions.

Flip Cup Hero: Okay

Flip Cup Hero: I'd still like to see you before you go. I'll give you a private tour of Boston

You felt your cheeks warm and you couldn't help the grin that came to your face.

You: Tempting. I'll see what I can do

Flip Cup Hero: That's my girl

Wait. What? Did he just- Yeah. You were screwed.
Chapter 6

It was weird when the PA brought you a box in the middle of the night. It had been delivered earlier in the day. The shipping label was addressed to you and had been routed through the Universal Studios mailroom to find you on location. The sender's name was blank over an address you didn't know, but it came from Boston, one day rush. You took the box back to the Hair trailer to open while you were on a meal break. You laughed out loud when you folded open the flaps of the box to reveal a "Red Sox starter kit" according to the handwritten note inside from Chris. You pulled out a white and red Red Sox jersey with the number 34 emblazoned on the back and a navy blue ballcap with the red Boston "B" front and center. You smiled and reread the note.

"[Y/n], Here's your official Red Sox starter kit. Can't go into the Cathedral of Boston without the proper attire. I hope they fit. See you Sunday. -Chris"

Trying on the jersey for size, you took out your phone and snapped a photo of the back of the shirt in the mirror of your work station, the light pink ends of your ponytail brushing over the top of the embroidered numbering and the hem of the jersey almost hiding the cuff of your shorts. Checking your watch, it was just past 11:30. That wasn't too late for a Thursday. Was it? Nah. You sent the backward selfie to Chris. And that was weird. It was the first time you had messaged him since...wow. Forever. It only took a moment for your phone to chime a reply.

Flip Cup Hero: Nice!

Flip Cup Hero: Now that's a picture

You laughed, flattered.

You: Thanks

Flip Cup Hero: See you got my package

You: Came earlier today

Flip Cup Hero: Everything fit?

You pulled the hat on to be sure and turned your head, admiring your reflection. Tugging the brim of the cap down low over your eyes, you bowed your head and took a photo showing off the hat with a broad smile peeking out from under the bill and sent it over.

Flip Cup Hero: Oh my god. You're killing me!

You: Everything fits. Thx

Flip Cup Hero: Great. Ticket and parking pass are in the box. Call me if you get lost or have any trouble.

You peeked into the box and found an envelope with the ticket and pass taped to the bottom, as advertised.

You: Got 'em. Sounds like a plan

Flip Cup Hero: I'll let you get back to work. See you Sunday
Driving your rental car into Boston, you figured your nervousness would have subsided in the hour-ish long drive. You actually appreciated the traffic around the stadium slowing you down and giving you a few extra minutes to give yourself a pep talk. Nobody was committing any crimes today. Just a couple of friends watching a ball game. That's right- you had officially labeled Chris as a friend. It was for the best. Besides, that's pretty much what the last several weeks had been. Hell, even he had called you his "friend" in his tweet about your salon. Yeah. One of those breezy friendships where you don't hang out and only talk occasionally but you can pick up where the last conversation left off. It was better than no Chris Evans at all.

With the help of a couple handy ushers, you made your way to the private suite listed on your ticket. You inched through the door slowly, looking around for a familiar face and recognized a couple from the game in Atlanta. You forced yourself to step inside and the door shutting caught the attention of a few people which started a domino effect of glances your direction. Thank god for Chris' forward thinking gift of Red Sox apparel, because you noticed right away that everyone else was decked out in head to toe Sox gear. The people eyeing you may not have known who you were, but at least you wore their native colors and they didn't see you as a threat to their herd.

Nothing was more relieving to your fishbowl complex than to see Chris part his way through the room to greet you. You breathed out a small sigh at finally seeing someone you actually knew and sent him back an easy smile as he came your way. Chris put down his drink on a nearby table. He apparently needed both hands to hug you, squeezing you tight and leaning back to lift your feet from the floor for a moment. It's cool. Friends hug. And some friends hug like that. You apparently were going to be the friends in the later category. His recently added beard tickled your cheek, but you didn't complain.

"You made it," he smiled, as he let you go.

"Yep," you nodded. "Only had to ask two people how to get up here."

He chuckled. "You shoulda called. I'da come down to meet you." Chris' eyes went up and down you with an approving pout. "Lookin' good."

You shyly adjusted the bill of your cap and ducked your head down, hoping he didn't see you blush. Friends don't make friends blush. You shrugged shyly, smoothing the half buttoned front of your jersey over your red t-shirt. You tipped your head back up when you felt a soft move of your hair. Chris had reached around you to turn up the pink tips of your ponytail sticking through the back of your hat and smiled.

"It looks even better in person," he smiled, letting your hair fall back to your shoulders.

_Holy Jesus Christ._ Just his hand playing with your hair was enough to set your pulse racing. You don't know how, but somehow you managed to say "thank you" without dying on the spot. He asked if you wanted something to drink and you tried not to sound too eager at the offer. Maybe some booze will help you calm down.

He grabbed his drink again and ushered you further into the room with his same gentle hand at the small of your back. Chris introduced you to the new faces and reminded the familiar ones who you were. You gladly accepted the bottle of beer his brother offered you and didn't hesitate to take that first sip. There's no way the alcohol could soothe you so fast, but even just holding the bottle seemed to have a calming effect. At the very least, it gave you something to fidget with while you waited for the game to start.
The friends you had met before we're welcoming. You got several compliments for having the right outfit this time, a feat Chris was braggingly happy to take credit for. You listened to them discuss and complain about the season and this being the last game this year. You had been admittedly too preoccupied with work to have paid much attention to anyone's standings over the summer, let alone the Red Sox, but you chimed in when you could. When the game started, you took a seat next to Chris in the seats out at the front of the private box.

There was a new coolness between you. Not the kind filled with tension or any other negativity though. It was more like the absence of tension, a comfortable space between friends. There was no charming awkwardness and, with the exception of the hug when you came in the door, no play for or show of affection. It was like it was in Atlanta before he knew you had a crush on him. It was odd to think you'd managed to somehow go backward, but at the same time, wasn't that what the plan was? He was still attentive, making sure you didn't need another drink or something to eat and chatting with you here and there between fits of cheering and disappointment at the game, mostly about how you were getting along at your new job with Grillo, his filming for "Gifted" and the beard, and occasional tidbits about the team or the stadium. You figured whatever it had been had run its course and you really could say you were just friends with Chris Evans. That was still a pretty damn good consolation prize by anyone's standards.

By the top of the third inning, you had completely let go of your nervousness and had officially relaxed to enjoy the game. By the bottom of the fourth, you began to wonder if the Sox could end the season in a win. At the end of the fifth, Chris had made a second inspection of your multicolored hairstyle with a quiet and amused smile and let his arm rest along the back of your seat. At the bottom of the sixth, it was still there and he had absentmindedly, or maybe third grade flirtingly, flipped the end of your hair twice without so much as a glance your way either time. You knew this from the side of your eye glances you gave him, stiffening a little bit at each seemingly inconsequential touch.

You bowed your way out of a command performance of Take Me Out To The Ballgame by saying you couldn't drink that much again and still drive, and you certainly couldn't do it without your duet partner, drunk Anthony, much to your embarrassed cheeks and the loud dismay of the guys in attendance who had witnessed the original showstopper in Atlanta. Chris missed most of the eighth inning goodbye-ing with some friends from out of town who were heading home before the post-game traffic broke loose, Scott was on hand to harmonize Sweet Caroline with you. When Chris came back at the top of the ninth inning, he told you he had a surprise for you after the game and you spent the rest of the game with your mind racing through a litany of absurd and realistic possibilities of what that could mean and how you'd address them all.

Chris and his friends mingled about the suite for awhile after the game. The stands were nearly empty and you were checking your watch. You did still have about an hour drive to get back "home" and it was already past eleven. When Chris caught you looking for the time, he apologized and told you to follow him. He made a general and sweeping goodbye to the room and grabbed Scott's arm to bring him along. You waved a smiling goodbye to Chris' friends who remembered your name and wished you a safe trip home. Outside the suite, a pair of ushers were waiting and straightened up when they caught sight of the Evans boys. Chris greeted them with a wave and said you all were ready. His surprise? A private tour of Fenway Park.

The ushers took you through the stadium, top to bottom and side to side. You changed a number on the scoreboard and leaned over the Big Green Monster. The boys and the ushers filled your head with history and trivia about the park, the team, and the curse. You stood out on the pitcher's mound and took a selfie between the cheesy smiles of Chris and Scott in the Red Sox dugout. You took a lap around the bases and bounced triumphantly on home plate while Scott called the action. Chris told you he remembered how you wanted to travel and see all the ballparks in one summer. He
admitted it was too late in the year to get them all in, but at least you could say you saved the best for last this year.

Your guides escorted you safely back to your car just after 1 a.m. via golf cart through the stadium. You were too tickled to be tired. A tour of Fenway hadn't even come to mind as a possibility for what Chris had hinted at earlier. And now, you were absolutely thrilled to have gotten such a hands on experience with some true fans. You realized the awesomeness of the tour. You didn't know anyone who could have ever pulled that off anywhere else, and you couldn't stop gushing about it as you made your way to the garage. Chris' smile proved just how proud he was of his treat for you and tried assuring you that it was no trouble, he was just glad you enjoyed it.

"See?" he asked, hopping off the cart and offering you a gentlemanly, although completely unnecessary, hand to help you out of your seat. "Told you I'd give you a private tour of Bahstin."

"And you delivered," you agreed, fishing your rental car keys out of your pocket and smiling at his accent when he said his hometown's name.

Scott offered you a friendly half-hug from his seat at the front of the golf cart, telling you it was nice to see you again. Chris walked you the rest of the way to your car in the Lansdowne Street garage, pulling open the door and folding his arms over the top of the window from the outside. You slid in between the door and body of the car, a little protection from your weak will.

"You gotta come back though," he told you. "Fenway's just the tip of the iceberg. There's this place downtown that has the world's best cannoli."

Another visit to Boston with Chris Evans and the promise of the world's best cannoli? If he was hard to resist before...Damn. Where was a good bitch slap from Karen when you needed it? Just be cool. You barely got here for a ball game. You can BS your way out of dessert and still save yourself some heartache. Just be noncommittal and nobody gets hurt.

"I'll see what I can do," you smiled, hopefully convincingly.

"I'm gonna let that count, cause I know you're busy," he said with a quick point your way. "Gimme a call, or something. Let me know you get home alright, okay?"

"Sure," you said, dropping into the driver's seat and starting the car, halfway to a clean getaway. "It'll be late though."

You put down the window as Chris pushed the door shut for you. He leaned into the open window and said, "Nah. Go ahead." He jerked his head back toward the stadium and Scott. "We're gonna be up messin' around a couple places for a while."

"Okay," you shrugged, keenly aware that the awkward end of the night you were hoping to avoid had suddenly arrived. Awkward in the Lansdowne Street garage- the parking lot of all parking lots to be awkward in. Achievement- unlocked. Awkward level- prestige.

Chris flashed you a warm smile as you tried to decide if he was aware of the situation. After all, there was the arm behind the shoulders but no hand holding around the stadium, some playing with your hair but no hands on thighs, the pick-you-up-bear-hug but no kissing. What was the message here? ...if there was one.

There was a tick in his smile, a minuscule flinch down and then back up. He moved back from resting on the door. His hands resting on his knees to keep looking in at the level of the car, he was back enough of a step for you to leave. If you wanted to. But, sigh. You knew you had to. You
dropped the car in gear and thanked him again for, well, everything about this little Boston adventure. He flashed a humble smile and assured you "anytime". The awkward reaching critical levels, you smiled your goodbye and pulled away. A quick look in the mirror, because you're a glutton for punishment, saw him watch you head for the driveway out of the garage for a moment, hands stuffed in his pockets, before turning on a heel to go back to find Scott. Damn. Life was rough tonight.

Thankfully, there was work to do. Back in Rhode Island and back on set, you were happy to have some direction again. The game in Boston almost knocked you off balance. What were you thinking? Driving to Boston to watch baseball with your forbidden crush? Tsk. Stop doing dumb stuff like that to yourself. And for god's sake, don't follow through with that "I'll see what I can do" bullshit you sent back again when he reminded you that you should visit again for another tour of Boston last night. You shouldn't have sent that text that you got home alright. All it did was give him a reason to reply and tell you to come back. Honestly, you probably shouldn't be trusted with a smartphone anymore.

A couple busy nights at work and no calls or messages from Chris were okay. When they stretched into a week, even better. You dipped out of town for a couple days with Frank, a quick turnaround in LA to do hair for the Kingdom premier event. A welcome breath of fresh California air and a generous helping of miles between you and New England. Two solid weeks of filming with more radio silence from Chris and you were relaxed, figuring you had dodged a pretty big bullet. There wasn't much left. Filming was on schedule to wrap on time and be done before Halloween. One more week and you'd make it out scot-free, back to the warm, sunny sanctuary of LA.

The last day on set was a breeze and a little bittersweet. The end of any shoot was always a little disappointing. Friends you made went home, moved on to other projects, or went on the hunt for their next gig. Luckily for you, you had a short break and were back on the job for the season three shoot of Kingdom. The wrap party for the crew in Rhode Island was the last thing on your schedule before you booked a flight and could check out of your hotel. You filled your phone with selfies with your favorite coworkers and group shots on set and later at the party, tagging everyone and being tagged online so everyone could share and save when they had a chance.

Cleaned up and in a loose fitting, wide necked sweater that dipped cutely off your shoulder, skinny jeans, and boots for the cool New England evening, your party started early. Filming was finished by four that day. You and the rest of the production took over a small reception hall for a catered buffet and party. The cast was there, mingling and taking commemorative photos before the principles moved on to a more private and classier event at another restaurant. Mid-evening, Frank photobombed a group shot you were in with your friends and took you aside after your friend got her picture.

"Hey, listen," he smiled. "I gotta skip outta here for the next thing a little early. You comin' over? Need a ride?"

Um, no. Lowly crew were not invited to the cast event. You were at the kids' table for the night. He should know this.

"No," you shook your head. "This is me for tonight. But I'll see you next month when shooting starts up again."

"You're not coming?" he asked, a little surprised and with definite disappointment at the revelation.

You shrugged and pointed around. "These are my people. We don't get to go to your fancy-
"My fancy-schmancy?" he laughed and pulled you in for a hug, as he sighed out the end of his amusement. "Oh, Jesus. You're killing me." He let you go. "These may be your people," he said, pointing around the room behind you, "but you're my people, too. You finish up here and find us."

"Really, I'm-", you tried to protest.

Frank had none of it and put up a finger to shush you. He took out his phone and tapped around his screen for a moment. When he was done he pointed back at you and you felt your phone vibrate in your pocket.

"That's the address," he said, prognosticating your new message for you.

You pulled out your phone and, sure enough, there it was.

"I'm not askin'," he told you, his face and expression suddenly stern and for a minute you weren't sure if you were looking at Brock or Alvey. Either way, you were losing the fight against not smiling as he went on with the tough guy routine, still pointing a finger your way. "You better show up. You'll regret it if you don't."

You sputtered out a small laugh. You couldn't hold it in anymore and he broke into a smile with you. He hooked an arm around your head for a playful headlock. He exaggerated a kiss on the top of your head in lieu of ruining your hair and gave you a soft push away.

"I mean it," he called back, as he walked away.

You gave him a thumbs up and nod to say you'd be there later. You went back to your friends and had a watered down cocktail and a few more bite sized hors d'oeuvres. You made your rounds of hugs, goodbyes, and final photos for the next half hour before you headed out to your rental car and Frank's wrap party. It was in the hotel restaurant's banquet room where most of the cast had stayed during the production.

You felt a little out of place for the first few minutes until you saw the faces start to recognize and smile back at you. Obviously, the cast was familiar and comfortable with you. It took a double take or two from the director and other top end production staff to put it together. But when Grillo spotted you and called over the tops of a few heads for you to come over and held out a hand your way, the atmosphere broke and the room was suddenly welcoming.

"Hey, [y/n], c'mere," he smiled, as you came over. With a drink in one hand, he put his free hand around your shoulder for a quick hug. "I knew you'd make it, kiddo."

"Well, when the boss says..." you trailed off, with an innocent shrug.

"That's right," Frank seconded with a strong nod. "You know everybody here, right?"

"Sorta," you shrugged, looking around the room. You knew who they were, but you would classify them as business acquaintances, at best. You didn't have much, if any, interaction with the upper end of the production except for the cast, but you were quick and smart enough to have learned all the director's and producers' staff on sight the first week.

"Get a drink, mix around, get some names," he told you. "You'll probably get some offers or tips for stuff coming down the line. Get you a little somethin' past Kingdom to bank on. Schmooze a bit."

Frank Grillo- inviting you to rub elbows with studio types and schmooze. He might have been the
best thing to ever happen to you. How do you thank a guy like that? A nice fruit basket isn't enough. Not even with a pricey bottle of champagne thrown in. Maybe your first born? Yeah, that was probably the going rate.

And schmooze you did. It wasn't hard. You were at least vaguely familiar to everyone and some of them even knew your first name from seeing you talking and working with Frank. You were always easy to get along with. You weren't really ever in any particular mold, not even in high school. You were friends just as easily with the popular kids as you were with the nerds and everyone in between. You were approachable, made your own judgements of people, and people had always found you affable and fun to talk to. That's probably what made you good at your job. People just naturally were comfortable with you and drawn to your laid back way. You actually did get a couple business cards for your pocket from some Universal execs who told you to direct your résumé to HR with their names attached. God bless Frank Grillo.

After a couple hours of shaking hands and friendly conversations, you gravitated back towards Frank. Parting your way through the room, you had made the rounds and figured you would bow out gracefully at the early hour of midnight. After all, you still had to track down a reasonably priced flight and square away your belongings for the trip home. You spotted a glimpse of Frank ahead of you and made a beeline his way. You stopped dead in your tracks when you heard it. A laugh. That laugh. That beautiful, angelic laugh. And then you caught a peek ahead as some of the other guests moved out of your line of sight. That unmistakable shoulder to waist ratio. That divine equation that, with that laugh, added up to nothing but trouble. Fucking Chris Evans was there. But how?

Don't kid yourself. You knew. Curse Frank Grillo. You took it back. Your first born, the fruit basket and champagne. All of it.

The same moment you thought about just making a run for it was the same instant Frank's eyes caught yours and he waved you over with an easy smile. You thought you might still have a chance to get lost in the crowd, but Chris turned to see who Frank was beckoning and you were done for. Fuuuuuuuuuck. You had no other choice. You put on a smile and went over. Be brave. Be cool. You can do this.

"Oh, hey," you smiled casually, because that was the best you could come up with in your mortified state.

"Hey yourself," Chris said with a small tip of his drink your way. "Long time, no see."

"Yeah. Little bit," you agreed.

"Yeah, Chris and I were just negotiating the return of his hairstylist," Frank quipped, "and, boom. There you are."

"Here I am," you laughed. Oh, sweet Jesus, kill me now.

"Wait a tick," Grillo said, eyes fixed on something behind Chris as he patted his arm and moved around him. "James is leaving. I gotta go say something. Be right back."

Aaand there goes your one chance at having a life preserver. Well, shit. You're screwed.

Chris twisted at the waist to see Frank go. He turned back to you and wagged his eyebrows up with a boyish smile. You tittered quietly, with a shy glance down at your drink, immediately wishing there was more left in your glass than barely an ounce or so of liquor and ice.
"Get you another drink?" he offered, breaking the short silence. "What's your poison?"

"Sea breeze," you answered, a little embarrassed at the feminine sounding drink when you noted the manly draft beer in his hand. "The whole bar is, like, this showcase of New England highballs so, you know...when in Rome..."

You shrugged, not sure why you felt the need to explain your drink choice. You tried something new and you liked it. Big whoop.

"Want another?" he asked.

Yes.

"Oh, no, thank you," you shook your head. "I was actually just coming by to say goodnight. Got a lot of stuff to do to get home."

You looked around for Frank, hoping he was on his way back. Chris looked with you to see what you were looking at. You didn't find Grillo and turned back, catching him smiling at you and you felt your cheeks warm a little.

Chris took a drink and asked when you were leaving. You admitted you didn't have it exactly all down on paper just yet, but that you were hoping in the next day or so. He nodded and you finished the last sip of your drink like you were a dying man in the desert. You felt a hand at your elbow and turned, never more happy to see Frank in your life. You smiled, inhaling a deep and relieved breath.

"This place is winding down," Frank noted. "Let's head upstairs."

"I should get going," you began, trying to not seem rude. "I got a lot of stuff I need t-"

"What? You got an early flight?" Grillo asked.

"Well, no, not exactly," you fumbled.

"Okay then," he settled for you. "Come on up, have a drink, live a little." Frank hooked his arm in yours and took the empty glass from your hand, handing it off to a passing waiter. "Come on, kid. Elizabeth was just asking about you."

Frank led the way and Chris followed you both. You picked up one of the producers on the way to the elevator. You listened as the men talked shop about projected earnings and were the last one out of the car, following them down the hall a few doors and into a large suite behind a couple cast members who were on the other elevator ahead of you. Inside, the party was down to several cast members and their family and friends, some of the younger production execs, Chris, and you, Frank's humble hairstylist.

Chris finished his drink, tipping his head for you follow him to the bar cart, with cheeks full of beer and a smile before he swallowed it down. What the hell. You could really use another drink right now, anyway. You had money to pay for a cab and would pay for another to get your little rental back tomorrow. A couple volunteers were already playing mixologist and you ordered Three Wise Men on the rocks. You could use the counsel. Chris gave you an approving nod for dropping the girly drink and grabbed a beer for himself from the ice filled tub nearby. Just remember to sip this one an you'll be fine.

Frank waved your way when you grabbed your drink. You tried not to make it look like you were running. You said hello to Frank's co-star, Elizabeth, trading some small talk about LA and work. Chris held down a couple conversations of his own, as he made his way around the small party.
Elizabeth excused herself to greet someone who came in and you were alone, clutching your long ago emptied glass like it could ward off evil. If only Chris Evans were evil, because it did nothing to repel his approach. On the other hand, he passed you a fresh drink and you were grateful for it. Damn that other hand for finding the small of your back and ushering you beside him out onto the empty balcony overlooking the pool. At least the air was cooler outside. Maybe it would hide the flush in your cheeks as your nervousness grew.

"So, you've been lucking out lately, huh?" Chris noted with a smile, leaning an elbow onto the balcony railing and wrapping both hands around his drink.

"Yeah," you admitted, taking a sip and a quick glance back inside. "Can't complain."

"Yeah, I saw you shaking some hands downstairs when I came in," he told you. "You're kinduva pro at this now."

"I wouldn't say that," you said, looking down modestly.

"Well," he shrugged, "then you've got them fooled. And me."

"Don't tell anyone," you joked. "They've only just accepted the pink haired girl as one of their own. It's a tricky time."

Ahhh. Bullshit awkward conversation. It was the home away from home for you two. You wondered how long you had before he realized you guys were in the same familiar place again and you ran out of things to say. He laughed and you smiled, taking a drink, happy your friends Johnnie, Jack, and Jim were there to help fill the time while you tried to come up with something else clever to say.

There was a pause as the laughter died down. When his smile broke to a crooked grin and a squinting gaze you knew your time was up.

"There's something weird here, isn't there?" he asked, cocking his head to the side. He pointed a finger back and forth between you. "Between you and me. What is that? 'Cause I still kinda get this feeling, like- Standoffish isn't the word, but it's something like that."


"I mean, I know I probably came off as kind of a dick in Atlanta," he went on, buying you some time to figure out how to get out of the quicksand. "I didn't mean to. I was just a little thrown, I guess. I figured you were with the production for the haul. That was presumptuous on my part. But we're still good, right?"

Good? What definition of 'good' are 'we' using? 'Good' meaning friends, ol' buddies, ol' pals? Okay. 'Good', like there wasn't a cuter hairstylist than you in Germany? Great. If it means admitting how incredibly charming and sweet and funny and sexy and- No. Stop it.

"Yeah," you nodded, figuring you had to take the more casual of two evils- friendship.

"If schedules weren't so crazy, it would'a been nice to hang out while you were in the neighborhood, so to speak," he said, flashing a small smile at his own little joke.

Sigh. Hang out? Friend zoned it is.

He shrugged. "I missed hanging out with you."
Well, now hold on. Come on now. You two didn't just hang out. Statistically speaking, most of the
time you two spent together was with plenty of flirty smiles, some kind of physical contact, and, not
to mention, highlighted by some pretty potent lip locking. We're still talking as 'friends', right?

"I just wanna be sure we're still friends at the end of everything," he finished.

Ohthankgod. And, at the same time- Aw, son of a bitch. You were a roller coaster ride of relief and
disappointment. Just smile and nod. Smile and nod. It'll all be over soon.

"I know long distance relationships don't have a good track record..."

Wait.

"-and I know I haven't done this very well, so far, or at all really."

What the hell?

"I didn't really communicate too well with you after Atlanta and I didn't hear anything from you..."

Ho-ly shit. He's not doing what you think he's doing...is he?!

"-so I kinda figured I screwed the pooch on that one."

No! Stop that. Get the image of Jensen saying 'legless Pooch' out of your head this instant and pay
attention to this man!

"And when I did finally nut up and call you," he shrugged, "you didn't seem too interested anymore.
And then Germany, back to Georgia, in and outta Boston, and..." He trailed off into a sigh. "That's
my fault for, I guess, using work as an excuse."

You weren't interested anymore? Anymore?! Ha! Your interest never stopped. You were just stifled
by reason. And here he is, throwing reason out the damned window.

"Honestly, I didn't think I'd actually get you to Boston that weekend," he admitted.

Who was he kidding? Just whistle and you'd be there. You know how to whistle, don't you? Just put
your lips together and blow. By the way, now would be a good time to say something instead of just
letting this poor man spill his guts out alone. Go on, say something.

"Oh," you said.

'Oh'? That's it? And sheepishly, nonetheless. Try harder!

"Yeah," he nodded, looking down toward his beer...or his shoes. You weren't sure, but he went on,
"And when I didn't hear from you after that I, uh... I know you've been busy, but I see you cuttin' up
with Grillo and-" He paused looking up with that adorable smile. "I gotta admit, I'm a little jealous."

Ohhhh myyy goodness.

"Not that I think you got anything going on with Frank, I mean," he added quickly, raising a halting
hand.

"No," you chuckled along, nervously. "No, of course not."

"Of course not, I know," he shook his head, wincing at the suggestion. "I mean, he's a handsome
guy and all, but..."
"No. Yeah," you smiled and nodded your understanding.

"What I mean is, I need my flip cup partner." He chuckled when you ducked your head. "I've got no game unless I've got Boots on my side." You were laughing now. "I'm serious, ask Mackie or Stan. They'll tell you."

If reason had survived the fall from the window, it had just been run over by a bus.

"I wanna find out you dyed your hair pink because you told me," he said with a mild grimace and a quick dismissive wave of his hand, "not because Frank happened to tweet it. Or see you smiling in LA from Germany 'cause you facetimed me instead of hoping Karen's hanging around somewhere to give you the phone. I wanna know you'll go to a Sahx game with me when we got the time."

"I wanna do better than this. I've got to go back to Georgia, but I'm gonna be back in LA soon for a bit and I wanna know that you're still interested in hanging out with me n' seein' where things go. I'm not hanging any expectations on ya, I'm just asking for another shot. What do ya say, [y/n]?

Nevermind that the longer he went on, the more Boston you were starting to hear eek out. There's no time for that now! Focus! He asked you a question. Now, remember how words work, you dummy, and answer him! ...without sounding too crazy, of course.

"That'd be nice," you smiled. "I'd like that."

Slow clap for yourself. Well played. Demure, yet charming, and it won you a broad smile from Chris. Brava!

"Really?" he checked, straightening up from the railing. Maybe a bit hopeful?

"Yeah," you nodded, even though you couldn't escape the nagging voice in the back of your head saying you've never known a single long distance relationship that worked that wasn't a part of a movie.

What were you thinking? Oh, yeah. He's pretty. Gotcha. And sweet. Uh-huh. And charming. True. And kind. Yep. And he seems to really like you. Like, really honestly like you. Yay!

"Good," he smiled, looking a little relieved, as he inched closer. "Sooo, just to clarify, you're not gonna leave Rhode Island in the next couple days and never call me again because you think I'm a dick...right?"

"Right," you concurred.

The heat came back to your cheeks again, as you estimated the mere inches there were between you two now. Chris was still grinning at you when he leaned in to kiss you. You're eyes went wide, somehow surprised that it happened. You recovered, closing your eyes and relaxing into the sweet moment, before it was gone a couple seconds later. You pulled in and bit the inside of your lower lip and he smiled.

"I missed that, too," he said, reaching a hand to your waist.

Teeth still holding your lip, you broke into a charmed smile. He does say the sweetest things. A cheerful uproar from inside the party took both of your attentions back to the balcony doorway. Something amazing or hilarious or both had happened inside, but you were content with your fresh air and fresh start with Chris on the balcony. Apparently he was too, because you felt his hand slip around from your waist to your back and, when you turned your head to look at him, his face was bent down beside yours and you could feel the warmth of his breath against the air cooled skin of
your neck.

Your eyes flicked down to notice the distinct lack of personal space between you anymore and, somehow, over the noise of the party, you could hear his breathing, the soft sound matched perfectly to the gentle humidity that graced and left your neck in a steady, even cycle. When his lips met your skin, your breath caught and your eyes crushed closed, a small sigh escaping your lips. He trailed a line of slow and soft kisses from your jaw to your shoulder and you savored every second of it, the trimmed hairs of his beard lightly tickling your neck. Chris closed the remaining millimeters between you, hooking his free arm around you. You hesitated, reaching your empty hand up toward his side, as if somehow you weren't really allowed to touch him. But come on, he was already latching himself to you like a plecostomus.

When he went back along your neck the way he started, you found your hand twisting the loose material at the side of his red Henley around your finger and your chin tucking bashfully to your chest, your forehead nuzzled against his shoulder. His kisses stopped at the hollow behind your ear and he tipped the side of his head to yours. He rested there for a moment, as you breathed in the scent of the air around him. My god, he smelled good. Nestled there in his arms, it was quiet and warm and the most comfortable place you'd ever been in. It was a shame that at some point you'd have to leave that spot and go back to the party.

He picked his head up, planting a lingering kiss on your temple. "We should probably go back inside," he said quietly, as if he had read your mind.

You nodded, raising your head when he straightened up again. He let you go, taking a small step away, and you were fully aware of how chilly the night air was without him close. He took a drink of his beer, holding out his free hand for you to take. You put your hand in his, as he started for the party again. Just before you would have crossed the threshold of the suite, you stopped and he stopped to look back at you. The realization that you almost walked into a room full of a couple dozen Hollywood movers and shakers holding the hand of one of their most valuable players made you freeze.

"What'sa matter?" he asked, giving you a curious look.

Your hand slipped his grasp and you pointed inside. "We almost walked in there, hand in hand," you explained what you thought should have been plainly obvious. "In front of all those people," you added.

Chris gave you an easy smile. "Those aren't the kind of people that would care," he said. He held out his hand again and promised, "It's alright."

How could it not be alright, if he said so? He was Captain America, after all, and he was always honest. At least he looked completely honest when he said no one would care. That counts, right? You took a deep breath and then his hand. He walked in, as confident as ever, and you trailed a half step behind. Someone called his name and you gravitated with him that way.

While he talked, you stood beside him, his hand still holding onto yours like it was second nature. You took a distracted look around, sipping at the last of your drink, checking to see if anyone really did care. Nobody did. Turning back to the conversation you caught a look at Grillo. He raised an eyebrow at you and nodded once, as he toasted your way with his drink. You assumed at that point it was no coincidence that Chris was at Frank's wrap party. The only thing you weren't sure of was whether Frank had picked up on something amiss between you or if Chris had told him something to earn an invitation. Either way, you would have to send him that fruit basket when you got back to LA. In the meantime, you nodded back with a smile and hoisted your glass to answer his.
You mingled around a little while longer with Chris. Before you knew it, it was almost two in the morning. The crowd had begun to thin out and the work day was beginning to catch up with you, quick. Chris was still energetic, smiling and joking with everyone when you tugged on his hand and said it was time for you to go. He nodded and you met Frank again to say your goodbyes.

Frank took Chris' hand, as they met for a brotherly hug and clapped each other on the back when you came over. He left a hand on Chris' shoulder and gave it a shake. "You calling it quits, hero boy?" he asked.

"Nah," Chris smiled with a short gesture to you. "[Y/n]'s pretty tired. She needs to get some sleep."

Grillo nodded, with a sympathetic pout. "Been a long day," he agreed. He let go of Chris and waved you closer, rolling his hands at the wrists. He pulled you into a hug, with a quick kiss to the top of your head and said, "Glad you made it, sweetheart. You got a ride home?"

"Cab," you told him, with a sure nod.

"Okay, good," Frank approved. "You be careful getting home. I'm gonna see you after the holiday for work." He pointed at Chris. "And I'm gonna see youoo...?"

"I'm gonna be back," Chris told him.

"Alright. Make sure nobody steals our girl," Frank warned him, jabbing his finger in Chris' chest and looking at him from under a stern brow.

"I think I can handle it," Chris assured him, with an arrogant scoff.

Chris took your hand again and you waved your goodnight to Frank. You deposited your empty glass on the coffee table on your way out and you rode the elevator down to the lobby in a comfortable silence. There were several late night revelers in the lobby, so you crossed to the exit with your hands in your pockets, with a respectable couple of feet between you and Chris. Outside, the valet whistled over an empty cab for you. With an audience around, you didn't even consider a kiss or any other gesture from Chris. Instead, you gave him a small wave and smile, as you dipped into the back seat of the car. Chris pushed the door shut for you and told you goodbye, waiting on the sidewalk to leave until the cab took you away. My, my. What a night.
Back home in LA just in time for Halloween, the weather was kind to be tramping around dressed as a fairy. With a purple tulle skirt and corset top beneath the glittery wings hooked round your shoulders, you matched a pair of your friends dressed in red and lime green fairy costumes themselves. You even had time to dye everyone's hair before the party that night. While they opted for the wash out coloring to be ready for work on Monday, you went for broke. You didn't have a fancy office job with blouses and skirts and sensible hair styles. You wore t-shirts and tanks over cut offs and sandals. You liked a challenge and were feeling saucy when you wondered if you could pull off your own color melt at home. You were beaming at the absolute success your violet and silver dye job was and your friends couldn't stop going on about their envy. You were just about to post up a picture of your spritely trio on your way out the door when, thank goodness, you remembered something Chris said. Time for a quick selfie.

You: Hey. Busy?

Flip Cup Hero: No. What's up?

You: Don't freak out or anything but...

You bit your lip and sent your selfie. A small "eek" escaped you as you waited anxiously for a reply. You gestured for a minute more from your friends before you went out for the night and you bit nervously at your thumbnail. You knew it wasn't even thirty seconds but you felt like time had stopped. And so did your breath when your phone rang for a facetime call from Chris. Your face in the tiny corner of your screen was a mix of curiosity and guilt as you winced, waiting for the verdict. There was a slight question in his expression as he seemed to be calling from a couch somewhere in Savannah.

"Is that...I don't even know what that is," he laughed. "Is it purple?"

You nodded, a sheepish smile around your bit nail. "Violet and silver," you said, the distinct hesitation enough to come off as fearful.

"For Halloween?" he asked, his face still smiling as he squinted at the screen for a moment while you ran a hand through the side of your loose hair for the color to trickle through as it fell back in place. "Is it permanent?"

"Yyeah." The word came slow, still worried and trying to gauge his response.

His face relaxed with a faint smile still on his lips. He seemed to straighten up a little and his hand came up to draw down the sides of his mouth. "Holy shit, that's hot," he breathed and then laughed as his hand fell from his face.

Oh my god. Did he just-? Did he mean it?

"Really?" you begged, bracing for the awful truth.

Chris' face lit up, his brow rising and eyes widening. "Yeah," he nodded. "Jesus Christ. I mean, that's frickin'- Did you do that yourself?"


"Yeah, that's okay. That is definitely okay," he smiled, scratching at the side of his bearded jaw with
a grin still on from his side of the screen.

"Well, you said you wanted to hear first if I dyed my hair, so," you shrugged, still smiling at his approval.

"I did," he agreed. "You going out trick-or-treating or something?"

You stretched out your arm and struck a hip cocked pose, tilting the phone to show your costume with a half turn and a little shake of your shoulders to wiggle you wings.

"Sweet Christ, you're killin' me," he said, seeming to lean forward onto his knees the way the angle of his phone changed. "Fahckin' hell."

"We're going to a friend's Halloween party," you giggled.

"There bettah naht be any guys there," he warned, the corner of his mouth tugged to the side in a mischievous smile and his Boston accent practically falling out of the phone.

You laughed out loud. Chris Evans doesn't want you going to parties with other guys. That's adorable. And the playful jealousy made you blush.

"There might be one or two," you admitted.

"No," he waved his hand and shook his head. "You're not going. I don't wike it," he complained, an unhappy frown on his face.

"No worries," you promised. "I only dance with my girlfriends."

Chris laughed again. "See, now you're just tryin' ta get me all worked up."

You shook your head, the heat burning your cheeks as you smiled shyly. "I promise, I'll be good," you swore, raising your hand on your honor.

"Ok, then," he nodded. "Have fun and stay outta trouble."

Finally off the phone, you and your friends headed out for the night. With Chris informed of your current hair situation, you posted your photo with your friends and new do without worry. His enthusiasm for your new look had your confidence soaring. It didn't hurt that the hair, the costume, or both seemed to get him a little bothered either.

Archie didn't understand why everything you did did with a smile. Wake up in the morning? Smile. Brushing your teeth? Smile. Singing along to the radio from your alarm clock while you got dressed? Smile. How could you explain to his sweet, confused face that it was because there was another man in your life? The kind that sends a random "What's up?" when you're at work and isn't impatient when you don't answer for an hour or more. The kind that gives you a quick call some nights before you go to bed to ask how your day was and still apologizes for the occasional calls to say "good morning" when he hears you yawn on the phone, even though you've been up and working for two hours, because time zones are hard sometimes he says. There were plenty of reasons to smile.

Back at work with the Kingdom crew, the days were long but enjoyable. Your new multi-hued hair earned you raves from your crewmates and some good natured ribbing from Frank about how one weekend back in LA and he didn't recognize you anymore. But, seriously though, he liked it and
cracked jokes with you about daring looks you could come up with for him in the off season.

Over the next couple of weeks, you talked to Chris pretty regularly. There were the "hellos" and "goodnights" that came up one way or the other every couple days or so, some short texting conversations on your or his lunch break. He gave your bi-colored selfie a like online and talked shit to Grillo when you showed up in a Vine of him on set ranting in Italian for the camera while you stifled a laugh and tried to style his hair around his expressive gestures.

[@FrankGrillo give that poor girl a break. Her job's hard enough already]

[@ChrisEvans I don't hear her complaining #teamKulina #AlveysAngel]

[@FrankGrillo you probably can't hear her over the sound of your own voice]

[@ChrisEvans we'll see how well YOU talk after I knock those pearly whites out #crossbones #civilwar]

My god, you loved how they bickered about you. Makes a girl feel special. The stir it causes in the comments of Frank's posts though made you a little wary. There had been a few compliments for "the hot girl who does hair" and other winking statements with some heart eyed emojis attached here and there. And, for a moment, there was a blip of a hashtag from fans of the pink tipped hair asking #wherespinky. But there had also been some mean comments from people who were obviously a little too uptight and had nothing better to do than criticize your hair color and were definitely perturbed with why Chris and Frank even bothered with you. Note to self- don't read more than the first page of comments on any post you end up in. The chips in your self-esteem were always repaired by some sort of divine providence of Chris shooting you a message or giving you a call when you needed it. How does he know?

**Flip Cup Hero:** Looking good today, ma'am. Saw Frank's vine

**You:** Thanks 0:) I saw

**Flip Cup Hero:** Gettin a little tired of that hashtag tho

**You:** Be nice now

**Flip Cup Hero:** I know- Alvey pays the bills. But I think he does it on purpose. Rubbing it in my face

**You:** I'll let him know you said hi;)

**Flip Cup Hero:** Let him know I've got a few things to say to him

**You:** Lol

**Flip Cup Hero:** Going to LA for a few days next week. What's your schedule look like?

**You:** Off Tuesday and half day Sunday

**Flip Cup Hero:** Wtf kind of schedule is that?

**Flip Cup Hero:** I'm in on Friday. Put me down for Sunday

**You:** I'll let my people know to add you to my calendar
Flip Cup Hero: Ha! Thank you. You're too kind.

Why does the world move so slowly when you're looking forward to something? Crawling excruciatingly slow. It felt like it took a month to get to Friday. You got a voicemail at work from Chris saying that he was walking through the airport and telling you to give him a call when you were home. You were a little eager and called from the car on your way there. He sounded a little travel weary so you kept it short. You planned on meeting him for an early dinner Sunday afternoon.

You rolled through Saturday and Sunday's shoots with anxious butterflies in your stomach. Chris was in LA. You had plans to meet for dinner. You hadn't seen him since the wrap party in Rhode Island a few weeks ago- when he held your hand in a room full of people and had set your heart on fire when he said he missed you. How could you not be excited to see him again? Like Fred Flintstone sliding down the back of a dinosaur, you practically sprinted off the set to go home and change for dinner.

You met him at a Mexican restaurant, just in time for the start of happy hour. He was rather incognito in a red and white plaid shirt and a ball cap. You were casual chic in a long, thin cardigan over a tank top and skinny jeans. Snacking over chips and queso, you caught up about the last few weeks. Chris had put the final touches on his new movie, Gifted, and was in town for a few meetings about potential projects. You were still filling your time with the Kingdom schedule and already had some extra hours planned for your chair at the salon for the Thanksgiving break and when shooting broke again in a few weeks.

Over dinner, you talked about plans for the holiday that next week, where people were going and what they do when they're there. Chris was flying back to Boston on Tuesday after his last meeting. He planned to spend a couple weeks at home with his family and decompress from his hectic summer. You shared some of your Thanksgiving traditions and that you were staying local, having your turkey dinner with a friend's family as you had planned on saving your traveling for the longer Christmas break at home this year. It occurred to him he had no idea where "home" was for you and he profusely apologized over dessert.

"I feel like such an ass," he insisted. "How did it not come up by now? You're not from LA. You said it in Georgia but I didn't- I'm sorry."

You giggled at his pained apology. "It's fine," you assured him. "Everything's been so...sporadic with, ya know, 'us'. It's not like we've been hardcore dating for months or something and you forgot to ask. That'd probably be a little insulting. But not this. This I can give a mulligan for."

He chuckled and ducked his head, maybe a little embarrassed. "Well, thanks," he said with a sheepish grin. He took a drink of his water and swallowed like it gave him a renewed purpose. "So, tell me where you're from. Siblings? High school mascot? We got a lot to catch up on."

And catch him up you did. The check sat ignored on the table as you told him about home. Your little neighborhood in Cincinnati, your older brother and your high school sweethearts parents, the dogs you had growing up, baseball games in the summer with your grandparents, and sneaking onto a golf course to go sledding when you were in grade school with your brother and his friends. It was pretty mundane stuff, you thought, but he listened and asked questions with an admiring grin the whole time and it made you feel like you were interesting.

You had camped out at the restaurant almost two hours just talking and laughing. This is what you would note in your diary was your "first date" with Chris, if you actually kept one. That first meal in Atlanta, sitting on the trunk of his car eating grilled cheese sandwiches, was perfect in its own way.
But when you gave everything a little perspective, this was how things were supposed to start. This felt more solid. The conversation was more personal and detailed, less awkward and completely natural. Things were a little half assed, if not poorly mishandled, since Atlanta. He wanted to do better and this felt like you guys were finally getting it right.

By the time you left the restaurant, the November sun was long gone. Walking through the parking lot, he held your hand, fingers laced lightly together with yours. Pointing out your car, he nodded approvingly at your soft top Jeep. You explained it was the essential tool for any girl to enjoy the California wind in her hair and easily transport surf boards. He asked if you surfed and you told him about your first roommate being a surfing instructor in Santa Monica who taught you enough not to make a complete fool of yourself and that's what started off another half hour of conversation in the parking lot before you caught the time. Your poor puppy hadn't eaten since before you went to work and in your rush to meet Chris you hadn't thought to give the little guy his dinner first.

"I'm sorry," you winced. "Archie's gonna be pissed if I don't get home soon."

His brow creased and his tone was a little offended when he asked, "Who the hell is Archie?"

You grinned like an idiot at the jealousy in the question. "He's my dog, you dork," you told him, laughing as you saw the relief and sheepish grin come to his face.

"Jeeesus," he groaned, his head falling back. "For a minute there I thought you had some guy waiting on you at home."

"Well, I mean, kinda," you shrugged, taking out your phone to find a pic of your furry friend. You showed him a picture of you hugged up to Archie, sitting on the beach with a wide smile as his nose reached toward the camera. "He's been alone all day and needs dinner. He's pretty much the love of my life."

Chris took the phone out of your hand, holding it up for a better look. "So, that's the competition, huh?" he noted, a lopsided smile on his face. "I think I can take him."

You coughed out a laugh, as you nearly choked, feeling your cheeks warm as he handed you back your phone. Chris Evans fighting your dog for the title of "love of your life"? Welcome back, feeling awkward in parking lots. What do you even say to that? Nothing. Just giggle and put away your phone, you blushing idiot.

"So, let's go save Archie," he suggested.

"What?"

"Let's go get Archie some dinner," he rephrased. "Poor guy's probably starving to death."

He couldn't be serious. But he was. Staring at you with a high brow and sweet smile while you panicked, wondering when the last time you vacuumed was, was there laundry in the living room, and a number of other nerve racking potential disasters to having an unexpected guest.

You swallowed the disbelieving and worried lump in your throat. "You wanna go feed my dog?" you double checked.

"Yeah, why not," he shrugged. "He looks awesome. I'd love to meet him."

There was a moment where you fumbled for what to say. Instead of words, you opened your mouth and another cough fell out. All you could do was laugh and raise your shoulders as you shook your head. "Yeah. Okay. Sure."
Chris made a face and his head ticked slightly to the side as his eyes crinkled in some kind of recognition. "Ahh," he groaned, quietly. He pointed at himself and then to you. "I just invited myself over, didn't I?" A statement more than a question and it came with a small knowing nod. "That's weird."

"No," you tried to brush it off. "It's cool, I mean-"

"Cause I'm not tryin' ta, ya know-"

"No, of course not," you shook your head, wrinkling your nose at the suggestion of impropriety.

"I just meant, it's still early, you know," he fumbled along with you, "and I thought maybe you'd still wanna-"

"Oh, yeah," you nodded and waved a dismissive hand. "That'd be great. Sure."

"Okay then," he smiled with a small snort.

"Okay then," you repeated, instantly feeling like an ignorant parrot. You fished out your keys and pointed at your car. "So, you just wanna-"

"Yeah," he piped up. "I'll follow you and- Well, yeah."

"Yeah," you smiled, unlocking your car as he turned on his heel to go to his.

Admittedly, you fell out of graces with the church some time ago. You couldn't recall the last time you went to mass and you were always relieved when a church didn't burst into flames when you made the occasional appearance to work at or attend a wedding. But on your way home, you prayed. You were pretty sure there wasn't a specific patron saint of first-time-a-guy-comes-over-to-your-apartment, so instead you pleaded to eight pound, six ounce, newborn baby Jesus, the only name you knew by heart, that you had left your apartment in a non-embarrassing state.

You probably never used your rearview mirror so much in your entire driving career either. Quick glances as you drove and long side eye stares at red lights and your stomach did somersaults seeing Chris driving behind you down to Santa Monica. You couldn't help but giggle when you checked back once at a light and saw him bobbing his head and his lips mumbling along while his thumb tapped the top of the steering wheel to whatever he was listening to. You both found parking on the street a few spaces apart from each other and he stood by his car door for you to point the way. He followed you a half step behind as you lead the way inside and up two flights to your front door. Hearing Archie's panting breath and whimper on the other side of the door as you turned the key helped settle your nerves a bit. After all, Archie would never judge you for a messy apartment and now you had backup and home field advantage. Just try to relax. This isn't necessarily a bad thing.

It took a few months after bringing Archie home from the shelter for him to warm up to strangers, but socializing him with daily walks, patient friends over to visit, and occasional trips to a dog park and Archie was the happiest damned dog to make new friends. Apparently, so was Chris. He was instantly crouched down and perched on his toes as he scratched your dog behind the ears, complimenting Archie on his looks and assuring him he was a good boy. As usual, Archie soaked it up like a sponge, tongue hanging out of the side of his mouth and tail sweeping the floor. Well, that was easy.

"He's not much of a guard dog," you pointed out, setting you keys and purse on the table. "He'd probably just lick you to death."
"Ahh," Chris dismissed your claim. "He'd step up if he had to. You can tell. Wouldn'tcha, buddy?"

He gave Archie's head a firm rub as he stood back up and took a look around, stuffing his hands in his pockets. You took a quick look around as well, hoping there wasn't too much clutter or anything embarrassing lying about. Nothing caught your attention and you let out a relieved breath as you patted your leg and told Archie to follow you for dinner. On your way into the kitchen to fill Archie's bowls, you told Chris to make himself at home.

When you came around out of the kitchen, Chris was standing in your living room in front of a bookcase in the corner, eyeing the pictures you had in small frames there. He looked over, hearing your footsteps on the hardwood floor, and smiled. His eyes took another trip around the room before he nodded at you.

"Nice place," he told you. "Been here long?"

Nice place? You heard yourself laugh in your head. Your little, one bedroom with a walk up to the third floor and barely 700 square feet? Yeah, right.

"About a year and a half now," you shrugged. "It's not much, but the neighbors are nice and the beach is just a six block walk."

You don't know why you felt the need to explain why you liked your humble home. Maybe it was because you knew he parked his shiny SUV in a garage instead of on the street. That he didn't have to lug groceries up two flights of stairs and go down three to do laundry in the basement. That it, no doubt, took more steps to cross his living room than it probably took to get through all of your apartment. So much for home field advantage. You were feeling more than a little outclassed.

"Six blocks?" he asked, his brow tipping up at the idea. "That's great. You must go all the time."

"I try. Archie likes to go for walks that way when we've got time," you said, smiling as a full-bellied Archie pranced back into the room to sniff at Chris some more.

"Well, let's go," Chris decided.

"Go where?"

"Let's get the little man his exercise," he said, scratching a finger in the middle of Archie's head. "He's been cooped up all day. You wanna go, don'tcha?"

Archie wiggled, his tail wagging hard enough to make his hips sway at the way Chris spoke to him. You asked if he was serious and Chris gave you an emphatic nod, practically insisting on taking your dog for his evening walk. What could you do? You were outnumbered and the men had spoken. You grabbed your keys and Archie's leash and, next thing you knew, you were walking your dog toward the beach with Chris Evans.

Archie did well on a leash. He didn't exactly heel at your side, but he never tugged you along either. And it earned him another compliment from Chris. For a moment, you almost suspected he liked Archie better than you. But when he took hold of your free hand in his, you changed your mind.

You wandered along a narrow portion of the beach for a while, letting Archie loose for a few minutes to take in the smells and dampen his toes. He never went further than a couple dozen feet from you since you brought him home and always came when called, so you never worried. You and Chris shared stories about your dogs growing up and you told him one of your biggest life goals was to be able to buy a house so Archie could have his own yard. Bonus if it was near the beach because Archie loved playing in the waves when they rolled in. Chris agreed, it was a good plan.
A solid half hour of adventuring with Archie and you were back to traipsing up the stairs to your apartment. You got Archie a fresh bowl of water and offered Chris a cup of coffee or anything to drink. You cringed as soon as you said it, not completely confident that you had whatever he might want. What if he asked for some fancy bottled water or some special blend coffee you'd never heard of? If he asked for a "drink" that was anything other than something to do with the Grey Goose in your freezer or the bottle of Jack in the cupboard, you were screwed.

"No, I'm fine," he answered. "Thanks."

There was a small grin on his face when you came back from the kitchen with a glass of water for yourself. It was more a prop than a necessity. Chris was standing in the middle of your living room and neither of you seemed to know what to do about it. You took a sip of your drink, a clever stalling tactic, before you gestured toward the couch and asked if he'd like to sit down. His brow ticked up as he looked over his shoulder at the piece of furniture like it had suddenly appeared out of nowhere. He smiled and took a seat. You made your way around the coffee table, angling yourself into the cushions to face him. Man, that list of places to be awkward is getting long.

"So, should we..." You trailed off, the words coming out of your mouth before the idea had finished forming. "Talk? Wanna watch a movie?" You tittered, looking at your drink for a hint. "I don't know."

Chris laughed, the faintest hint of pink coming to his cheeks. Or at least you hoped it was. You couldn't be the only one sweating about what to do. Why was this so difficult? He's just a guy. You've had guys over to your apartment before. Okay, but to be fair, normal guys, everyday Joe kind of guys with shitty little apartments and student loans. What do you do with a Hollywood dreamboat?

"We could talk, yeah," he nodded. "Or a movie. A movie works." He shrugged with a noncommittal pout and gesture of an open hand. "You know, whatever."

You blushed this time. You were sure of it. You could feel the warmth in your cheeks and the nervous twist in your stomach. Oh, look! Your water. Nectar of the gods. Take another sip. Yeah, that's something to do.

Chris chuckled and shook his head. "This isn't us," he complained, with a smile. "We're fun, right? We play games and eat on cars and take goofy pictures in movie theaters! What are we doing here like we're in high school or something?"

"Oh, thank god," you breathed, completely relieved. "You get that, too? I thought it was just me. I feel so lame right now."

"I know," he laughed, his eyes crinkling and with a slight lean forward. "We're better than this." He slapped a hand to his knee and jabbed an authoritative finger in the air. "Fuck it. We're watching a movie. That's what we're gonna do."

"Okay," you enthusiastically agreed, setting your drink on the coffee table and slapping your own hands onto your knees to push yourself up. "What's it gonna be?"

"Anything without that Chris Evans in it," he scowled. "I hear that guy's a real asshole, can't act for shit."

"Seriously," you agreed, with an exaggerated eye roll, walking over to peruse the DVD titles on your shelves.
"Hey, now," he changed his tune, cocking his head with a lopsided smile. "Be nice."

"Hey," you shrugged. "You said it first."

"See?" he whined, his face pinching in disagreement. "This is why you need to stop hanging out with Grillo. You're getting awful sassy. You need to get back on the bus for Team Cap."

"But Frank-"

"I know," he groaned. "Alvey pays the bills. Yeah yeah yeah. Pick a movie already."

You stifled a laugh at his cranky Bostonian tone before suggesting, "I haven't broken the seal on The Man From U.N.C.L.E. yet. Seen it?"

"I have not," he said with an interested raise of his eyebrows. "Actually, I haven't seen anything new since the one with you."

"No shit?" you wondered out loud, unwrapping the cellophane from the movie.

"I've been a little busy lately," he explained, dryly, with a smirk.

"Yeah," you nodded, putting in the movie. "So I've heard."

"Still not being nice, are ya?" he smirked. "Definitely need to stop working with Grillo."

"Ha!" you laughed, defiantly, as you took up the remote controls and started the movie.

Archie came into the room, laying his chin on Chris' knee as you settled back into your spot. Chris scratched softly behind his ears and Archie was in heaven. You smiled at the new comfortableness in the air and picked up your drink again. You threw another quick glance over when you heard Archie grumble contently as he slid down to lay on the floor and Chris smiled down at him. It was nice to see the boys getting along so well. Chris caught your gaze and sent you your own small smile. He tipped his head and laid his arm along the back of the couch, fanning his fingers back and worth to beg you over.

"C'mere," he said, with an inviting smile. "If we're going all high school tonight, let's go all high school."

You'd have to call the landlord about the AC in your apartment tomorrow, because, damn, there was your hot face again. You scooted over, nestling yourself to his side as he lazily draped his arm behind your neck and over your arm. You did your best to suppress a giddy grin as you thought high school was never this good.

"Have you seen this before?" he asked, as the opening credits rolled.

"No," you shook your head. "But it got some great reviews from friends." You gave him a quick sideways glance. "What? No text to Henry Cavill about refunding my purchase if it sucks?"

"Text Henry? No," he chuckled. "Fuck Henry Cavill and his accent and his muscles."

"Really?" you questioned. "Captain America and Superman got beef?"

"No, we don't," he smiled, waving a hand at the TV as Cavill strutted across the screen. "But that guy...Fuck that guy."

You decided that mentioning "fucking that guy" was specifically on several of your friends' bucket
lists, and that the idea may have been penciled in on yours at one point, was probably not a good idea. No need to ruin the lighthearted atmosphere, you decided. Besides, who needs Superman when you're snuggled up on the couch with your own superhero? Chris was right—fuck Henry Cavill. Team Cap!

You watched the movie in the decidedly agreeable comfort of Chris' arm. Your occasional grin at the still unfathomable reality that Chris Evans was on your couch with you was hopefully mistaken for your enjoying the movie. You only paused once to fetch a fresh drink of water for yourself and one for Chris. And when you came back from the kitchen, his arm was up and waiting to welcome you back to its fold.

You resorted to biting the inside of your lower lip to keep a straight face when Chris absentmindedly played with the end of your ponytailed hair for a couple minutes. By the time Napoleon was riding his scooter, Chris' fingertips were drawing soft, distracting lines up and down your arm and you tried your damnedest to keep track of the plot. By the time Illya had taken the boat, Chris' nose and breath made a warm path up to your ear from your shoulder and you were just trying to remember how to breathe. Henry Cavill laid down on a couch, or something, for some reason and who the hell cares because Chris was dotting soft kisses on your neck and sending a tingle through your entire body. Who the hell was Henry Cavill?

A shy tuck of your chin to your chest and a tilt of your head while you bit your lip was your way of saying you didn't mind the attention he was paying to you instead of the movie. The feel of his fingertips under your chin to turn your face toward his seemed to be his way of saying he didn't mind either. Your lips met, several small chaste kisses from soft lips before you parted from him with a quiet titter and felt your face flush again. You locked eyes for a brief moment before he gave you a small, disarming smile and a lingering kiss. His arm behind your neck became his hand combing up with the back of your hair to say he didn't want you to go away again. Your hand found its way to the back of his neck to say you didn't want to leave.

You felt a rush as mouths parted to slow kisses that puckered and pulled at each other's lips. His slacked open mouth pressed to yours, and you felt the tip of his tongue glide past your upper lip. Your opening mouth and quiet sigh was all the invitation he needed for his tongue to dart inside and lavish you with deep, wet kisses. Chris' free hand cupped your face, pulling you closer as your hand instinctively pulled at his neck. The next thing you knew, your free fingertips were grabbing at the front of his shirt as the weight of his frame leaned you back onto the couch and you pulled him along with you.

Your heart was racing. Your arms wrapped around his neck, your mouths crashing into each other hungrily. Your breath caught for a moment, Chris' fingers twisting in your hair and his hand at your hip, his thumb swiping under the hem of your camisole. The next kiss was deeper, and the feel of his warm fingers splayed across your side beneath your shirt was electric. The wet lick of your face—much less so.

Chris flinched toward the back of the couch, leaning up on one hand and wiping at the side of his face with the other. You turned away to the cushions to hide for a moment. Archie grumbled proudly, wagging his tail and nudging his nose into your arm.

"The hell, Archie?" you complained.

Chris sat back and laughed. "I know, bud. I'm sorry," he smiled, patting the dog on the head. "Not on the first date."

"First date?" you repeated, still trying to compose yourself as you straightened up and tugged down the side of your shirt.
There was that boyish smile you melted for.

"Yeah," he shrugged. "This is our mulligan, right? Where I get to do better? He's right." Chris jutted his chin toward Archie, who had taken to bumping Chris' knee for more affection. "Don't wanna start off on the wrong foot and have you thinking I'm some super creep."

Are you kidding right now with this?! You politely smiled, secretly cursing your jealous dog for so successfully defending your virtue. But then, sigh. God love that little, furry bastard.

"You don't give off the super creep vibe," you told him, trying to dispel disappointment with humor.

"Thanks," he chuckled. Chris made a show of checking the time on his watch with a small teeth baring wince. "I should get going anyway. Got a meeting first thing tomorrow."

If it hadn't been him, and you didn't know he was in town for work in the first place, the line would have been a little insulting. You couldn't do much complaining. You smiled to say you understood, finally feeling your pulse come back down. There was an awkward pause and smile before he stood up and headed for the door. You followed to see him out, chewing on your lip, a little let down and a little worried about when you'd see him again. He opened the door for himself and turned around to face you as you hung on the door's edge.

"You probably work tomorrow?" he half suggested and you nodded reluctantly. There was a low, thoughtful hum from him. "I've got a couple meetings in the morning and a dinner thing with some people. What time do you work?"

"Not till one," you frowned. "It's all late day and nighttime shooting tomorrow."

"Well, shit," he muttered. "I'm busy Tuesday morning then on a plane for Boston at 2 for Thanksgiving."

You pressed your lips together and shrugged, trying to smile like you weren't actually bummed by the news. "Next time," you said.

Whenever the hell that was. Dammit. This was hard. He had a good intuition about him or you were doing a shittier job at putting on a brave face than you thought. Chris flashed an unhappy smile and took your hand to pull you in for a hug. He wrapped his arms around your shoulders and tipped his cheek to the side of your head.

"This sucks," he said, adding a small sway to the hug. "I'm gonna come back. After Thanksgiving, we're gonna put our schedules together and we'll make somethin' happen, alright?"

"Yeah," you nodded, unashamedly enjoying the warmth of his hug and taking a commemorative inhale of his cologne.

"I promise," he added, sealing the vow with a kiss to the side of your head. He pulled back, cupping your face in his hands for a long parting kiss. "Don't pout. I'll talk to you later."

"I'm not pouting," you smiled.

Yes, you were. But maybe saying you weren't would help it not be true. He gave you another quick peck on the forehead, smiled fondly, and left. You shut the door behind him with a heavy sigh. He'd be back. He promised. He meant it, right?

You went back to the couch and sat down with Archie's head in your lap, looking up at you with eyes so soulful, you couldn't be mad. You smiled and gave him a scratch on the head. The movie
was still running and you decided to start from the beginning and see what you missed. You smiled. Tonight kinda was like being in high school. Watching movies cuddled on the couch, making out and missing the movie. High school was pretty awesome. So was tonight. You couldn't stop smiling as you thought about it.

You settled into the corner of the couch and the cushion behind you gave a soft puff of air with a hint of Chris' cologne on it. Unapologetically, you turned your face into the material behind you and sniffed. Lonely sigh. So much for your smile. Oh, well. At least you had Henry Cavill.
Chapter 8

It never fails. Every Thanksgiving, you post the Happy Happy Turkey Day song from Addams Family Values on your social media pages. Every year, the song fights it out in your head for supremacy over Adam Sandler's The Thanksgiving Song. And this year, celebrating Thanksgiving with Karen, her daughter, her husband, and a pair of your other orphaned mutual friends in California, a short video of you teaching Karen's 8 year old to sing with you, as you basted the turkey, was an Internet sensation among your friends.

"Ready? Okay, and-" you whispered before you coaxed her into it.

"Eat me!" little Sophie yelled.

"Sautéed or barbecued," you sang and smiled, pushing the bird back into the oven.

"Eat me!"

"We once were pets, but now we're food," you went on.

"We won't stay fresh for very long," Sophie chimed in with you, while Karen's hubby, Allen, snickered in the background as he made the video. "So eat us before we finish this song."

The video abruptly ended when Karen came in asking if Sophie had just yelled "eat me" and your face went from 0 to guilty in .009 seconds. It was one of the highlights of a wonderful day with friends in lieu of too far away family. Your inner child was happily coloring hand turkeys with Sophie on the living room coffee table, with the Packers-Bears game on while everyone digested, when your phone chimed. Putting aside your colored pencil, you smiled at the scolding message.

**Flip Cup Hero:** Shame on you. How old is that kid? What are you teaching her?

**You:** She's 8. She's gonna be just fine

**You:** Gotta raise 'em right

**Flip Cup Hero:** Ha!

**Flip Cup Hero:** You've got issues. It's a good song tho

**You:** Tis a fine holiday standard

**Flip Cup Hero:** Happy Thanksgiving

**You:** Happy Turkey Day to you and yours!

**Flip Cup Hero:** What are you doing? Eat yet?

**You:** OMG ate too much!! Sitting on the floor coloring and watching football

**Flip Cup Hero:** The Pats aren't playing. What r u watching that shit for?

**You:** Not everyone's life revolves around the patriots

**Flip Cup Hero:** The Patriots. Capital Letters. Show some respect
You: Wowww 0_o

You: You need an intervention

Flip Cup Hero: You have no idea

Flip Cup Hero: I'll take you to a Pats game and make you a believer

You: Pats game? Add it to the list, bub. You still owe me that cannoli

Flip Cup Hero: I'm gonna take the high road and ignore how bad that sounds and just tell you you need to come to Boston

Good lord, woman! Think before you send.

You: And you say I have issues?? Gutter dweller

Flip Cup Hero: Gutter dweller?! No cannoli for you

You: That's cool. I'll just have Frank bring me some next time he goes to NY

Your phone rang. You were in trouble. Oops. Answering the phone, you stood up to go to the next room. There wasn't even a "hello" back. Chris just started in.

"Nuh-uh. Frank Grillo is naht getting you cannoli."

"Oh. Why hello, rude," you giggled.

"If I even hear 'Grillo' and 'cannoli' in the same sentence," Chris warned, his voice finally giving way to a snigger. "Fahck New York cannoli."

"Easy there, tiger," you soothed.

"You love driving me nuts," he accused.

"You make it so easy," you shrugged.

"That's enough outta you." You both chuckled. "How's your holiday?" he asked.


"Then you did Thanksgiving right," he approved. "Now, about the cannoli..."

"Really?" you complained, with a laugh. "Still?"

"Yeah," he threw back. "You still owe me a trip to Boston. When are you gonna pay up?"

"Pay up?" you scoffed. "Some of us actually work for a living, ya know. We can't all just hop on a plane to Boston for Italian pastries on a whim."

"What whim?" he asked. "I'm talking about a plan. You, me, The Pats, a box of cannoli. The works, baby."

Hold up. Did he just call you 'baby'? He did. He did just do that. God, please, let him do it again! Your first affectionate nickname? Conspiring about cannoli with Chris? Ahh, the holidays are a
magical time.

"Sounds tempting," you said, coyly.

"Damn right, it does," he assured you, smugly. "Pats are home on the 6th."

"Really? What a coincidence," you mocked surprise. "I'll be at home, too. What are the odds, huh?"

"Alright, sassy," he grumbled. "You know what I meant."

"Yeah," you agreed, "but my ass'll still be in L.A. I'm not unemployed again yet. I've got Kingdom into February and I'm still getting in hours at the salon, ya know."

"*Your ass* still needs to come to Boston," he insisted, sassing you right back. "It's gonna happen, whether you like it or not."

"Don't you tell me what I'm gonna like," you snickered, trying to keep a straight face.

"Fine," he pouted, angrily.

"Fine," you shrugged.

"Okay then."

"Okay," you said.

There was a small pause.

"You're ridiculous," he pointed out.

"*You're* ridiculous," you threw back.

He burst into laughter in your ear and you felt your cheeks blush as you smiled, absolutely delighted by the sound. Chris' laugh wound down to a happy sigh.

"Fine," he conceded. "We're both idiots."

"Fair enough," you accepted his assessment.

"You go back to enjoying your shitty ass football game," he told you. "I'm gonna go have some pumpkin pie...And stop teaching little kids to say 'eat me'."

"You'll never stop me," you promised.

"God, you're terrible," he chuckled. "I like it."


Being back at work after the long holiday weekend wasn't so bad. Mild California weather was nothing to complain about. What you could keep track of about plot points for Kingdom was interesting and, as usual, working with Frank and your friends on the crew was as good as the paycheck. It was nice to have Frank's wife, Wendy, working on set as well. You two always got along and she enjoyed tugging on your arm to ask about Chris and yourself. Chris had called about your schedule, trying to put together a plan to see you again, like he had promised. He was still in Boston and had a couple business reasons to visit Los Angeles before Christmas. Putting his travel dates next to your shooting schedule gave you a couple evenings free in common.
"You should come with me," he said, sounding a little inspired on the phone.

His visit before Christmas included taping an interview for an upcoming Captain America retrospective on one of your days off. "That wouldn't be a little weird?" you wondered.

"No. Why would it?" he turned it around. "It shouldn't be more than a couple hours and we can go straight to dinner from there."

"Because I'd just be sitting there, staring at you from the corner, or something," you imagined. "I mean, if they even let my random ass watch."

"Okay, fine," he conceded. "I'll tell them I'm bringing my own haristylist. That'll take care of that."

"You want me to do your hair for the interview?" you doubted, a bit sarcastically.

"Well, if you don't think you can do it..." he taunted you, trailing off in a quiet snort.

"Seriously?" you scoffed. "At this point, your hair is, like, a two step process. Literally, a drop of gel and push a comb through it."

Chris laughed on the other end of the call. "Yeah, but no one can do it like you do," he complimented.

"Sure," you skeptically agreed. "Because it's so hard to do. What do you do every other day without me and my comb then?"

"I wear a lot of hats," he answered thoughtfully and you laughed. "Come on. It'll be nice to have you there."

"Okay," you shrugged. "Sure."

A week later, Chris was in town again for his interview and a couple of meetings. With a small bag of styling tools and products over your shoulder, you met him at the curb outside your apartment just before 2 p.m. to join him for his interview. On the ride to the restaurant where the interview was going to be taped, you admitted you felt a little foolish to be going as his hairstylist. He made a few flattering remarks about your work in Atlanta to put you at ease. When he added that he never had a prettier or more fun stylist than you, you laughed and blushed, meek and charmed at the same time.

The filming crew all seemed nice. You stood off to the side while Chris shook hands and took their compliments about his Marvel roles with modest thanks. The producer went over the schedule and skimmed over the topics for several minutes while Chris took a seat and you worked on his hair. He managed to send you a small smile, but otherwise, he seemed to be intently listening to the producer. Chris' hair styled and smoothed, in slightly more than two steps, because, hey, you are a professional, he shrugged on a blue cardigan and moved to a chair in front of the cameras. You watched the crew set up sound and measure lighting on Chris from a restaurant table off to the side of the cameras, trying to be as invisible as possible.

When the interview began, you watched with a thin, fangirl grin on your face the entire time. It was so endearing to hear him talk about Steve Rogers and, if you ever had any doubts about Team Cap, you were sold now. You couldn't help a large goofy smile here and there at the way he almost romanticized the comics and how humble he was about giving Steve Rogers life on film. You actually thought you might hit up a comic book shop and grab a few back issues he was so convincing. The cameras never stopped rolling. He stole sips of coffee from a paper cup in between
questions and, for the most part, was locked in on the interviewer. He shot a glance from the side of his eye over to you a couple of times and you smiled warmly for him to see in those brief moments of distraction.

He was right, it only took a couple hours for his interview. When it was over, he traded his sweater for a soft flannel shirt with blue and black lines and pulled on a Maple Leafs ballcap as he finished another round of handshakes and thanks. Letting your bag hang idly in front of you, you waited patiently near the door, a random ass girl with an admiring smile at how nice he was to everyone. When he was finally free, you followed him outside and he opened the car door for you with a tired smile. You drove a little ways and stopped for dinner at a pub in Atwater Village.

You waited a couple minutes for a table among the dinner crowd, with Chris texting back and forth with his publicist. Seated and handed your menus, Chris didn't hesitate to order a German lager you couldn't pronounce the name of if your life depended on it. You went with a simple cocktail you knew all the words to. While you waited for your burgers, you quietly picked at an order of wings. It was odd to have so little conversation. You two had been so chatty over the phone. You considered he might be a bit jet lagged from his trip into town the night before, but when the check came and there still hadn't much to talk about, your insecurities kicked in and you worked up the nerve to ask if something was wrong.

Chris' brow rose and he straightened up in his seat a bit before he made a sour face and shook his head. "No. Why?"

"You just seem..." What was a polite way of saying miserable? "Quiet."

He frowned, polishing off his second beer in one large swallow. "I'm sorry," he shook his head, creasing his brow as he looked down at the tabletop. "I'm kinda ruining the night, aren't I?"

Idiot. Shoulda kept your mouth shut. You felt bad for apparently making him feel bad and went into damage control mode.

"No," you interjected quickly. "No, I just mean, you're kinda quiet is all and- Is everything okay? Or...did I do something? Because, usually-"

"No," he interrupted, raising a hand to stop you and sounding apalled. "Hell no. You didn't do anything. Jesus. I'm sor-" He put his head in his hand, his hat moving for a moment as he rubbed his hand back and forth with a frustrated sigh. "I just- I hate interviews. They drive me nuts...I just get a little anxious some times and I get stuck in my head and- Fuck. I'm sorry."

So, the poor guy is bothered and anxious, and you just made him admit it. Feel better, Nosey Nancy? Way to go, a-hole.

"No, I'm sorry," you insisted. "You were so good during the interview, though. It seemed so natural and the way you spoke about Cap and...And here I am, going on and thinking, 'Oh, poor me. He's not chatty. What did I do?' and you're-"

"A walking disaster?" he suggested with an awkward grin and self-deprecating chuckle as he settled into the booth back.

"I was gonna say you're 'unhappy'," you corrected, frowning as you watched Chris, slumped back in his seat, rolling the empty pilsner glass side to side on its bottom edge.

"I'm not unhappy," he assured you, righting the glass again and sitting a few inches more upright. "I am happy, actually. Happy to be hanging out with you, for one."
He emphasized his point with a gesture your way and you raised your hands innocently with a shrug and cock of your head. "I am pretty awesome," you stated, conceitedly, smiling when he snorted at your lack of humility.

Chris nodded thoughtfully, the side of his mouth pulled up in a half smile. "You are pretty awesome," he agreed. "But, seriously, I am sorry."

"Don't apologize," you insisted, with a small shake of your head. "So, you're in a bit of a funk. That's okay. It happens to everyone. It'll pass. Glass half full and whatnot, right?"

"And whatnot," he repeated, with a smiling nod.

"I didn't mean to put you on the spot," you apologized.

He sat up, leaning on the table. "Nah. You didn't. I'm over it. I swear." He rapped his knuckles on the table and perked up, having apparently made some kind of decision. "That's enough of that. New topic. Whatcha got?"

You were amused by his new found enthusiasm. But, suddenly on the spot yourself, you were drawing a blank. You made a wide, empty gesture to the space in front of you as you fished for something enlightened to say. "Sooo, uhh. Hmph," you drug on. "There, uhh. Oh! New Star Wars on Friday. How about that?"

Chris' head fell back dramatically. "Yass! Looove Star Wars!" he agreed with an enormous smile.

"Oh, my god," you gushed. "Me too. I'm always a slut for Star Wars."

*Whoops.* That just happened. Man, some times you really need a filter. Maybe he didn't hear.

His head snapped back up, his smile vague and his eyes squinted in a question. "You're- Say what now?"

Yep. He heard.

You did the most embarrassed laughing backpedaling of your life. "I said I'm so in love with Star Wars," you tried.

One eye shrank further and he got a shrewd smile on his face. Pointing at you with a wagging finger. "No," he persisted. "You said you were-"

"Like, so happy they made another movie!" you cut in. "Am I right?"

His shoulders shook with laughter as he nodded. "That's what I thought," he said, dropping his hand on the table as he laughed out loud.

There was no hiding the red in your cheeks as you slid down in your seat and hid your eyes behind the shade of your hand. Well, at least he was laughing again. In fact, it took several long seconds for him to find his composure, sighing and wiping at one eye as he finally did. You peeked out from behind your hand to see him flashing that boyish smile at you, waiting for you to reappear.

"Oh, man," you whined. "I'm never gonna live that one down, am I?"

Chris shook his head with a fiendish smile. "Nnnope," he said, popping the 'P' in his promise.
Your misstep at dinner—Well, either of them really. Becuase let's be honest, kicking a man when he's
down and then saying you're a slut for anything are pretty obvious faux pas. -didn't seem to put Chris
off to talking to you. In fact, you spent a long hour after work one night just BS-ing on the
phone about everything from sports to the weather and even your need to go to the pet store for food
for Archie before he ran out in the next day or so. Pretty pedestrian stuff, but you didn't mind. It was
nice just chatting about every day life like normal people do.

At work, you snuck in replies to Chris' messages here and there. He spent the couple days you were
working catching up with friends around town and taking care of his business meetings. You spent
your time hanging out with Archie between early mornings and long days on set. Messaging one
night, you sent Chris a picture of Archie curled up on the end of the couch, staring at the TV, and
looking bored as hell while you had a movie on. Your message to him, "Apparently Archie is done
with this movie and my shit". Chris replied that Archie was in his seat.

On set at the end of the week, you were sitting around on the floor of Alvey's Navy St gym,
watching quietly as the crew reshot the last scene for the day. If everything stayed on track, you'd be
home a little early, and boy did you need it. You texted Chris to see how his night was going. He
was out for drinks with some buddies, watching the Patriots play in Texas. You were impressed he
even payed attention to his phone, given his man crush on Brady, Gronk, and all things Patriots.

The director called it for the day and you checked your watch with a smile. 9:17 p.m. Grinning at
your early parole from work, you let Chris know you were getting ready to pack it in for the night.
Your jaw slackled open when his reply buzzed in, asking if you wanted him to leave early so you
could see each other. You giggled at the idea that he'd leave Pats football to hang out with you. It
was a late game and probably a little too early to tell if Tom and the boys were doing so well that he
felt confident enough to leave already.

You had just sent him a teasing message, asking if you'd have to turn on the rest of the game for him
to watch if he did, when Frank scuffed the toe of his shoe into yours. He stood over top of you,
looking down with his hands on his hips and fake sweat pasting his tank top to his chest. He jutted
his chin toward you and asked what you were doing.

"Just saying we're getting out a little early," you explained, waggling your phone in your fingertips to
say you were texting.

"Oh, yeah?" he asked, his brow cocking up as he stepped around to slide down the wall and join you
on the floor. He grabbed your phone from you before you could protest and went on. "You talking
to Evans?"

"Yeah," you nodded, a bit shy and feeling those damn delicate cheeks of yours warming a bit.

Frank fiddled around with your phone, holding it at his far arm's length when you tried to take it
back. "What's Mr. Evans up to?"

"Watching the Patriots game," you told him, pouting for your phone when it buzzed in his hand.

"Watching football? Instead of seeing you?" he asked. Grillo held up a finger to you as he read the
message. "'Flip Cup Hero'? You have to explain that sometime...He says he'll come over if you want
him to," he paraphrased, turning to give you a swooning sigh complete with puppy dog eyes. "How
sweet."

Frank's thumb expanded the reply box and he hummed mischievously as you made another grab for
the phone. "Frank, no!" you pleaded, but you knew it fell on deaf ears. No harm in trying, though,
right?
Holding you back with a hand on your shoulder, he one thumbed a message with the other, reading aloud slowly as he typed. "That's...o-kayy. I've...got bet-ter...plans...Go...Texans!" His smile turned fiendish. "Annnd, send. There."

"You didn't!" you begged, mortified, as he handed back your phone with an evil chuckle.

Chris' reply of "What the hell??" came fast and you elbowed Frank in the arm. You typed back a quick apology, saying someone else had your phone for a minute. You grumbled a curse at Frank as you hit send, failing at your attempt to be mad at him while he laughed like a hyena beside you. It was kinda funny, after all. The smirk on your face that said you knew Frank was only having fun was short lived. You raised your hand, an exasperated motion to say you both should have seen Chris' next reply coming.

**Flip Cup Hero:** Is that fuckin Grillo??

Frank lit up, seeing the screen. "Ha! Gimme that," he insisted, making a play for your phone again.

You leaned away, sheltering your phone underneath you, slapping at his hand and telling him 'no' again. Frank gave you a playful push and groaned his displeasure with a snarled lip as he stood up. He called across the gym to some of the guys, circling his hand at the wrist to draw them over. As the trio made their way, you were immediately suspicious and got to your feet, clutching your phone to your chest with both hands.

Grillo looked away, leaning to see past you, and you fell for it. As soon as you looked to see, he jumped in, hooking an arm around your waist to foil any escape and snatching the phone from your grasp. He gave you the stiff arm, dancing around with you to keep you at bay while you stretched and pawed for your stolen device.

"Guys, c'mere," he said, inclining his head toward you, when you finally settled down again with a huff. "I need to borrow you for a minute." Frank pointed a looping finger around over your head. Turning on the phone's camera, he explained, "Get in here. We gotta send her boyfriend a picture."

"Ohh, God," you whined, hiding your face in your hand, afraid to see, as Matt, Nick, and Jon huddled up around you.

This was gonna be bad. The boys, all dripping water and in varying styles of muscly, half-nakedness like Frank, had you surrounded. They all laughed. They had to know the trouble they were causing, even if they didn't know who the picture was going to. Frank held up the phone, fitting everyone in the frame. He dropped down a bit, leaning back into your shoulder, his head tilted toward yours while the rest of the sculpted body, male leads moved in as obnoxiously close as they could. Frank gave a 3 count and snapped the pic. He smiled like the Devil as he sent the picture off and gave back your phone.

The guys all wished you a sarcastic goodnight as they waved on their way back to the trailers. You needed a second to work up the courage to look at the photo. Grillo stood by, arms crossed and cocky smile beaming proudly. When you saw the finished product, you about died. Matt looked like he was going to lick the left side of your face, Nick puckered up to the camera on your right with an arrogant glint in his eyes, while Jon nuzzled his cheek on top of your head with the douchiest, tongue hanging out, wild eyed expression you'd ever seen, and Frank...Well, Frank never looked so smolderingly sexy and smug as he flipped off the camera. And the comment beneath the photo? Yeah. The pièce de résistance. [#AlveysAngel, bitch.]

"Aw, come on!" you yelled, defeated and helpless. "The fuck, guys??"
Jon hollered back from the garage door of the gym that you were welcome and you flipped him off as hard as you could. Frank doubled over in laughter. Your phone vibrated in your palm again and you winced. You couldn't look. Your pitiful expression only spurred Grillo's chuckling on as he asked what Chris said.

"You mother fucker," you read aloud, flatly. Another message came in and you went on, "You're dead, Grillo. I'm going to fuckin' kill you." You swept your hand out toward Frank. "There? Are you happy now?" you asked, rolling your eyes. "How'm I gonna fix this?" You shook your head. God love him, Frank was a fun guy. But, damn it, did he know how to stir the shit. He came over, hugging an arm around your shoulders and kissing the side of your head in a smiling apology. He tipped the phone to read the texts personally and chuckled, still pleased with himself. A new text buzzed in, and Frank laughed out loud when he saw it.

**Flip Cup Hero:** Tell her I'm on the way over. I'll kick your fucking ass later

"There. See?" he insisted, tapping his finger on the phone. "I got to him to ditch the Patriots for you."

You had to admit, Grillo got the job done. You wanted to see Chris, but you also didn't want to come off like that needy girl who insisted her guy spend his time with her and not his buddies every free minute of the day. You hadn't actually decided whether or not you'd do it before Frank hijacked your conversation, but you probably didn't have the nerve to ask Chris to leave the game and his friends in the first place. So, actually- Thanks, Frank Grillo!

"Yeah," you said, in jest, walking off the set with Grillo. "Thanks, Frank. Get him all pissed off and then send him over."

"Nah," he dismissed your complaint, with a wave of his hand and an incredulous smirk. "He'll get over it." Frank split off from you as you headed for your trailer and he went to his. "He's a passionate guy," he pointed out. "Now he's all fired up?" He shrugged. "You can thank me later."

You couldn't stay mad at Frank or the rest of the boys. After all, that was one hell of an epic picture. Well, in other circumstances, of course. Closing up your work trailer for the night, your phone buzzed in your pocket on the the way to your car. You grinned, seeing it was from Chris, telling you he'd be at your apartment in 15 minutes. He must have left when he said he was going to. Figuring he must have sent the text stopped at a light, you weren't going to reply while he was driving and when you were about to do the same. Instead, you opened the message so it at least had a read time on it and headed home.

You found a spot on the curb infront of the apartment building next door to yours. Locking your car and looking down the street, you spotted Chris' SUV across the way and several spaces down. You shouldered the little tote bag you used for work and scooted across the street when traffic had passed. You waved a smiling greeting as he got out of his car, seeing you approach. Immediately, you fell into an emphatic apology.

"I am sooo sorry," you promised, earnestly, as he shut the door and hit the remote lock on his key ring. Pressing your palms together in front of your chest, a prayer for mercy, you winced and checked, "You're not actually mad, are you?"

If there was an answer to your question, you missed it. And, frankly, didn't care. Because instead of wasting time with words, Chris chose action, which, yes, does speak louder. His hands on your hips, he kissed you, backing you up against the passenger door of his car. Lips pressed firmly against yours, he held you tight and leaned into you. More than a bit surprised by the sudden affection, your mouth opened for a deeper breath and he took the initiative to slip his tongue in to push and lick at
yours. You couldn’t help but recall Frank saying Chris was a passionate guy, and it made you smile into the mad kiss about how right he was. Several long, glorious seconds later, Chris pulled back, tilting his forehead to your as you both needed a couple small, panting breaths to find your feet again.

You snickered, a bit shied by the overt PDA and his eyes running down what he could see of you from that angle. "Um, hi," you said, biting your lip.

"Hi," Chris smiled.

"Been waiting long?" you asked, suppressing a giggle at still being pressed between the car and him.

"No," he answered, straightening up, but keeping his hands at your waist. "About ten minutes or so. How was work?"

You shrugged with a small tip of your head, still working on your lip. "Pretty good. How was the game?"

Chris shrugged with his own tipping head. "Pretty good."

You couldn’t contain your laughter at the cuteness of the duplicate shrugs and responses you two had going. You figured he’d realized it too, when he broke into a smile and chucked along with you. The laughter dissolved and you pointed to your building across the street, asking if he wanted to come in. He nodded and let you loose to follow you inside.

Archie seemed excited to see Chris again and the feeling appeared to be mutual for Chris as well. You told Chris you would just be a few minutes while you got Archie's dinner and told him to have a seat, if he liked. After seeing to Archie, you scooted off to your room to change into some clean clothes and swipe on a fresh layer of deodorant. Even if you didn’t already think you were probably a little dusty from sitting on the floor at work, you got the idea that sitting around in your Navy St MMA t-shirt probably wouldn't go over too well tonight, all things considered. You swapped it out for a non-Grillo related, plain tee and a new pair of jeans.

Returning to the living room, Chris and Archie were both waiting on you. Sitting at the end of the couch, Chris scratched your dog's side while Archie was balled up in the middle with his head in Chris' lap and they watched the third quarter of the Patriots game on TV. You cocked your head, taking in the scene for a moment. You were going to have to have a talk with Archie about who got to sit next to Chris when he comes over.

Tip toeing quickly past the television, trying to be as little an interruption as possible, you went to the other end of the couch and shooed Archie to the floor. Chris shrugged at his new friend with a heartfelt "sorry, bud" when you eased your way under Chris’ arm and folded your feet up on the cushion beside you. You spent the next hour or so taking in the excitement that is Chris Evans watching his Patriots own the Texans. You appreciated football as much as anyone, but you figured you should probably start paying more attention to the Pats if you and Chris were going to be a thing. It wouldn't be too much trouble. Rob Gronkowski was always easy to look at, anyway.
Waking up wasn't always pleasant. The alarm screaming for your attention, waking up in the middle of a good dream before it got really good, opening your eyes to that disoriented-what time is it-what day is it even feeling, let alone, the occasional panicky jolt of oversleeping. But this morning was an odd mix of a couple things.

You were off today, thank goodness, and hadn't set the alarm. A quick check of the clock said it was time for Archie to lay his chin on the side of the bed and stare at you with woeful eyes until you woke up to feed him. Only, there was no Archie. And, come to think of it, you weren't exactly sure how you got in bed in the first place. Flipping the covers off, you realized you were still in your clothes from the night before. Standing up and looking around, you scratched at your head and stretched. Where was Scooby and the gang to help solve this mystery when you needed them? The distant sound of metal on ceramic made something click. *Jinkies.*

A couple small pieces started coming together. You remembered being a little heavy lidded last night. At work for a 14 hour day, you were a little yawy. You might have dozed off somewhere before the final two minute warning. You vaguely remembered Chris saying something to you, but not what or when and- *Ohmygod!*

You padded down the hall to peek into the living room. Archie's tail thumped on the floor when his little, fuzzy head came up for a second to look at you before laying back down over Chris' feet. The rest of Chris sat on the couch, elbows perched on knees and a bowl of cereal in his hands, watching *SportsCenter.* He smiled up at you as he chewed a mouthful of Cheerios until he could speak with an empty mouth.

"Mornin', Sleeping Beauty," he said, fishing his spoon into his bowl for another bite.

You were more than a little out of sorts this morning. Finger pointing around from the hall behind you to you to Chris to the kitchen as you faltered through, "How did I, um- You're, uh... You-?"

He swallowed his bite with a grin. "You fell asleep during the game," he filled in for you. "Missed a helluva good game, too. We fuckin' dominated."

You shuffled a few more steps into the room, a limp wristed finger still pointing to a question in the air. "And you're still here."

One eye squinted as his head ticked noncommittally from side to side. "Ehh, I mayyy have fallen asleep during the post game show," he admitted. "I didn't have the heart to wake you, so I figured I'd let you go for a bit and, well..."

"So, youuu-"

"Woke up pretty late, put you to bed, and slept on your couch after I took Archie out," he finished for you, before another spoonful of cereal.

*Wow.* That's...unexpected.

"You took Archie out?" you checked, crossing to sit on the other end of the couch, pulling your knees up to your chest for a place to set your tired chin.

He nodded while his mouth was full. "We went out this morning. He already had breakfast," he added, around a half swallowed bite.
You suddenly recalled an interview he gave somewhere when he described Captain America as the kind of guy who would babysit your dog if you went out of town. Completely amused by the recollection, and the fact that Chris Evans, *the* definitive Captain America, had, in fact, taken care of your dog for you, you bit the nail of your thumb as you smiled and a small snigger shook your shoulders.

"What's so funny?" he asked, scraping around his bowl for the last stray rings of oats.

"Nothing," you said, releasing your nail and waving your hand to forget about it. "Thank you, for taking care of him."

"Anytime," he smiled, sipping the milk from his near empty bowl. "You want some breakfast? I made coffee and had some cereal. Hope you don't mind."

Mind? That the most gentlemanly of gentlemen helped a sleeping girl to bed instead of taking advantage, took her dog for, not one but, two walks, *and* fed said dog his breakfast? Who in the world would mind if that guy helped himself to a bowl of Cheerios and a cup of coffee? Hell, you felt like you should give the guy a medal or something for his trouble.

"No, by all means," you told him. "Sounds like you earned it."

He put his empty bowl on the coffee table. "Thanks," he said, with an appreciative grin. He wiped the sides of his mouth and turned in his seat to face you, mouth opening then closing like he was rethinking something. "It's not too weird that I did that, is it?" he asked. "You're not, like, creeped out or anything about me crashing on your couch?"

Well, kinda. Maybe a little, at first, but now? Not so much. He was front runner for Nicest Guy In The World in your book. He wasn't the first guy who'd ever spent a night at your place, but he was the first to take the couch, the first to offer you breakfast, and the first to take care of Archie. So, no, of course not. Even your friends who spent a night on your couch hadn't chipped in so much.

"No," you shook your head, fervently. "Of course not." You nodded toward Archie. "I'm sure he agrees."

Chris glanced down at the fuzzy mass warming his feet and smiled sweetly. "Well, I'm glad." He turned back to you. "I wasn't going to, but it was like 2 in the morning and I'm like a half hour from home, so I-"

He stopped with a shrug and you waved an understanding hand. "You're not the first person to sleep on the couch," you said, light and dismissive. "It's probably me more than anyone, actually."

You both snickered. He probably thought it was cute. You were laughing because it was true. You were probably about 50/50 for making it to your bed after a long work week. It wasn't unusual to wake up in the middle of the night to an infomercial on the television and Archie squished in between your legs and the couch back.

"Yeah, you looked pretty cozy there when I woke up," he noted.

Worry quickly set in, wondering if you snored or anything else embarrassing in your sleep. You didn't talk in your sleep, did you? Oh, God! *Please,* say you didn't drool on him.

"It's actually a really great couch," he added.

"Pretty proud of it," you nodded, with an affectionate pat of your hand on the top of the back cushion. "Plenty of good times here."
Chris' eyes crinkled as he snuffled a laugh and held his lips tight against a smile. *Jesus.* Could you keep your foot out of your mouth just *once* when you're around him?

"That sounded terrible," you groaned, hiding your head against your knees. "That's not what I meant. Sleeping. I meant, it's comfor-"

"I know what you meant," he said. "Doesn't mean it still wasn't funny."

Never a cliff or bridge to jump off of when ya need one. You shook your head to get rid of your mild embarrassment and looked back up, clearing your throat. With a devil may care "anyway!", you got off the couch and headed toward the kitchen, offering him a cup of coffee as you went.

"No, thanks," he said after you. "I'm good." He went on while you took a mug out of the cupboard. "So, what do you usually do with your days off when you're back in LA?"

Pouring your coffee, you called back, "When I'm on studio gigs? It's pretty pathetic, actually." You went to the fridge for some cream. "You know what the hours are like. I usually sleep in, do laundry, and stay in my pajamas all day channeling my inner sloth, if I'm lucky. If I'm not lucky, I'm running around doing chores, trying to catch up for the week and mayyybe see some friends or see the beach, if I can. Don't forget, sometimes, I pencil in a few hours at the salon so I don't lose my off-shoots job." You took your coffee back into the living room. "I'm usually pretty broke down by the end of a shooting week. Hence, my rudely falling asleep on company."

"Literally," he noted with a wag up of his eyebrows for the joke.

"Ugh," you groaned, sitting down again. "I'm so sorry about that."

It was Chris' turn to wave you off. "It's alright," he assured you. "I'm not complaining."

You pressed your lips together to control your grin, a little shy. "I didn't drool on you or anything, did I?" you half joked, half hoped you didn't.

"No," he said, confidently. "No, you're very polite when you're sleeping on someone."

"Thank god," you sighed into your mug before a drink.

"But," he added and you froze, "you do do this tiny, little snoring thing." He scrunched his face, holding his thumb and forefinger just a hair apart in measurement of the sound. "You can just barely hear it."

The heat was in your cheeks in a flash and you covered your eyes with your hand. "Ohhh, God," you whined.

"I thought it was adorable," he said, matter of factly.

"Kill me now," you pleaded, looking up at the ceiling.

Chris chuckled. "So, what do you want to do today?"

"Besides die of embarrassment?" you quipped.

"Yeah, we'll save that for later," he suggested. "You said you got laundry to do. How 'bout we just kick it around here? We can finish that movie, take Archie for a walk."

Domestic Chris Evans. Huh. What a novel idea.
"That's not too low key for you?" you checked.

"No," he scoffed, with a soured face. "Are you kidding? I don't get enough low key around here. That's why I'm usually in Boston."

"Okay," you shrugged. "If you're sure."

He nodded, standing up. "I'm gonna head home, get a shower and change," he said, leaning down to kiss the top of your head. "I'll be back in about an hour and a half and we'll channel our inner sloths together."

Chris came back, as advertised, about an hour and a half later. By then, you had taken your own shower, gotten Archie out for a little after breakfast walk, and did a quick cleaning of your apartment. Dishes washed and laundry running in the basement, you and Chris sat cuddled on the couch together for the second take of The Man From U.N.C.L.E. It was probably the bright light of the midday sun and that he was going to be around for the day that helped you get through the movie without pawing at each other like you had the other night. When the movie was done, you switched your laundry from the washer to the dryer and sprinted back upstairs.

Shutting the door and catching your breath after the three flight jog, you smiled at seeing Chris sitting on the floor. With his back against the front of the couch, he was wrestling a tennis ball from Archie's mouth to toss down the hall. You climbed over the end of the couch, walking along the cushions for a couple steps until you dropped down to sit on your folded feet near Chris' side. He tipped his head back to lay on the seat behind him as he tossed the ball away for Archie to chase and looked at you.

"It's a nice day," he noted. "We should go down to the beach and let him run around awhile."

You still couldn't get over it. Chris Evans hanging out at your place, wanting to go on walks with your dog. And now they play fetch. How is this not beneath him? Hollywood heart throb and blockbuster action star, he had to have better ways to spend his time.

"You sure?" you asked. "I'm sure we could come up with something a little more exciting than that, if we tried."

Archie slid to a stop on the hardwood floor, his toes using Chris' leg as a bumper, and dropped the slobber soaked ball in his lap. Chris praised him with a firm rub on his head. He picked up the ball, winging it down the hall again and sending Archie scrambling after it. He glanced at the dog spit on his hand and wiped it down the side of his jeans.

"Nah," he shrugged, inspecting his hand for dryness. "Let's take the little man for a walk."

Your brow peaked in surprise for a moment. "Okay," you agreed.

Unfolding from the couch, you went to your room to grab a sweatshirt and trade your fuzzy slippers for sandals. Coming back to the front of the apartment, Chris and Archie were by the door, dancing in a small circle as Chris dangled the ball out of Archie's reach and Archie jumped trying to rescue his most prized possession. Chris stopped when he saw you come in, hiding the ball behind his back with an innocent grin, while Archie circled behind him grumbling petulantly. He picked Archie's leash off a hook near the door and held it out for you to take. With Archie hooked up, you headed downstairs and toward the beach.

Your trio wandered down the beach a bit, looking for a spot to let Archie off his lead. It wasn't
necessarily crowded, but it was always nicer when he could play without running through someone else's day. You figured with having Chris in tow, the less people nearby, the better. Free of his leash, Archie spent a few minutes rushing in and out with the tide, the waves lapping at his belly when he waited too long to retreat. Kicking off your sandals beside you, you and Chris watched from the dry sand, taking in the warmth of the December sun.

"So what's the plan for Christmas?" Chris asked.

"Last shooting day is tomorrow," you said, doodling a nonsensical line in the sand in front of your crossed legs. "Gonna fly home on the 23rd. Hang out there for awhile and come back the 28th. I'd love of stay longer, but I've got an interview for a job on the 29th."

"Home is in Cincinnati," he said, making a proud, if not a bit sarcastic, point of remembering.

"Yes, it is," you smiled, elbowing him in the arm. "Good job."

"I pay attention," Chris boasted.

"Yes, we're very proud," you assured him. "How about you? When do you leave?"

"Wednesday," he nodded, chucking Archie's ball along the beach for him to chase.

"For how long?" you asked, watching your dog kick up a trail of sand as he tore after his toy.

"Till the 8th," he answered with a hint of laughter in his voice at Archie galloping back to drop the ball beside him, pushing his nose impatiently into Chris' leg for him to throw it again.

"Nice," you nodded, your brow raised, impressed, and a little jealous you didn't have that kind of time to take for the holidays.

It was also a way of avoiding addressing that meant you wouldn't see him for nearly a month. And that was presuming he was talking about coming back to LA and not off to some new shooting locale or other adventure. Chris threw the ball away for Archie again, chuckling as you both watched him chase it down and scoop it out of the sand. You were kind of at a loss for what to say. You wanted to ask when, or even if, he planned on coming back to California, but you weren't quite sure how. You hadn't figured out yet how to not come off as "that girl" if you did ask. Luckily, he answered anyway.

"Had to be back by the 10th," he mentioned.

"Oh, yeah?" you asked, casually.

"Yeah," he said, playing tug with your dog for the ball again. "I'm presenting at the Golden Globes that night."

"Oh, yeah?" you repeated, sounding very impressed. "Look at you, Mr. Fancy Pants." You nudged him in the arm and he responded with a shy chuckle.

"Yyyep," he said, arrogantly, as he took in a deep breath. "I'm kind of a big deal."

"And so humble," you groaned with a roll of your eyes.

"Sass," he noted, making a slow and exaggerated lolling turn of his head to look at you. "You are full of it."

"A girl's gotta have a hobby," you shrugged, innocently.
Chris gave you a playful shove. "Hobby my ass," he complained. "It's your side job."

"Hater's gonna hate," you told him, hugging Archie when he brought you the ball this time.

"Well, I was going to take a few days after the Globes and hang around Los Angeles," he shrugged, a tone of doubtful teasing whining along, "but, if you're gonna be this sassy next year too..."

"Consistency is key. Just tryin' to keep you on your toes, Evans," you quipped.

"You're doing a great job of it," he declared.

"I'm a girl of many talents," you bragged, handing him Archie's toy.

"Like what?" he asked, throwing away the ball again.

"Well, for starters," you began, counting on your finger as you went, "I'm a total pro at this hair thing." You pointed at your own shiny locks. "And I keep your hair from looking ridiculous."

"Very true," he smiled, with a firm nod.

"Two- I am a wealth of useless information, so you definitely want me on your team for trivia games," you assured him. "Double bonus for you if it's a movies trivia game... Three- flip cup and corn hole. I mean, come on. Need I say more?" He waved a hand to agree it was beyond debate. "Four- I kill it at some car karaoke."

"Better than the seventh inning stretch?" he dared to ask.

You tipped your head and looked at him over the tops of your sunglasses to prove how serious you were. "Honey, the seventh inning stretch has got nothing on me with my windows down and system up," you promised. "I'm talking falsettos and choreography. The works."

He gave an impressed pout and nod. "I'll have to check that out."

"It's pretty epic," you assured him with a confident nod. "I'm not gonna lie."

"Oh, I believe you," he laughed, sending Archie after the tennis ball again.

"There's plenty more, but I don't wanna brag and make you feel bad about yourself," you said, laying the humility on thick.

"I can tell," he agreed.

"So, basically, you won the girlfriend lottery," you informed him.

And then you realized what you said. **Shhhhhit.** You, without permission from him, and certainly not with his lead, just used the 'G' word. Panic set in and you felt your heart racing and stomach twist. What were you thinking? Obviously, you know damn well- you weren't. It just slipped out. Now what?

Chris smirked, his head ticking back in a small nod before he looked over at you. "I'm a pretty lucky guy," he said, smiling that charming smile.

To say you were relieved was the understatement of the year. Your stomach unknotted and you could breath again. You both shared an awkward smile before both of you broke your gaze from the other in simultaneous shyness. You had to chuckle a little.
"Add the beach to the list of places we're awkward," you mumbled and he laughed beside you.

"God," he wondered aloud. "We have to be the most awkward people on the planet."

"It's a distinct possibility," you said, with an emphatic nod.

There was a long pause between you. You both wore thin smiles, content to just watch Archie come with and go after his ball. You went back to drawing in the sand and Chris leaned back on his palms planted behind him. You nuzzled with your dog a few times, but Archie seemed more than happy to take his ball to Chris today for a majority of the time. It seemed he was Archie's new favorite toy and Chris showed no signs of tiring of playing with Archie.

While Archie was off to prance in the surf for a moment with his ball, Chris straightened up and dusted the sand off his hands. "Ya know," he began, his attention turning from Archie to you, "Cincinnati's not too far from Boston." He gestured an exception with his hand. "Well, compared to California, anyway. If you're gonna be that close, you might as well stop by. Maybe after Christmas, before you have to be back in L.A." He cocked an eyebrow and shrugged, adding, "I'm just saying."

"You want me to stop by Boston?" you smiled, barely managing to contain a giggle of disbelief.

"Well," he shrugged, "it's not so much that I want you to come to Boston." You gave him a sideways look. "It's for Scott, really," he said, coming off as if he were disappointed in himself that he had let some secret slip. "He misses you and thinks you should stop by, see some sights or whatever."

"Eat some cannoli?" you suggested.

"There would probably be cannoli involved," he shrugged again. "Maybe. Who knows?"

You laughed, shaking your head at the ploy. "Well, Scott would probably think I'm a terribly selfish person for saying 'I don't think so'," you said, the disappointment in your tone evident. "I haven't been home since last year and I don't have a whole lot of time with everyone."

Chris nodded with a sympathetic smile. "I'm sure Scott would understand," he said. "He wouldn't call you selfish. Scott gets family is important. Especially if you've been gone that long."

"Scott's a good guy," you noted.

He shrugged again. "He has moments."

"His brother's not so bad either," you added.

"That dude?" he laughed. "That guy's fahckin' awesome!"

You burst into laughter, giving him a push in the arm. Chris let himself fall away at your touch, tipping back to wrap his arms around your shoulders and pull you close. You folded your arms up, your hands curling over his forearms at your chest, and leaned into this shoulder. He kissed the top of your head as the laughter subsided, holding onto you and resting his head on yours.

"You gonna give me some of your free time after New Year's?" he asked after a couple quiet minutes.

You shrugged in his arms. "Well, I suppose I have to," you told him. "I'm afraid Archie would miss you, otherwise."
"'Cause Archie would miss me," he mused aloud and chuckled. "Sounds like Archie and Scott are a pair of saps."

"They're pretty pathetic," you agreed.

"Terrible," he said, before planting a firm kiss on your head and laughing. "Let me know what your schedule's like in January, ya know, for Archie's sake."

"Of course," you smiled. "For Archie."

The last day of work before the holiday break wrapped up by 8 and you prepped for your trip home the next day. You dropped Archie off at the dog sitter's and packed your suitcase. You traded some texts with your family, coordinating with your brother about when to meet you at the airport. You made a late dinner for yourself, just finishing some leftover Chinese and catching up on a DVR'd episode of The Muppets, when there was a knock at the door. Winking through the peep hole, the butterflies in your stomach took off when you saw Chris outside your door.

You threw off the bolt and opened the door with a smile. "This is a pleasant surprise. What are you doing here?"

"I came to see Archie," he said, coming in when you stepped aside. "Wanted to say goodbye and wish him a Merry Christmas, before I head out tomorrow."

"Aw, that's sweet," you cooed, closing the door. "But, I'm sorry. He's already at the sitter's."

"Well, dammit," he complained with a smile. "Guess you can have this then."

He held out a red gift bag, with Santa and his sleigh crossing the Christmas Eve sky over a sleepy hamlet, for you to take. You took the bag off his hands, eyeing it for a second. You hadn't expected to see him until January and you certainly hadn't expected to exchange gifts. Instantly feeling embarrassed at your lack of gift for him, you shook your head and muddled an apology.

"Oh, my god," you winced. "I feel terrible. I didn't think we were-"

"No," he interrupted, holding up a hand with a disapproving shake of his head. "It's nothing. It's just a little something to-" He shook his head again. "It's okay. It's nothing really. Just open it," he said, waving his hand to spur you on.

Peeking into the green tissue paper, you reached in and pulled out a folded pile of something blue. Setting the bag aside on the table, you unfolded the material and laughed in complete amusement and charm. It was a navy blue hoodie with a distressed version of Cap's shield on the chest.

"Now, maybe you'll stop wearing that Navy Street bullshit when I'm around," he said, pointing at your gift as you held it up to you for size.

You hugged the shirt close, shaking your head as you laughed. "This is perfect," you smiled. "I'm so wearing this home tomorrow."

Chris smiled wide, a chuckle shaking his shoulders, apparently unable to keep a straight face while he was trying to bitch about your crew shirts and other official Kingdom gear you get to sport at work. "You like it?"

"Love it," you nodded, with a smile.
He stepped over and wrapped you up in a hug. "I just thought you might need something to help you remember Team Cap while you're gone," he said, "since you can't make Boston this trip and it'll be a bit before I get back to L.A."

"Good idea," you agreed, nuzzling into his shoulder as he gave you a squeeze.

"See?" he asked, kissing the side of your head. "Told you it was nothing."

"Well," you began to disagree, "I think it's pretty awesome. Thank you."

"You're welcome," he told you as he let you go. "What time's your flight?"

You stepped back, pulling on your new favorite sweatshirt as you said, "2:15."

Chris smiled. "Lookin' good," he said, coming back in to rest his hands on your hips as you flipped your hair up from under the collar of the shirt.

You smiled back, your arms lying over his. "What time's your flight?"

He leaned in, his bearded face tickling a soft kiss against your neck. "11."

The warmth of his breath on your skin and the scratch of his beard gave you an excited chill. "That's good," you told him, a little distracted by his mouth moving down your neck. "Gives you more time to see everyone."

He stopped, his mouth coming off your skin just enough for his lips to draw words on you as he agreed, "Yeah. It was the earliest I could get. You all packed?"

"Yep," you answered, your voice slightly softer than before. Your head felt a little light and your knees a bit weak as he left one side of your neck to trail the same torturously slow kisses on the other side. "All set," you nodded. "You?"

"Yeah," he paused, warm breath turning your skin to goose flesh. "Before I came over. You gonna leave your car at the airport?"

His lips went back to work as you nodded your answer with a small hum. "Mhm...And yours?"

His fingertips gently began to bunch the hem of your hoodie. "Got a driver," he mumbled into the curve of your neck.

"Right," you sighed. "Of course."

_Holy Jesus Christ_. He had to know what he was doing to you. That sexy sonuvabitch. Of course, he did. You turned your face to his, a cue he took and he put his lips straight to yours. Your arms folded around his neck and he pulled you close, sweet kisses dotting your lips like they had your neck.

Chris stopped, tilting his forehead to yours and tip of your noses brushing. "I'm going to miss you," he said, his eyes running between your mouth and eyes.

You nodded, your eyes making the same journey on his face and biting the inside of your lip. "Me too."

Your eyes locked for a moment and he stretched a puckering kiss to your lips before he told you, "I just came here to give you the shirt." He paused, the honesty in his voice sinking in. "I didn't come here expecting anything else. I just wanted to see you before I leave."
"Wow," you breathed out, taken a little aback by the sentiment. He let out a quiet snort and his lips curled up into a gentle smile. "I know, right?" he chuckled, before another short pause, his hands letting loose of your shirt and slipping around your back. "I really like you, [y/n]. I don't want you take that as a line or a come on or something. I'm not tryin' ta rush into anything. I think we're just starting to get to know each other and that's important." You nodded your agreement. "And I hate that that's getting put on hold for awhile...again."

"It's kind of our thing," you smiled with a small shrug.

"It is unfortunately kind of our thing," Chris agreed, lifting his head up for a sure nod and roll of his wide eyes in emphasis.

Arms still hanging around his neck, there was a silent moment where you just stared, taking each other in, and you were awestruck. Here was this incredibly charming, kind, thoughtful, funny, and handsome man. Perfection personified and he liked you. And he wasn't trying to put on any moves or sweet talk you into bed. Suddenly, you had a new perspective about him. He wasn't just a nice guy, he was a good man and that was, at least for this moment, the most attractive thing about him. It was completely refreshing. It warmed your heart in a whole new way and made the thought of not seeing him for a few more weeks damn near unbearable.

"Maybe you could stay here tonight," you offered, your eyes flitting down, a bit shy. "I'm not saying that anything would happen, but just having you around a little longer wouldn't be so bad."

"That doesn't sound so bad," he said, taking a moment to look you in the eye before resting his chin to your shoulder for another hug.

When you two finally seperated, you went to lock the door for the night. He wore a thin and sweet grin, watching you fold your gift bag from the table and add it to a little pile of Christmas bags and paper you had been using to wrap gifts. You both settled onto the couch, watching the end of your show, cuddled together. Deleting some old items out of the DVR to make room for your scheduled recordings while you would be gone, Chris replied to a message on his phone. When he put his phone away, he looked around with a contemplative frown.

"It's so quiet without Archie here," he observed.

"Ohh," you groaned, a little heartbroken. "It's terrible when he's gone."

Chris chuckled. "It's like, I want to throw the ball, but I know there's no one to chase it and that's a little depressing."

"I know," you agreed, emphatically. "I hate it."

"God," he complained with a laugh. "I really do miss him."

"He's a charmer," you agreed, catching a look at the time and turning off the TV. "You've got to get up early," you reminded him.

He nodded, glancing at the clock. Well, this might be the literal most awkward moment of your acquaintance thus far. How do you say, 'I know we just said nobody's screwing anybody tonight, but you should follow me to my bedroom now' without sounding like too much of a tramp? Hmm. Good question.

"So, um," you started, with a titter.
His laughter started in his chest, shaking his shoulders before it burst out of his mouth, crinkling his eyes. "I'm sorry," he sighed, waving his hand as he leaned forward onto his knees, "but, fuck, we're ridiculous."

You couldn't help but laugh along. "Why are we so awkward?" you demanded.

"I have no idea," he shook his head, at a loss himself.

"I'm just gonna go start getting ready for bed," you told him, standing up off the couch. You pointed down the hall. "You-"

"I know the way," he nodded with a long blink and two fingered salute at his brow.

Stifling a laugh, you headed off to the bathroom. Teeth brushed, face washed, and hair twisted up in a knot, you traded your jeans for a pair of plaid sleep shorts from the back of the bathroom door, opting to keep the Captain America sweatshirt but losing the t-shirt from underneath. You stopped by the small linen closet in the hall. You picked out an extra towel and rummaged around in your stash of toiletries to dig out a spare toothbrush, depositing the items on the corner of the bathroom sink, just in case he wanted them. Going back through the apartment, you double checked the door and turned off lights on your way to your room. You stopped in your door, a bit stumped for how to proceed at seeing Chris in socked feet with his shoes on your floor and one leg folded under him as he sat on the end of your bed, hunched over his phone.

He looked up with a bashful smile, pointing over his shoulder. "I didn't know if you, ya know, preferred a side or something," he shrugged.

You smiled at how endearing the moment was. Is he for real? Seriously, is he ever not considerate of you?

"I usually sleep by the alarm," gesturing toward one side of the bed.

Chris glanced over his shoulder to see which side you meant. He looked back with a smile at what was, apparently, the obvious answer. He locked the screen on his phone and stretched back, planting his palms in the mattress to lift and push himself up to the "guest" pillow. Setting his phone aside on the nightstand and propping his shoulders up against the headboard after another small maneuver, he patted the mattress beside him with an innocent smile and wag of his brow. You dropped your head to hide a small cough of a laugh behind the back of your hand.

"I'm sorry," he said, leaning up to reach out a hand in apology and shaking his head with a grimacing smile at himself. "That's not funny. I didn't mean-" He cut himself off with another shake of his head. "Come on, Christopher," he mumbled to himself.

You had to laugh. You two were pretty ridiculous. You're both adults. It is completely within the realm of possibilities and reason that a man and a woman can share a bed for a night without having sex. Besides, it was actually pretty funny. He was too cute for it not to be.

You turned off the bedroom light at the switch near the door. A small air freshener/night light combo in the hall and a touch of street and moon light from outside lit the room enough to see by, even if you didn't know the space by brail. You dropped a knee into the end of the bed and crawled up to your pillow. You grinned at the mattress dipping behind you as Chris settled himself onto his pillow and you set the alarm clock for the morning. You laid back into your pillow and turned to see Chris' head turned to see you with a small and warm smile. You smiled back with a shy titter.

Chris brought up his arm, holding it above his head and out of the way. "C'mere," he invited, his
voice softened at being so close.

You inched over, snuggling into his side when he brought his arm down to pillow your neck. He planted a lingering kiss on your temple before he shifted to get comfortable himself. It was quiet for a minute and you sat there staring at the ceiling, appreciating the disappearance of the earlier awkwardness. Chris let out a contented sigh and you smiled. Turning onto your shoulder, you nestled your cheek on his shoulder, folding one arm across your belly and laying the other on his chest, lining yourself along his side. His arm followed your move, folding over your shoulders and giving you a squeeze. His free hand found yours, his fingertips tracing lightly over the back of your hand before they curled under your palm for him to hold your hand where it laid.

"Goodnight, [y/n]," he said.
Chapter 10

Mumford & Sons stomped and strummed, loud and suddenly from your alarm clock. You roused slowly, stretching your fists up by your cheeks and scratching your fingertips back through your hair. You grumbled a curse, rolling away from Chris to hit the snooze button on the alarm. Turning back, you nuzzled your head under the curve of his throat, face buried in the softness of his blue Patriots hoodie and taking a deep breath to enjoy the mix of snuggle, warm Chris and his cologne. Chris folded his arms back around your shoulders again, asking what time it was after a long yawn.

"7:30," you mumbled into his shirt.

He settled the point of his chin on top of your head. "I don't wanna get up," he said.

You snickered at the adorable petulance. "I can make some coffee," you offered. "Whip up some breakfast?"

Chris took in a deep breath and sighed. "Don't do that...I'd skip breakfast for another half hour."

"What time is your driver coming for you?" you asked, turning your face up and out of the warmth of his hug.

"8:30," he groaned.

"You can't have a half hour," you told him. "Weekday traffic to the airport two days before Christmas? In LA? You need to get up."

You surprised yourself at how much of a responsible adult you were, kicking Chris Evans out of your bed.

"Fine," he griped. "We're getting up."

He straightened out his arms in a long stretch with a small grunt at the end. You picked your head up for him to take back his arm and you pulled your pillow under your cheek, nestling into the soft fluff. Through a squinted open eye, you saw Chris swing his feet off the bed and check his phone on the nightstand. You closed your eye and curled your knees up, feeling a small chill without him to keep you warm. You felt the mattress shift and cracked open an eye to see him rising and heading out of the room. His footsteps trailed into the hallway and disappeared as you heard the bathroom door shut. A couple minutes later, you heard the shower turn on and you climbed under the covers.

By the time the shower turned off, the snooze had run out. Turning down the volume, you were snuggled in bed listening to the music when your heard the bathroom door open and Chris come back into the room. Something nudged the mattress and a smack on your ass gave you a start, snapping open your eyes with a small yelp. You sat up, seeing Chris laughing at you, standing beside the bed with damp hair. You scooted back to lean into the headboard.

"What the hell?" you whined.

"Time to get up," he pointed out, sounding much more chipper after a shower.

"My flight's not till this afternoon and you told me not to make breakfast," you reminded him, rubbing the sleep out of one eye. "Why do I have to get up?"

"Because misery loves company," he explained, firmly.
Your face soured. "That's a terrible reason," you assured him, sounding a little bitter.

Chris innocently smiled and shrugged, and, because you find his smile so irresistible, you reciprocated, with a shake of your head. He put a knee down into the mattress and swung the other leg over yours, falling with an exaggerated groan to lay with his limbs splayed haphazardly over yours and his cheek to your belly. You let out a small "oof" at the sudden weight before patting a hand on his head the way someone encourages a child they don't really want to encourage.

"Am I in your way?" you wondered aloud.

"No, you're fine," he said, muffled by a fold in your sweatshirt, his eyes closed and giving a quick thumbs up before his hand fell lifelessly to the bed.

You laughed, one hand combing through his hair and the other lying on his shoulder. "You're not going back to sleep," you told him, in no uncertain terms.

"I'm not going back to sleep," he parroted, in a monotone and sounding a little cranky. "I'm just resting my eyes."

You gave him a soft pinch on the shoulder. "No resting your eyes either," you added.

"Would it sound too creepy if I told you I like when you mess with my hair?" he asked, turning his head to speak more clearly. "Like, on a scale of 1 to 10."

"Like, 1 being 'not creepy at all' and 10 being 'how did you get in my apartment'?" you thoughtfully supposed.

"Yeah, that's it," he nodded against you.

You thought for a moment, humming behind a smile. "Hmm. Probably a 1."

If only he knew how you had enjoyed running your hands through his hair on set in Atlanta. He might rate your creepiness at a slightly higher number. Thankfully, that was your little secret.

"Good," he smiled. He made a small plaintive groan and pushed himself up, climbing back off the bed one leg at a time. "I gotta go."

"I know," you said, with a sympathetic smile.

"God," he complained, with a grimace. "I hate to go...I mean, do you have any idea how good that sweatshirt looks on you?!" You laughed. "Not the way I thought that was going, but okay."

" Seriously, though," he said, holding out his hand to reference the shirt, "that's a good looking shirt."

"Don't you have someplace to go?" you prodded, getting out of bed and giving his shoulder a push to head for the door.

"You're gonna think about me when I'm gone," he promised, adding a cocky raise of one eyebrow and glancing over his shoulder at you as you followed him down the hall.

"I'll be thinking about how I can go back to sleep when you're gone," you smirked, watching him open the door.

"Knock off the sass and kiss me already," he scowled.
"You quit being a shit and kiss me," you countered, feigning mild offense.

He laughed, taking a small step forward to wrap you up in a hug. "You're such a pain in the ass," he said, squeezing you tight. "I like it."

Chris let go of you with a warm smile. Cupping your face in his hands, he tilted your chin up to give you a lingering kiss. Your hands wrapped lightly over his forearms and you raised up on your toes to stay with him for an extra second before he straightened up to end the kiss and leave. He chuckled, apparently amused by your efforts. Proof you could be cute when you wanted to be, instead of just sassy.

"Have a safe trip home," he smiled, dotting another kiss on your forehead. "Gimme a call when you have a chance."

You nodded with a dutiful smile, letting your arms fall back to your sides. "Have fun," you told him. As he turned for the open door, you added, "Merry Christmas."

He wished you the same, with a parting smile, and disappeared down the stairs. You shut the door again and reset the lock. It was still early and you were still tired. You shrugged and went back to your room, making good on your promise to go back to sleep when he was gone.

You didn't necessarily travel too often. In fact, 2015 was probably your most active year for sky miles, between back and forth trips to Atlanta, LA, and Rhode Island for work and now this trip to Ohio. If you had it your way, you'd drive. Going to church for you was an open top Jeep and a long, open road with your iPod cranked up to inflict itself on other drivers. You'd made the trip a couple times since moving to LA, when there was an employment gap and you had the time to commit to that kind of adventure. Your favorite road trip, by far, was the one in summer of last year when you were able to drive home and Archie rode shotgun. This trip, however, had you moving with the herd of holiday travelers through airport security like cattle. LAX was crowded, hot, and loud. God, you couldn't wait to get home.

Back in Cincinnati, the airport bustled but was less crowded. Christmas music piped through the terminal speakers, a grey sky, and bare trees made you smile- you finally made it home for Christmas. It had been way too long since you'd last been home. Your older brother met you with a long hug and pulled your suitcase along for you. The air was cold but there wasn't any snow. Your Captain America sweatshirt kept you warm and put an occasional, tiny smile on your face when you happened to catch a waft of Chris' cologne that had latched itself onto the shirt from the night before.

You pouted in the car, checking the forecast on your phone and seeing there was no chance for a white Christmas. You posted a photo of the city skyline as you rode home to your parents' house with a comment loudly declaring [HOME! FINALLY!!]. Settling into your old room, you sent off a short message to Chris saying you got in alright and you'd talk to him later. Your mom made dinner, your brother's wife caught up with everyone after she got off work, and you and your little family gathered together in the living room to catch up with Christmas movies on TV in the background while you talked.

You figured in person was the best way to bring up Chris and, at the end of the Cliff's Notes version of your story, there was a quiet pause while it sunk in. Your sister-in-law made the first move, leaning out of her chair to give you a high five where you sat on the floor. Your mom raised an eyebrow with a cautious hum, saying he was handsome and seemed like a nice guy from what she'd seen on TV. Your brother, as per usual, was rather unimpressed. He hadn't met the guy, but as long
as he didn't make you cry, that was good enough, for now. He only asked that you let Chris know that if your feelings were ever hurt, Captain America or not, he'd 'still fucking kill him'. Your dad was always a stoic guy. He smiled, saying that he was happy for you and pointed out your 'nice sweatshirt' with a knowing nod. You knew if it had to come to murder, your dad would be there helping your brother hide the body. Man, it was good to be home.

Christmas Eve morning, you were out doing some shopping. It was easier to shop at home than to hope shipped gifts made it on time or overworked baggage handlers at the airport didn't damage anything. It was also nice to tool around the ol' hometown again. You had a list and a plan of attack. Your early start had you a little ahead of the last minute holiday shoppers who were still at work. By lunch, you were almost done. Navigating a mall for the last couple of things on your list, your phone rang. Digging it out of your pocket, you smiled at the caller ID and said hello to Frank.

He rattled off something loudly in Italian and you laughed. "Say what now?"

"I said, 'Merry Christmas, kid'. Geez, doesn't anybody speak Italian anymore?" he complained, before a laugh.

"I'm sorry. My choices in school were Spanish, French, or German," you explained. "But, Feliz Navidad!"

"Thank you, sweetheart," he said. "Hey, the reason I'm calling is, Wendy and I were talking and were wondering if you're going to NOLA."

"No," you said, a bit confused. "Why would I go to New Orleans?"

"For the Wizard World con next month," he said, as if you should have known.

"Ohh, right," you realized. "No, I'm not."

"Why not?" he scoffed.

You didn't have an answer prepared and shrugged at yourself. "I don't know. Why would I go?"

"We figured you'd go with Evans," he said, sounding a little offended somehow.

"Nope. Hadn't heard about it," you told him.

"You two didn't break up already, did you?" he asked with a deep, mischievous chuckle.

"Jesus, Frank!" you complained.

"I'm just teasin'. Calm down," he laughed. "What are you doing for Christmas?"

"I'm home right now," you said, eyeing up and down the row of stores for your next stop. "Till the 28th. Got an interview for a Universal production in February the next day."

"Oh, yeah?" he lit up. "Well, good luck with that."

"Thanks," you smiled.

"So, no NOLA and no trip to Boston then?" he checked.

"Nope, not for me," you shrugged again. You heard him turn away from the phone and say to someone else, "Nah. She says she didn't know about it."

"Christmas shopping," you confirmed.

"Okay, well, when you get home today, get yourself a plane ticket to NOLA for the 8th through the 10th," he instructed. "We think you should come down for the con."

You were thrown by the invitation, but felt more than a little flattered that Frank and Wendy were even talking about you in their free time. But, regardless...

"I can't do that," you apologized. "I've got work and I wasn't really planning on anymore travel expe-"

"Nonsense," he interrupted. "You're not working that weekend because I'll be at the con. You're off till Monday that week. Come down to NOLA, work with me for the weekend, and you can surprise Evans."

It was definitely an interesting idea but you couldn't just travel on a whim like that. "I'd like to but-"

"What happened to 'When the boss says'??" he asked, sounding more than a little indignant.

"Okay," you laughed. "See, there's a biiig difference between going to a party and flying to Louisiana for a weekend. Two weeks before a con in NOLA? I'm never gonna find-"

"I'm calling people," he assured you, with a serious tone. "I'm putting your name down. Get a ticket and don't worry about the rest. Work for me for the weekend and we'll call it square. Send me an email address and I'll have my assistant forward you everything else."

"Seriously, Frank, I-"

"What I don't get is why we're still talking about this," he interrupted. "I swear to God, I'll put Wendy on the phone. If she hears about the shit you're givin' me on this..."

You laughed. He was serious. You hadn't ever been to a comicbook convention before, but they always looked like a good time. You wouldn't necessarily be freeloding if you worked for him for the weekend and you were still buying your own airfair. And it would be a hell of a bonus to surprise Chris. Sooo, what the hell? Why not go? You groaned loudly while you struggled with the decision.

"Fine!" you conceded.

"That's better," he said. "Get a ticket, check your email."

"Ticket. Email," you summarized. "Got it."

"Get in on the 8th," he reminded you. "Con starts for us on Saturday morning. You're gonna love it. And Chris is gonna shit when he sees you."

You laughed. "Frank, seriously, as always, I can't thank you enough."

"No problem," he insisted. "Just remember to invite me to the wedding."

Christmas at home is the best. There was a real Christmas tree in the living room, covered in
oraments you and your brother made or were gifted over the years and other heirlooms. A row of nutcrackers stood watch over the stockings hung on the mantle, a pile of presents were under the tree, and your mom was in the kitchen cooking up a storm for breakfast bright and early. You watched A Christmas Story with your dad for, at least, the millionth time in your life on TV while you and your parents waited for your brother and his wife to arrive with your grandmother. Chris messaged an exclamation point heavy [Merry Christmas!!!!!!!!] and you smiled, thinking about surprising him in New Orleans next month. You sent back your own cheerful wishes just as the rest of your family arrived yelling their's obnoxiously when they came in the door. The rest of the morning flew by, a mix of full bellies, holiday cheer, and torn wrapping paper.

The rest of your holiday at home went by in much the same way. You had plenty of time with your family, thankful that Christmas fell on a Friday and gifted everyone with a long weekend off. You caught up with some friends one afternoon for lunch at one of your favorite local restaurants. No one in LA knew or could understand Cincinnati style chili, but you were sure to Instagram and live tweet the meal for postarity. You lost hours of your life to a late night game of Cards Against Humanity at your brother's house with some mutual friends and made no apologies for stuffing yourself full every morning and night of your mom's cooking. When it was time to head back to California, you were torn- part of you eager to get home and jail break Archie from the sitter's and the other part of you feeling homesick before you even got to the airport.

Back in L.A, and with Archie where he belonged, work was back on track. You had an interview with Universal Studios for a position with a period piece production that was slated to start at the end of February, an opportunity that came out of Frank's wrap party schmoozing. You couldn't believe you actually got a reply to your résumé and made a note not to forget about still owing Frank your first born for all his help and pushing with your career. The interview went well, you thought, and you would hear something after the New Year. Stupid Hollywood taking time off for holidays and making you wait. At least you had things to do to kill your time while you waited for a reply and until New Orleans.

You kept in touch with Chris over your holiday, trading a few pics of your Christmas trees and other holiday themed decor and shenanigans. For New Year's Eve, you gathered at a friend's house to barb-que by the pool and countdown the West Coast year turning over with backyard fireworks and sparklers. The East coast New Year came with a phone call from Chris at "his midnight" to wish you a Happy New Year and remind you that there would be no kissing any guys when your clock struck 12. You teased him by complaing it was a hard promise to make, after all, there are rules one must follow to ringing in a proper New Year.

"You're gonna start off 2016 sassy, huh?" he'd scoffed, sounding playfully indignant and mayyyybe a tad drunk. "I swear ta Gahd, I'll come out there and kick who'ever's ass I gotta, but you are naht kissing any 'a those fahckin' guys at that pahty."

How does he make the threat of kicking a stranger's ass sound so...soo...sigh, so damned hot! Oh, yeah. Boston. Who were you kidding, anyway? You weren't trying to kiss any of the guys there. You managed to escape midnight, and spare the lives of the men in attendance, with a few cheek staining, lip stick kisses from your girlfriends. You called it a night and went home about an hour later.

Every year, for the last four years, you and a group of friends participated in the Polar Bear Plunge at Hermosa Beach on New Year's Day. On the beach, barefoot and a little chilled in a bright green, crop rashguard top and bikini bottoms that matched the bathing suits of the rest of your group, and with Archie in a green bandana to boot, you and several dozen other rowdy people had gathered for your run into the ocean. One of the guys with you strapped a gopro to his head to record the event. He edited the video later that night with a slow-mo of the initial run scored with Chariots of Fire and
tweeted it to all of you. You spent the rest of your New year's Day at the beach, suited up by Bodyglove to keep you warm for some waves and enjoying California life with Archie and your friends.

Messages were waiting for you the next morning. Chris had seen the post while you were sleeping and you woke up to a text congratulating you and Archie on doing the Plunge and simultaneously calling you 'nuts'. A second message pointed out how hot you looked in your belly baring outfit, adding "In case you didn't know" at the end. The final message was from your point of contact at Universal, offering you a place on the crew. 2016 was off to a good start.

The first Monday of 2016 put you to work again for Kingdom. Frank picked on you for giving him a hard time about Wizard World and made sure you had gotten your email with the event itinerary and your hotel info. His assistant had set you up in a room at the same hotel as Grillo would be staying. You were happy to be mostly just texting with Chris since New Year's, afraid you might give something away in your excitement if you spoke on the phone too much. Work breezed by fast that week, and, when the shooting wrapped early on Friday so Frank could catch his flight out of town, you raced home to get Archie squared away and get yourself to the airport.

A small panic set in while your plane taxied on the runway before takeoff, wondering if surprising Chris when he was technically working was, in fact, a good idea. You were already committed to going, not that you could escape the plane anyway without becoming TSA's new pet project for a day. Frank had done a lot for you, as usual, and he was counting on you to be there to work the weekend. You had to go. Come on. You used to have a spine. Didn't you? Just sit back and enjoy your economy classed flight. It'll be okay.

Touching down in New Orleans, you shook off your nerves. Waiting for you at the hotel front desk was an envelope from Frank's assistant with your con credentials and an extra copy of the schedule for the weekend. You were checked into your room just after 9 and didn't bother to unpack. Your day had started before sunrise for Kingdom and, as if flying wasn't exhaustingly boring enough already, you were beat. Frank's first event was the Civil War panel at 10 a.m. so you had to be ready to go by 8. You went to bed early to be on time for your adventure at your first comic con.

Dolled up in a white button down with rolled up sleeves, your dark wash skinny jeans folded up your calves above your slip on Skechers, you met up with Frank and his son the next morning at 7:30 in his room to do his hair. He teased you about your rolled up, purple bandana wrapped hair with pinned up curls in the back and a poofy little pompadore in front to pull off a perfect greaser girl style. He called you Rosie while you styled him for the day.

There was an SUV waiting outside by 8 to take you to the convention. Ushered in through a loading dock entrance to the convention center, you followed an event rep with a headset and clipboard as she led you through the back hallways to what was essentially a holding pen for con celebrities. The large room boasted several faces you knew from TV shows and movies, some from growing up and some from the last few years. You weren't a nerd, per se, but you knew enough to geek out with some internal screaming as you panned across the oversized green room at some of the people milling about. Frank asked your guide if Chris had arrived yet and you overheard her say he had not. Across the room, you heard a man yell "Polka! Dot! Boots!" and you, and just about everyone else, turned to look. With hands stretched up in the air in the middle of the room, you caught sight of Anthony Mackie, his smile radiant as always. You instantly blushed, remembering your rain boots and realizing he had made the ruckus over you. You ducked your head as he came over and pulled Grillo in for a manly embrace and slapped his son on his shoulder. Anthony turned to you, tucking
his chin to his shoulder and giving you a playful side eye, and held his arms out wide.

Anthony enveloped you in a hug that teetered from side to side. "How ya doin'?" he asked, stepping back to give you a once over. "What'd you do to your hair?! I like it. What are you doing with Grillo? Where's Chris?"

"He's not here yet," Frank piped up. "He doesn't know she's here."

Frank ticked his brow up to see if Anthony caught his drift and Anthony's eyes went wide, as he covered his mouth in excitement. "He doesn't know?" he repeated. Anthony put a hand on your shoulder, his expression sobering up, as he nodded confidently. "This is gonna be fun."

"Frank thought it'd be a nice surprise," you told him.

"Ohh, he's gonna love it," Mackie assured you.

"Yeah, I been kinda pissin' him off with twitter and shit, lately," Frank shrugged. "Wendy thought I should do something to keep the peace." Frank nudged your arm. "Show him that pic."

You rolled your eyes but obediently dug out your phone, scrolling back through your text messages to Chris to find the photo of you and the boys from Kingdom. Frank waited with a proud smirk, his arms crossed and rocking back on his heels. It took a minute to find, but you still had it. Anthony looked over your shoulder, grabbing at your phone to turn it for a better view. He hissed in a wincing breath.

"Oo," Mackie shook his head. "That's cold."

Grillo laughed and you shook your head with an unamused smile as you turned the phone around for Remy to see. "Yeah, so after that," you explained, "for Christmas, he bought me a Captain America sweatshirt so I'd stop wearing Kingdom gear around him."

The guys all laughed and you pocketed your phone, another soft touch of pink coming to your cheeks again. They spent the next couple of minutes trying to convince you to get a HYDRA t-shirt to wear before Chris showed up. But, come on, a line should be drawn somewhere. Shouldn't it? You wondered, was it that Chris was perturbed by anti-Cap or just pro-Grillo in general? Who really knew? But, no. No. Don't let them talk you into this.

"If Cap's girlfriend wore a HYDRA shirt, a bald eagle would probably fall out of the sky," Remy theorized.

You gestured at Frank's son. "See? He gets it." You gave him a high five for his support...and, secretly, for calling you Cap's girlfriend.

"It'll be okay," Mackie assured you. "They're not on the endangered species list anymore."

"You've got problems," you told him. "Shouldn't you be trying to protect your bird brethren?"

"It's Falcon, not Eagle," he pointed out.

"On the other hand," Frank chimed in, "I am the boss...And when the boss says..."

Your jaw gaping at the insinuation. "You wouldn't," you asserted.

Grillo shrugged as innocently as Satan himself could. Remy switched sides, laughing at his dad's joke while Anthony rubbed his hands together in giddy mischief. Mackie egged Frank on with a
backhanded slap on his arm for encouragement.

"After all," Frank went on, opening his arms wide in suggestion, "we're here to promote Civil War, and you are here working for Crossbones, soo...It couldn't hurt."

"That's a hell of a promo," Anthony added, somehow pulling off "thoughtful marketer" instead of "evil sidekick" for a moment.

"Come on," Grillo encouraged, flashing an enticing smile. "It'll be the last shot I take at him about you."

"Seriously?" you doubted.

"Seriously," Frank nodded. "But you gotta wear it the whole con."

God damn Frank Grillo. Part of you knew it was all in good fun and didn't think Chris took it all that seriously either. It kinda would be funny. It would amuse these three idiots, anyway. Besides, Frank did have a point. You were there to work for him and he was Brock Rumlow/Crossbones, after all. And if it did get Frank to quit trying to get guys at work to lick your face and other tomfoolery just to get a rise out of Chris, well, that couldn't hurt either. The devil on your shoulder won.

"I am not," you warned, holding up a finger for emphasis "...paying for this damned t-shirt."

"No, you're not," Anthony enthusiastically agreed as he and Frank both took out their wallets at the same time. "I love you," Anthony said, stuffing a pair of twenties into your palm. "You know that?"

"Uh-huh. Yeah, sure you do," you groaned, sarcastically. You held out your hand to Frank to pay up. "Nothing's cheap at comic con, boss man."

A fiendish smirk took over Frank's face as he happily dished out some bills to you and Remy. "Make sure she does it," Frank warned Remy, with a stern finger toward his face. "Hurry up. An' keep an eye out. He should be here soon."

You really are kind of a little shit, sometimes. You and Remy found your way out onto the convention floor, power walking through a couple aisles to find a Marvel t-shirt vendor. You waited several minutes in line, nervously checking your watch to be sure you had time to change clothes before you had to be at the theater for the Civil War panel set up. You and Remy both bought black t-shirts with the red HYDRA logo on front and hurried back to the green room area. You took a quick peek inside to see if Chris was there yet. You didn't see him and Remy went back in without you while you found a restroom to change in.

The women's restroom was, thankfully, close by and you changed in a stall. Stuffing your recently replaced white button down to hang half out of your back pocket like a flag, you stepped up to the row of sinks to see yourself in the mirror. You hung your con pass lanyard back over your head and smoothed down your new t-shirt. Checking yourself over as you twisted in the mirror, a woman came out from a stall to use the sink beside yours. You both exchanged a fast, but polite, side eye smile at the other's reflection, as is part of the Girl Code, and you moved to re-pin a curl that was about to go astray.

"I love your hair," the woman noted, with a smile and a delightful accent.

Pin split open on your teeth, you smiled while you tucked up your hair. "Thanks," you said, a little proud.
"It's a shame you have to ruin it with that awful shirt," she smirked.

Hair back in place, you looked over again and stared in a moment of curiosity. "I'm sorry," you began, "You look familiar, but I-

The woman smiled, politely, as she interrupted. "You know, oddly enough, something about you seems familiar, too."

You both realized at the same time, eyes going wide as you spoke over one another, simultaneously pointing fingers at each other.

"You're Hayley Atwell!" - "You're Chris' girl!"

You both stopped to stare at each other with astonished smiles. Peggy Carter! You instantly wanted to kick yourself in the ass for not recognizing her right away. Okay, so the little dynamo in front of you was missing her victory curls and uniform, but you loved her in the Cap movies and you've been meaning for forever to catch up on Agent Carter. You felt a little flush of starstruck shyness coming.

"Oh, my God," you gushed, holding a hand over your heart. "I loooove Peggy Carter." And then it clicked. "Wait. I'm what?"

"You're Chris' girl," she repeated with a smile. "He's sent me your pictures. I remember the hair. It had pink tips before, right?" She gestured her hand near her own hair. "I could never get away with coloring my hair like that."

There was no denying your warm cheeks now. Chris showed your picture to Hayley Atwell? You were a bit dumbstruck for a moment. You blinked, catching up with what she was saying as she held out her hand to give yours a friendly shake.

"[Y/n], is it? It's so lovely to meet you," she smiled. "Chris is quite smitten with you," she added, with a coy grin.

Hayley Atwell knows your name. Peggy frickin' Carter knows your name! But, more importantly, Chris showed Hayley your picture. And he's "quite smitten with you". Holy Jesus Christ. Comic cons were amazing.

"What on Earth are you doing wearing a HYDRA t-shirt?" she complained, squinting in disbelief at your wardrobe choice.

You tittered in a little moment of shame as you explained. You even showed her the picture Frank had sent Chris. She took your phone to study the picture a moment, making a disapproving tick with her toungue.

"Frank is a bit of a cheeky bastard, isn't he?" she mused, shaking her head. Her eyebrows quirked up with a mischievous change of heart. "On the other hand, that is a delicious predicament to be stuck in the literal middle of."

"Okay, maybe it wasn't that awful," you conceded, maybe not with as much shame as you should have.

Hayley stuck out her hand toward you, fingers reaching for yours and eager eyes wide. "Come on," she insisted. "We have to go find Chris."

The next thing you knew, you were jogging back down the hall, lead by the hand by Hayley. You both scuffed to a stop outside of the large green room and she stuck her head in the door to look
around. She waved, beckoning someone out. A moment later, Frank and Anthony appeared and joined you in the hall, noting that Chris was inside.

Anthony instantly broke into laughter, jumping on his toes and smacking Frank's arm in childish glee at seeing your new t-shirt. You held your hands out to pose for their approval. Frank nodded with a pout, agreeing that it "should set him off". They plotted for a moment, trying to figure out how to present you to Chris. Several ideas met the trios' disapproval before Hayley snapped her fingers and her eyes lit up.

"The picture," she said confidently. "Frank, you have the picture you sent to Chris?"

"Naw, she does," he said, jutting his chin toward you.

Hayley gripped your arm. "Send a copy to Frank's phone," she instructed. "Anthony and I will take our own pictures with [y/n], and, when we get to the theater, [y/n] will be hiding somewhere, we'll show him the pictures together, and he'll wonder how we got them."

You weren't quit sure how the whole plan was going to unfold, but you were too far in at this point to not go along. You took pictures in the hallway with Hayley and Anthony. A picture each with them recreating their favorite pose from the original picture that Frank sent Chris from the Kingdom set last month. Hayley played at licking your face while you shielded your eyes from the camera like you did before in the original pic. Anthony channeled Jon and stuck his tongue out obnoxiously from on top of your head. You forwarded Frank's original photo to his phone.

There were a few minutes before it was time to go to the hall for the panel. Frank sent Remy out with you and the two of you went ahead to the New Orleans Theater where the panel would be held. You scanned around the backstage area but there were few options for stashing a body. Your best option was to stand off to the side of the stage and try to blend into the shadows and crew with Remy in the way to duck behind if need be. As the minutes ticked by, your stomach began to twist in nervous excitement, hoping Chris was surprised in a good way to see you and dying to know how long you had to wait to find out.

In the theater, you heard the din of the waiting crowd and checked your watch. 5 minutes till the panel began. You looked around and Remy pointed out Hayley and her co-conspirators coming in with Chris, everyone smiling and talking as an event coordinator lead them along. The power of suggestion doing its magic, Chris ended up standing with his back to you, playing off the positions of his co-stars. You and Remy dared to creep a little bit closer and you heard Hayley speaking to Anthony.

"Honestly," she complained. "I don't know how these fans find out where we are all the time. Just this morning, this mad woman practically threw herself at me in the loo. I managed to get her picture to show to security."

"That's ridiculous," Chris said, shaking his head.

Anthony asked to see the pic and Hayley took out her phone, careful to angle the phone so Chris didn't see. "I know her," Mackie nodded, jabbing his finger at the screen and pulling his own phone out.

Hayley's eyes widened, mortified at seeing Anthony's phone. "That's her," she agreed.

Frank leaned in to see, effectively blocking Chris from getting a look. "Yeah," he added. "Yeah, I know that girl." Hayley and Anthony had put their phones down by their sides as Frank dug out his phone to scroll through. Turning his phone to his wingmen, Grillo added, "Yeah, she's crazy."
“Who?” Chris asked, craning his neck to see Frank's phone.

As soon as he asked, Hayley held up her phone for Chris to see. Then, like dominos, Mackie and Grillo did the same. Hayley could hardly contain her smile as Chris looked down the row of phones in front of him. Anthony started to sputter and Frank wound his hand at the wrist by his side to wave you over. You tiptoed up behind Chris, just as he began to question "What the-?" and Grillo pointed for him to look behind himself.
Chapter 11

Chris twisted to look over his shoulder, the confused expression wrinkling his brow giving way to delighted surprise at seeing you.

Chris turned around, immediately wrapping you up in a tight hug and leaning back with you to take your feet off the floor. His face buried into your neck as he set you down, you could feel his smile. He let you go, maybe realizing he was in public, and looked you up and down to make sure it was really you.

"What are you doing here?" he asked, breath a little short from mild shock.

"I brought you a peace offering," Frank explained, with a smile.

"What the hell?" was Chris' next question, his gaze honing in on your shirt.

"Our idea," Mackie boasted, raising his hand in prideful ownership.

"She's here working for me," Grillo announced smugly. "That's the uniform for Team Crossbones."

"That's too many teams," Chris pointed out, with a disapproving head shake. "You can't have that many teams."

"What teams?" Hayley asked. "How many teams?"

"Team Grillo, Team Kulina, Team Bones..." Frank started counting.

"That's enough of that," Chris interrupted, his eyes rolling over hard.

"Well, screw the lot of you. I think Team Carter should be her team," Hayley said with a sure nod, hooking her arm into yours.

"Everybody just stahp with the teams. Alright?" Chris groaned, putting up a hand and giving everyone a disgusted frown. "She's Team Cap from now on. No more teams." Anthony started to open his mouth, but Chris pointed a warning finger his way and gave him a stern look. "I said, no more teams."

Man, you're popular. If this were kickball, you definitely wouldn't be the last kid picked. Chris butted his way between you and Hayley, putting his hand on your back to usher you away from the others. The group behind you laughed proudly at their little trick. There wasn't any real privacy to be had backstage, but you managed as much as you could in a corner behind the curtain.

"What are you doing here?" he asked, flashing a disbelieving smile at you.

His hand found yours near the curtain where no one could see and he twisted his fingers with yours. "Frank thought it'd be a nice surprise," you shrugged with a smile and feeling a bit giddy. "You surprised?"

"Yeah," he confirmed, with an exaggerated nod. "I'm surprised. How long have you been planning on this?"

"Since Christmas," you admitted.

"Since Christma- The hell?" he laughed. Chris took a quick look around before giving you a quick
kiss and another hug. "I'm glad you're here."

"Yayyy," you smiled, proudly. "I was kind of worried you'd freak out or something, me showing up like a stalker like this. Ya know, 'cause you're working or whatever, and I-"

"No," he said, with a shake of his head. "You have no idea how glad I am to see you."

Frank gave a sharp whistle through his teeth and you both looked. "Let's go!" he called, waving Chris back.

The crowd on the other side of the curtain began to howl and cheer as the presenter took the stage and Chris held up a finger to Frank. "You're gonna be here when I'm done?"

You jerked your thumb to the crowd side of the stage. "Yeah," you nodded. "Remy and I are going to watch and then I'm here with Frank through tomorrow."

The presenter began warming up the crowd and Remy started walking your way. Chris gave you a quick peck on the cheek and a smile. You told him to "knock 'em dead" and watched with Frank's son until everyone was on stage. The two of you found your way around into the theater and to your seats in the crowd to watch the panel. The movie directors emceed their actors. The atmosphere on stage was lively and humorous. You hadn't been there very long and hadn't seen very much, but you were already taken with the convention and were thinking about who of your friends would be interested in going with you if a local one came up.

Joe called on Frank, ready to ask something, but Chris piped up ahead of him, asking, "How do you get your hair to do that?"

The crowd chuckled and you blushed, a bit from pride and a bit from Chris picking on Frank. Grillo leaned forward, looking down the row of chairs to Chris.

"I got this girl," Frank told him, an underlying tone of arrogance and possession. He cocked up a brow, "I could give you her number."

You dropped your head into your palm for a quick shake, ready to die. Joe went on, oblivious to Chris' alpha male chin jut back to Frank, as he asked Grillo to stand up and take off his jacket. Frank handed off his microphone to Anthony and stood. Just to be a shit back to Frank, Chris told him to show the crowd his tits. Frank put his muscles on display at Joe's prompting while Mackie gave him a club beat to pose to. You and Remy applauded with the crowd, adding a loud "woo" from you. Hey, you're only human, because- damn, Frank...and because he is your boss. Just trying to earn your keep in NOLA. Chris followed the noise and gave you a second's worth of a squinting glare before an even faster smile.

The rest of the panel went on the same way, plenty of jokes at each other's expense and friendly ribbing. You spent half the time laughing and the other half smiling. The hour flew by faster than you, and probably the rest of the audience, wanted it to. You and Remy flashed your passes to get back stage again, sifting through the small crowd of crew, VIPs, and event staff to find your favorite Marvel actors and the rest of the panel. Frank held a hand up overhead to guide you to them and Chris watched you cross their way with a warm smile. You shook hands with the directors, Anthony remembering your name right away when Joe's memory stumbled.

Jeremy Renner pointed at your hair before he even said hello. "Did you just do that?" he asked, stepping closer to look over your multicolored hairdo. "Hell of a change from blonde."

"Did it for Halloween," you smiled, proudly.
Renner nodded with an approving frown. "You've been filling it in since Halloween? Looks great," he said.

You and Jeremy stood aside for a few minutes, talking about your hair, of all things. It was a fun conversation to have, though. The two of you always had good talks about something creative with styling or music when he was in the trailer in Atlanta. It was nice to have another one now. People in your chair are usually pretty oblivious to the effort that goes into their hair, but not Jeremy. He was one of your all-time favorite celebrities you'd met for the simple reason that he got it, he appreciated it, and he liked what you did.

Your conversation carried on down the hallways, following at the back of the group as everyone headed back to the green room. Every now and then, Chris looked over his shoulder to make sure you were still there. There was catered food to pick over while waiting for the photo ops to begin. You went out with Remy, though, to grab lunch from concessions for Frank, the Russos, Hayley, and yourselves. Scoring sandwiches and drinks where none of the others could venture without being swamped by fans was your pleasure. All part of the job, you'd said to Frank...who then promptly beamed a smug smile Chris' way. So much for not giving Chris shit anymore.

After lunch, you and Remy took a quick lap to see the sights of the convention, taking peeks at the vendors to check out later and pointing out some seriously good cosplay to each other. You were back in time to give Frank's hair a good once over and retouch a spot before his photo op. He sarcastically offered your services to Chris before his first session started. It was a bit hard not to laugh as you combed out and restyled Chris' hair for him while practically the whole gang looked on. Hayley cooed at the two of you and laid her head on Anthony's shoulder as she watched.

Anthony reminded you, "People are paying money for these pics. Don't ruin this for them. Make 'em look good."

You finished with just enough time to stuff your spare white shirt in your bag and gather up your things to jog to catch up with Frank as he was led away to the photo area. You literally sat on the sidelines, amused by his fans and the poses they asked for. They all seemed to love Frank as much as you did, and he took all the fawning over him in stride. He permitted a couple people, on occasion, to touch his hair. You were up and undoing the damage in between pics each time. Somebody in line recognized you from Frank's Instagram feed and made a point to yell "Hey, Alvey's Angel!" at you on your way back out of frame. You blushed and waved back, pretty surprised by the enthusiastic wave you got and that anyone wanted to say hello to you, of all people, in a place like this.

When Grillo's session was over, you migrated to the next area for Frank to meet up with Chris for the next round of fan photos. The line was excited to see Frank and more than happy, and encouraging, to have him and Remy take a couple photos with Chris before they got started. You waved your hand 'no' and shook your head when Frank asked if you wanted "to get in on this" and the same when Chris offered you a solo pic with him. His smirk said he knew all along you wouldn't take the offer in public and you felt your cheeks warm at his mischievous smile. Now, who was a pain in the ass?

Off to the side again, you were a little jealous of all the fangirls touching Chris and his arms around them. You told yourself it was part of the job and tried to take it all with a grain of salt. After all, naked or not, none of them could claim they ever had Chris Evans in their bed. So, suck it, fangirls!

You jumped in once to make a fast fix for Frank. Like the smart ass he was, when you moved some stray hairs back into place for Chris, a habit from the job more than anything else, Grillo told him he'd be sending over a bill for your time. Chris scoffed, giving Frank a glaring side eye before breaking down into a smile and mumbling a good natured "fahck you" to Grillo as the next fan came
up. Chris put his hand over his heart and thanked you with a small bow. Sigh. Always such a sweetie.

There was a short break for Grillo before his next session with Chris and the others. It wasn't worth it to go far. You ended up stashed behind the backdrop for the photos. You bullshitted with Remy about cruising the con after work if there was time or tomorrow when Frank was done for the day. Jeremy and Anthony hung out, talking with Frank, while everyone gathered for the next session. Talk eventually turned to Kingdom and Frank had to show off the picture he took with you to Jeremy. Renner laughed so hard he nearly teared up.

You folded your arms with a disapproving head shake because you knew Frank would never stop giving Chris shit, no matter how many HYDRA shirts you wore. Seeing you frown, Frank gave you a headlock of a hug, swaying with you as he whined a disingenuous apology for still sharing the pic. You put up a hand to push him away and check your hair. He swiped at your hand and you swung back playfully. Frank balled up his hands and took to his boxing stance, tapping his knuckles gently into your self-protecting, raised palm. You held up both palms to him and he softly sparred with your hands for a few seconds while Remy started a video. When Frank saw his son's phone up, he hooked an arm around your neck to pull you close. He pointed up his finger, a number one, looking into the camera. "Wizard World, NOLA," he said. "Always time to get in a workout with my girl." He pointed at you and you dropped your head laughing. "Alvey's Angel. Train with the best." Frank pressed an exaggerated kiss to the side of your head before you could duck out of his hold, Remy stopped the video, and you all had a good laugh as Chris came around the corner for a quick break.

"What'd I miss?" Chris asked, with a curious smile.

"Frank's beating up your girl, man," Anthony accused.

"Hey," Grillo scolded Mackie, pointing a warning finger and raising his brow at him. "You know that's not true. I'd murder for this kid."

God love Frank Grillo. You sure as hell did.

You shrugged at Chris and he came over to give you a hug. The embrace came from the side, an arm ahead and one behind you. You hooked your hands over his forearm across your chest and tilted into his shoulder while he rested his cheek on your head for a moment. He gave you a small squeeze before he let you go and took a step away. The whole thing only lasted a couple of seconds, but there was a wealth of affection in the little gesture and the darling little butterflies were back to dancing in your stomach for a cheek warming moment. One of the event coordinators came around the backdrop to tell the group of actors it was time for the next session. Everyone filed around the corner, one at a time, to delighted applause from the fans on the other side of the screen.

You slipped around to the edge of the photo area to watch, in case Frank needed you. Chris looked around for a moment while staff cued up the first fan. He spotted you sitting cross legged on the floor and sent you an adoring smile before his attention was pulled away by the event staff. You watched his smile drop while everyone situated themselves at the photographer's directions to get in frame. A smile came to the corner of your mouth as you watched the photo session start. You realized, no matter how many tickets someone had or how many sessions there were, no one but you would get the smile that you got from him just then. Go ahead and be super smug about that. You should be.

The final session for Frank with Chris and Jeremy went by with the least trouble. People had stopped molesting Frank's hair and Chris' was holding up just fine. Chris made a joke about Grillo's hair finally becoming completely self-sufficient prompting Jeremy to complain you never even offered to help with his hair. You apologized with sad eyes, convincing enough that Jeremy's shoulders dropped and he took it back, asking you to forgive him. The whole exchange amused the waiting
crowd quite a bit.

Frank had an autograph session later in the day. Once again, you stood by in the wings. It was weird to watch the way staff herded everyone along the tables for autographs. You kinda felt bad, the way they were rushed, but you understood the process was necessary to make sure everyone got their turn. It still didn't stop you from thinking it was a shame people wouldn't know these guys the way you did. Yeah, it's pretty amazing to be you.

You smiled shyly when Frank's fan from the photo line came close to the table in the signing cue and called to you again. The fan waved and pointed out, "You're hair is awesome! You and Frank have the best looking hair on Instagram. And I love your shirt."

Grillo heard and looked up with a proud smile your way. Your mutual fan was up next and when Frank took her poster to sign he offered her a pic. The fan, naturally, accepted, asking if she could get both of you in it. You started to decline but Grillo mockingly demanded you come over, shooting you an angry look while he jabbed a pointed finger down beside him and, through gritted teeth, said, "Get over 'ere." The fan was ecstatic, professing her love for Brock and Alvey while you shook your head at Frank, making your way to his side. The fan held out her phone for a selfie and you and Frank leaned in, smiling together.

"Say 'Hail HYDRA'," Frank quipped, as the fan took the photo.

She turned around, an excited flush in her face, as she thanked you profusely. "You guys are awesome! This is the best day ever. Thank you so much!"

Staff ushered the fan along and you gave the side of Frank's hair a quick preen as he went back to signing. "You're famous, kid," he laughed.

After Frank signed the last autograph, you followed him back to the green room. You knew from the schedule not to expect Chris to be there. The room had thinned out significantly from the morning. You and the guys grazed over the food spread out for the dinner time attendees, talking about how you were enjoying your first comic con. It was a lot to take in, you admitted, but it was fun. When you finally sat still at a table to eat, you were surprised at how tired you were. If there was any time to check out the convention as a civilian, it would have to wait till tomorrow.

You checked your watch. Almost 6:30. You decided to send Chris a message to see when he'd be done, hoping one- he had his phone on him, and two- that he had a second between photos to answer. If you didn't get a reply, you were just going to catch a ride back to the hotel with the Grillos. You watched your phone intently to see if the 'delivered' became 'read'.

"Texting Evans?" Frank asked, flicking his eyes down at your phone in hand.

"Yeah," you shrugged. "Thought I'd try anyway."

Frank nodded and had a thoughtful look for a moment before he leaned into the table. "You know, between you and me," he began, not a whisper, but just quiet enough for the conversation to be private, "I'm glad you came down. I think he really needed this."

"Needed what?" you shook your head, a bit confused.

"You," Frank said, pointing at you with his fork. "The kid gets all worked up sometimes doing these things. Gets all anxious and nervous. He hates this shit, really." Grillo shook his head as he chewed a bite and went on. "But, with you around, he's much better. He seems more relaxed with you here today...More zen or some bullshit."
You sat there for a moment, taking in what Frank said. "You think?"

"I know," he nodded. "I seen him do PR before and done other cons with him. He's all smiles and jokes on stage, but, if ya know him? Nah. Anxious as hell. You can see his ticks, when he may be 'on' but he's not comfortable. I see the difference, today. He just fuckin' looks at you and he gets better. It's a good thing you did comin' down here. A real good thing."

Really? Well, he did say he gets nervous in interviews, but you'd seen enough clips online to see the energy and brightness he puts out in front of the camera. You wondered if you went back to watch a few again if you'd see what Frank was talking about. You wondered if Chris was maybe soft selling his nervousness to you and- Your phone buzzed in your palm and interrupted your train of thought.

**Flip Cup Hero**: 20 minutes tops. Still here?

**You**: Yes. Green room

**Flip Cup Hero**: Don't go anywhere

You smiled. Frank asked what his reply was and you told him. Frank had a good memory and knocked a knuckle into the back of your phone before you put it away, asking you, "Why the hell is his name 'Flip Cup Hero' in your phone?" You felt your cheeks warm a shade as you pocketed your phone and your forehead went to the table in embarrassment. You took a deep breath and explained anyway, not forgetting to add the story of why you're 'Red Vine' in Chris' phone. Well, at least you figured that was still it.

Grillo laughed, shaking his head. "It all makes sense now. That's funny. I like it...What am I in there?" he asked, gesturing to your out of sight phone.

"Frank fuckin' Grillo," you said, matter of factly, as if he should have known.

He gave you a critical eye. "You shittin' me?"

"Absolutely not," you assured him, taking out your phone again to prove it.

"See?" he grinned, proudly. "That's why you're my favorite."

Time flew by and, before you knew it, Remy was pointing toward the door, saying Chris was back. Chris made a beeline for your table, seeming a little worn out. Looking at him, you felt an involuntary frown start to tug down the corners of your mouth, thinking about what Frank had said. You quickly turned it around, scooting your chair over a few inches so he had room to pull out the one beside you. He fell into the seat heavily and blew out a tired breath through puffed out cheeks, letting his hands fall limply in his lap.

"There he is," Frank greeted him.

"I'm fahckin' beat," Chris said, his voice sounding a little raspy.

You gave him a sympathetic smile and rubbed your hand soothingly on his arm for a second. "Long day," you agreed. "Want something to eat?"

Chris looked over his shoulder, studying the buffet, and shook his head. "N'I just wanna go home." He jutted his chin toward you. "You still on the clock?"

"She's all yours," Grillo offered. He nodded toward you. "10:30 tomorrow?"
"10:30 tomorrow," you agreed.

"Alright," he smiled. "You kids stay outta trouble."

Chris smiled, standing up out of his chair and putting a hand on yours to pull it away for you as you stood. You shouldered your tote bag and you both said goodnight to Frank and his son. You followed just behind Chris and a staff person escorting you back through the inwards of the convention center to the loading dock where an SUV was waiting for Chris. He stopped just before the car, digging into his pocket and pulling out a pack of cigarettes.

He held it up as a question. "You mind?" he asked.

You shrugged, shaking your head. Chris tapped the package on the knuckle of his thumb till a cigarette stood out over the others and he lit it. Tipping his head back, he took a long drag and held on for a moment. He breathed out the smoke on a slow exhale and dropped his head to stare at the ground, kicking at a patch of loose gravel from a shallow pot hole. It was a quiet few minutes while you waited for him to finish before you got in the car. While you stood close, the back of his fingers brushed across yours softly.

As the driver began to navigate the semis and other cars in the lot toward Chris' hotel, Chris asked if there was someplace you wanted to go. Any other night, you would have cajoled him, or anyone else for that matter, into going to Bourbon Street. It was your first trip to the Big Easy and you were dying to know if it lived up to the hype and/or the horror stories. But one look at his empty gaze out the window and all you wanted to do was channel your inner Coulson and see the poor guy sleep. You shrugged off the question and suggested you just stay in and stop along the way to get him some dinner or order room service. His smile was appreciative but still not his usual one. Chris held your hand for the ride to the hotel, your hands resting on the empty space of the backseat between you.

Arriving at the hotel, you headed up to Chris' room. Inside the elevator, where no one could see, he took your hand again and kept it until you got in his room. He pulled off his sweater and excused himself to go take a shower, offering you to make yourself at home. You slipped off your shoes, curled up in a chair in the corner, and turned on the TV. Flipping through the channels, you heard the shower turn on in the bathroom and you found The Sixth Sense to watch while you waited and skimmed over the room service menu.

You didn't have to wait long. Barely ten minutes later, Chris opened the bathroom door, wearing a pair of grey basketball shorts and pulling down a plain white t-shirt over his head. He crawled into the bed, eyeing the television for a second until he recognized the movie and said it was a good one. He folded a pillow between him and the headboard and patted the empty half of the mattress for you to join him. There wasn't a joke or a smile this time, he just settled against the pillow and watched the movie.

You left your chair and climbed onto the bed, inching up beside him to rest under his arm. His head leaned down to rest on top of yours and you were both still until the movie went to a commercial. You reminded Chris about dinner, but he shrugged it off. He was definitely not himself.

"You okay?" you asked, trying to come off as casual and unconcerned.

He nodded his head against yours before he picked his head up quickly, apologizing that he didn't want to ruin your hair. You assured him it was fine and nothing you couldn't fix. It apparently didn't convince him to put his head back down to yours, though. You pouted about that, but just for a moment. Don't want him to see. You turned your eyes up to see him. He might as well have been asleep with his eyes open.
You tried one more time to see if he wanted to eat. Chris shook his head, eyes stuck on the television. You asked if he just wanted to go to sleep, even chiming it that the busy day had worn you out too and mentioning you could thumb a cab to your hotel so he could rest. He gave you a squeeze and, mustered a few seconds of energy, saying he'd rather watch the movie with you. It was almost convincing.

Poor guy. That was it. If he wasn't going to have dinner, you'd be damned if was going to try to stay awake to watch a movie more than half of America had seen at least a dozen times. You slid off the bed, ignoring his question of where you were going as you turned off the light switch by the door. Walking back up the bed on your knees, Chris watched as you gave the pillow behind him a tug. He sat up, letting you flatten out the pillow and pointing your finger for him to scoot down. You grabbed the TV remote and turned down the volume a few notches, telling him, "If you make it to the end, great. If not...Well, hell. I may not make it either."

He snorted a soft laugh as you pulled the pins from your hair and piled them on the nightstand with your bandana before you stretched back out on the mattress. Using his arm behind your neck to prop up your head, you shifted a bit to get comfortable and went back to watching the movie. Chris' arm folded up, his fingertips combing lazily into what he could reach of your hair. A sweet smile came to you, thinking how funny it was that the table had turned and he was messing with your hair now.

After a few minutes, Chris' hand stopped. You felt his hand fall away toward the headboard and you looked up to see his eyes closed. You gave it till the next commercial break to see if he really had fallen asleep. When you could hear him softly breathing through his mouth, you knew. Reaching carefully around on the mattress beside you, you found the remote and shut off the TV. Turning onto your side, you cuddled up to your sleepy superhero, in the t-shirt of his sworn enemy. If that doesn't beat all, huh? He didn't seem to wake up, but Chris' arm did reflexively wrap around you and his cheek found the top of your head on his shoulder.

You had this unfortunate knack, when you were away from home, for waking up a minute or so before the alarm. A quick, squinty look at your phone let you know you still had it. The morning light was edging around the closed curtains, but the room was still dark. Chris was spooned up behind you, face turned down on his pillow and warming the space between your shoulders with each exhale. His left arm under your neck and straight across your pillow, he hugged up to you with his other arm draped over your stomach, fingers curled under your side.

For a working trip to New Orleans, it was going better than alright. Who else gets to call "work" hanging out with a sarcastic, Hollywood tough guy/secret softy at a comic book convention and wake up in bed next to an American hero? Nobody. Just you. When you're alone later, go ahead and do a victory dance, just in case this is the peak of your existence.

The alarm went off on your phone and you tapped the snooze in the same instant before the second's worth of song could wake Chris. Opening up your phone to kill some time before you absolutely had to get up and head back to your hotel, you scrolled through Instagram and your Twitter feed. You snickered quietly, seeing Remy's video of his dad boxing with you had shown up online. You gave it a "like" on Frank's page and felt Chris shift behind you. You locked your phone to hide the light from your screen in the dim room, hoping you hadn't woken him. Frozen like a statue, you waited a moment to see if he was still asleep.

Chris' nose nuzzled into your back, running a trail up beside your spine and into your loose hair piled at the nape of your neck. His arm tightened around your belly and his fingers of his free hand stretched out to the edge of your pillow, the muscles in his arms turning and moving against your skin. You laid your right arm over his, your fingernails scratching lightly on his forearm to say 'good morning'. You didn't think it was possible, but he managed to pull you closer, flattening your back
against him and his chin tilting to rest on your shoulder. He was quiet for a minute, breathing soft and
body still, and you took up your phone again, confident he hadn't actually woken up in the first
place.

Chris' arm folded up off your pillow, grabbing the top of your phone with his fingertips and tossing it
out of reach toward the end of the bed. You snickered again, this time at the tired groan that
accompanied the move. He bent his arm back, coming to rest across your collarbone and his hand
hooking onto your arm to keep it from falling away. Pulling his chin back from your shoulder, he
presssed a kiss to the cotton covered spot he just left, another to the curve where your neck and
shoulder met, and a lips softly dragging, open mouth kiss at the nape of your neck. So much for
being aslepp.

You couldn't go anywhere, even if you wanted to. Truth be told, there was nowhere you'd rather be.
And no one could blame you. Wrapped up in his strong arms, you smiled at the affection and
savored it as a reward for making it through the last couple of weeks without seeing him. Hooray for
absence making the heart grow fonder! And, apparently, other things.

An easy buck of his hips and you had no doubt Chris was, in fact, quite awake. He lifted his head
and craned his neck forward, tongue and lips capturing the curve your ear as he pulled his arm out
from under yours. His newly freed hand palmed back to him over your belly, withdrawing to your
hip only to let his fingertips find the hem of your t-shirt and slide underneath. His fingers splayed out
across your stomach, the side of his little finger brushing along the waist of your jeans. His mouth
released your ear, trailing a humid heat back down to your shoulder.

Your breath hitched when his arm across your chest became a hand over your breast and his fingers
tested their reach between the fabric of your jeans and skin. He nibbled and kissed at your neck as a
pair of fingertips barely grazed the elastic hem of your underwear and his hand came back up to your
hip. Skinny jeans weren't meant for company.

Chris loosened his arm and inched back from you, pulling at your hip for you to turn over. It seemed
like a good idea at the time so you gave no argument, turning over from one shoulder to the other to
face him. Morning breath or not, he didn't seem to mind as his mouth went straight for yours. His
arm beneath your neck bent again, the gentle press of his forearm leading your head close to his
while his fingertips curled into your hair. His right hand on the small of your back pulled you close
while his hips came forward to meet yours. Your leg instinctually rose to lay over his, hooking
behind his to keep you close, and your arms slipped round his neck.

Fingertips pulling across your back to your hip, Chris tilted his hips back, giving him room to reach
his hand between you. Lips pulling and teeth nibbling at each other's mouths, you felt him thumb the
loop from the button of your jeans and you moved back to give him an extra couple of inches to
further his exploring. Mouths and tongues pressed and moving together, Chris tugged the zipper of
your pants apart and pushed the denim down your hip as much as the snug material allowed. You
could almost curse the makers of the skin tight style if you weren't so certain that it was the very
nature of the cut that helped get you into this situation in the first place. Thanks, skinny jeans!

There was a new fervor to his kisses as his hand slipped into the front of your pants and his fingertips
smoothed down over your soft cotton panties to stroke and curl between your legs. You broke your
lips from his for a breath at the touch and he turned down his face to lick and suck gently at your
throat while his fingers ran over the dampness he was creating between your thighs. Your heart
racing, you tipped your forehead down to his head and he knew to come back. Chris dotted small
kisses up your neck and over your chin till your lips crashed into his, needing to feel them against
yours as his hand moved fabric aside and his fingers circled your hot, wet folds below.
You dropped a sigh from your open mouth to his. *Holy Jesus Christ, this man.* Hungry kisses bit and sucked at lips while you took back one hand and drew it down along his chest to find the elastic waist of his shorts and dip your hand inside. His mouth pressed firmly against yours, Chris inhaled sharply at your hand taking hold and stroking up his semi-hard length. He muttered a profanity against your mouth you didn't quite catch and didn't care to waste the time to have him repeat.

In between panting kisses, Chris' breathy question sent a weight sinking in your stomach. "Do you have a condom?"

*What?! Was he kidding? This was *his* hotel room. You didn't even have a toothbrush here. And now this? Come on!*

"Seriously?" you asked, a skeptical look on your face as you both stopped to look at each other.

"Yeah," he said, his eyes running back and forth between yours. "Didn't exactly plan on anything this trip. You think I just run around with a pocket full 'a rubbers on the offhand chance you show up unannounced at a con?"

Well, no. He did have a point there. And that he essentially said he wasn't planning on any fangirl hook ups or anything while he was traveling lately temporarily overrode your frustration. You shook your head with a disbelieving smile.

"Why are we so terrible at everything?" you exaggeratedly complained, tipping your forehead to his as he closed his eyes and laughed.

Chris tilted his chin up to give you a sweet kiss while his fingers gave you another playful pet. He smiled, opening his mouth to say something when the alarm on your phone sang its reminder that your snooze was over. You had less than an hour to get back to your hotel, shower and change, maybe try to grab a quick bite to eat, and meet up with Frank before you had to be at the convention center.

"Is that a sign?" Chris joked, taking back his hand and relaxing his arm from behind your head.

"A sign that I gotta go to work? Yeah, it's a sign," you groaned.

"Then that's a sign I need a cold shower," he sighed.

He tugged the side of your jeans back into place as best he could and you pulled back your hand, with a bashful bite of your lip. You twisted away, looking for your phone to turn off that hateful, moment ruining alarm. Sitting up to grab your phone from down near your feet, Chris rolled onto his back, groaning as he rubbed his hands up and down his face and you silenced the alarm.

"I'm sorry, I-" you began to apologize, before he interrupted.

His hand stretching out to scratch soothingly at what he could reach of your lower back, Chris interrupted, asking, "What could you possibly have to apologize for?"

"Um, for running out of here like this?" you suggested, leaning back a bit to zip up your jeans. "For, ya know..."

He smiled and snorted a quiet laugh at your helpless gesture between you and him. "I'm pretty sure we'll figure it out later," he said, reassuringly. "We can't be terrible at everything all the time, right?"

Thank god, he had a sense of humor. If he didn't, you might have just cried at the promising morning turned tragedy. Chris sat up, brushing his thumb along your jaw as his hand slid round to the back of
your neck to bring you to him for a lingering kiss.

"I'm staying in LA for a few days," he told you, pushing you hair behind your ear. "When are you off next?"

"I'm taking the red eye in the morning to get in before work," you frowned. "Couldn't get a flight out tonight. Shooting starts again tomorrow, 10 to 10. I should have a half day Thursday, if you're still around."

"I'll see what I can do," he smiled.
Sunday at the comic con was fun, albeit off to a bit of an unusual start. By some miracle, you
managed to get back to the hotel and get yourself, and a quick breakfast, squared away with a couple
minutes to spare before you met Frank and his son. On the ride over to the convention center, you
checked your phone. Not that you expected to see a message from Chris that you hadn't heard come
in, it's just that you rushed off without much of a goodbye and didn't even know when he was
leaving town. You guessed it would be sooner rather than later to get back in time for the Golden
Globes. From his seat in the back of the SUV, Frank must have seen you check your phone up front.

"What? He didn't call you after last night?" Frank asked, a smirk below his sunglasses and a
lascivious tone. "Maybe he's one of those '3 days' guys."

"It's not like that," you told him, turning to look over your shoulder so he could see just how hard
you could roll your eyes at him.

Grillo's brow rose in surprise. "Maybe Ol' Cap needs a lesson on what's s'pose to happen in hotels
with pretty girls then."

"Seriously, Frank," you started, twisting in your seat to lean on the center console to see him, "I'll
punch you in the face myself when this car stops."

"You should come by the gym sometime," he suggested, sounding inspired. "We'll get ya some pink
gloves and teach you a few things, so you can clock me good 'n proper." Remy laughed beside his
dad and you shook your head. "Nah, but, seriously though...He alright? He looked like shit last
night."

"He's alright," you shrugged. "I guess. He was just tired. He's supposed to go to Los Angeles for the
Golden Globes sometime today."

"Yeah, it's a shame you're not going to that," Grillo mused, looking out the window over the top of
his sunglasses. "A weekend 'a this and an awards show, he'll be shot by the end of the night."

"Mm," you hummed your disagreement. "I don't think I'm going near any award shows."

"Why not?" he asked, turning his gaze back to you.

You shrugged. "Everyone knows he's kind of a private guy. Which is a good thing," you added,
quickly. "But I'm not exactly red carpet material."

"Da fuck does that mean?" Frank asked, his brow furrowing into the top edge of his aviators.

"I'm the girl from the hair department," you reminded him, "not some actress or model. It's a little out
of my field of expertise and, I can confidently say, I am far from refined enough for those things."

He pointed a stern finger and look your way. "Don't ever sell yourself short like that," he insisted.
"You wanna walk a red carpet with him? Do it. Don't let somebody paint you into a corner and say
you don't belong somewhere." You tilted your head, a shrug of sorts. "What? You think you're not
good enough?"

"Hair department, Frank," you reiterated your standing in the Hollywood food chain.

"You're better than any one of those people out there," he assured you. "You think your job makes
you less of a somebody? [Y/n], believe me, you're good enough to be out there with him. Hell, you're probably too good for him, kid."

Frank's warm smile gave your confidence a boost. Reminder: call him next time you need a pep talk. You sent him back an appreciative smile as the driver turned into the convention center dock. You turned back around in your seat and gathered up your bag from the floor by your feet. The SUV stopped and an event staffer came forward to greet you all. Time to get back to work.

You took advantage of the short work hours for the convention, spending a couple hours wondering through the aisles with Remy while Frank stayed out of sight in the green room. You picked up a bright blue collar adorned with a row of Cap shields for Archie. Why the hell not? You figured Chris would have a laugh and, besides, it really was working on the film that helped get you a lot of opportunities with your career that you were enjoying now. Not to mention, blue was always Archie's color.

Calling it a day, you had dinner with the Grillo boys downtown before heading back to the hotel. You guys got some recommendations from a couple locals for where to get a good po' boy, an experience Frank had been craving all weekend. You even snapped a pic of him eating the sandwich for him to post on Instagram.

Back in your hotel room, you turned on the award show, a distraction while you packed for your early morning flight home. You weren't too terribly interested in the show itself. You hadn't really payed attention to see who was nominated for what, but you scanned the crowd shots, looking for any familiar faces and looking for one in particular. It took a while, but, before a commercial break, you caught a glimpse of Chris laughing at his table. Good lord, that man looked incredible in a tuxedo. You muttered a curse against the show's director and camera man for the too short shot and decided you'd stay up to see his presentation. You could always try sleeping on the plane to make up for it. And, boy, are you glad you did.

Seeing tuxedoed Chris in a head to toe shot, with his hands stuck casually in his pockets and staring back at you through the TV screen, made that thirty seconds of airtime worth every lost minute of sleep you could have been having. And when he took his cue and made his speech, your cheeks burned, swooning for every heavy drop of Boston accent that fell out of his mouth. You fanned at your face for a moment, because damn and there was no one else there to judge you. Good lord, that man in a tux. You gave the show a few more minutes of your time before you figured that was all of Chris you'd get to see for the night and turned off the television to go to bed.

Monday morning was murder. Actually, it would have been easier if someone had, in fact, just done you the favor of murdering you. There had to be a stronger word than 'exhaustion' to describe what you were feeling, you were just to exhausted to think of it. A good wind helped you land almost ten minutes early and traffic only held you up enough to be just a few minutes late for your 10 o'clock call time.

You muddled through the day, not even a shadow of your regular self, a cup of coffee or an energy drink never far from your reach. You hadn't had a drag ass day like this since Emily's birthday party in Atlanta. You must be getting old. What's wrong with you anyway? Staying up to see a few seconds of Chris Evans on TV when you had a 5:15 a.m. flight to catch. Oh, right. Tuxedo. Say no more.

The highlight of your day, besides the 15 minute nap you snuck in your chair in the trailer during
lunch, was a short, mid-morning text exchange with Chris. He asked how your day was going back at work. You tried hard to not to make it sound as completely miserable as it was. He asked how the rest of the convention went. You mentioned he looked good in a tuxedo. It wasn't exactly earth shattering conversation, but it was a good back and forth for several minutes and enough to put a smile on your face.

Archie would have to stay an extra night at the dog sitter's. You were already pushing the limits of safe motor vehicle operation by driving yourself home in your current depleted condition. The last thing you needed was an extra stop between you and your bed. You barely managed to stumble your way upstairs without your suitcase bumping into every damn stair you climbed. You didn't even bother to turn on a light in your apartment. You just went straight to your bedroom and fell face down into your pillow. It didn't surprise you that you woke up the same way when the alarm went off.

It was a few days before your were able to meet up with Chris again. 12-14 hour days were catching up with you pretty hard lately. The trip to NOLA had taken up your days off. The red eye flight home and irresponsible award show viewing absolutely wrecked you. By the time you caught your half day off on Thursday, you were understandably a little whiny and absolutely run down.

Feeling haggard and seeing your hair was due for a touch up, you decided it was time for the fairy hair to go. It had a good run, but almost three months of filling in violet colored roots and the color melt had lost its charm. A friend of yours at the salon squeezed you in for a quick trim and a new color. Tired as you were, you still wanted something fun. You settled on a fiery red ombré that faded from a bright burgundy into strawberry blonde by the end.

At home, you gave yourself a blowout, styling your updated look into large loose curls. You slipped into a sleeveless, v-neck picnic dress, white with a black floral pattern, and pair of black heels. It was the third outfit you tried on, knowing you were going out to a nice dinner and it would be the first time Chris saw you dressed up, let alone in a dress. Your new hue popped over the vintage look black and white dress and you knew this was the one. You looked great, but felt like crap. You stopped at a gas station for an energy drink. You needed a little pick me up on your way to meet Chris for dinner.

You met Chris at an Italian restaraunt in Beverly Hills. Practically in the middle of your homes, it was a good compromise. You read a message from Chris saying that he was waiting in his car when you stopped at a light. He saw you first in the parking lot, coming to open your door as you parked. His face lit up seeing the new you slide out of your Jeep and smooth your dress.

"Fuck me," he marveled, quietly.

Brow raised and mouth slacking open, he looked more than a little surprised. His eyes ran up and down you, a shocked cough of a pleased laugh escaping his wide smile as he rubbed the back of his neck with one hand and shut your car door with the other. You felt your cheeks warm from the attention and you fussed with your hair for a distraction, pulling it around to lay on one shoulder.

"It's okay?" you worried, nervously biting at your lip.

"God damn," he smiled, eyes looking over your hair. Chris reached up, his hand cupping the bare side of your neck and thumb caressing along your jaw. "You tryin' to kill me?" He gave your cheek a soft kiss before giving you another once over with a shake of his head. "Fahckin' hell."

Yeah. Sounds like it's definitely okay.
Cozied up at a small table for two, you toasted to your new job with Universal Studios. The celebration was a bit overdue, but work sucks and the two of you were managing as best you could. You talked over dinner about the few details you knew about your new project. You weren't taking care of any principles this time, but the pay was decent and it was a chance to let another studio get to know you. While you talked shop, it was inevitable that you discussed Chris' chaotic schedule.

"I'm headed out for Geneva Sunday night," he said, nodding his thanks to the waiter who cleared your plates. "There's a few things lined up. Some press for IWC and the launch party. Gotta check out the booth at the salon and a magazine thing. The gala dinner's Tuesday night."

"Gala dinner?" you repeated, with an impressed rise of your brow. "Sounds fancy."

"Another night in the monkey suit," he groaned, through a smile.

"Well, call it what you want, but you and tuxedos are a great pair," you winked, with a sure nod and tip of your wine glass his way.

Chris chuckled and shook his head. "Thank you," he said, giving you a modest nod. "This fuckin' traveling's screwing up my workout, though."

He was back to bulking up for reshoots. Not that he ever really looked like he dropped much mass to you. He had trimmed down some while he was working on Gifted, but the broad shoulders were always there over the narrow waist and he looked plenty strong to you. He was supposed to be back on a stricter diet and worked out with his trainer daily. You suspected he didn't mention the not exactly healthy dinners out with you to his trainer.

"It'll be okay," you assured him, eyes running over his arms in his grey suit jacket and noting the slight stress the buttons down the chest of his open collared shirt were under when he took a deep breath. "From where I'm sitting, it looks like the costume will fit just fine."

There was a short pause while you both faintly blushed and you took a drink to busy yourself.

"It's bullshit they didn't contract you for reshoots," he complained.

You shrugged. "I'm sure whoever they got knows what they're doing."

"Well, whoever they got isn't you," he said. "It won't be right without you."

"It would be fun," you admitted, a bit jealous of whoever did have the job. "But, what can you do?"

"Yeah," he agreed. "At least I'll be in town for a little while."

"Hooray for me," you smiled, a small shake of your fists near your shoulders in celebration.

Chris sent you a smile back, apparently amused by your tiny victory dance. "You'll see me so much, you'll be sick of me in a week," he joked.

"A week? Three days, tops," you quipped, waving a hand out over the table to emphasis your limit. "Then we'll be overnighting you back to Boston."

"That fast, huh?" he wondered, with a doubtful grin and cocked up eyebrow.

No. You'd never send him away.

"Fine. Maybe four," you allowed, with a bashful smile.
You had managed to disguise all of your yawns through dinner. The cup of espresso you ordered for dessert was practically useless. By the time the check was paid and you were headed out the door, you were fading fast. Walking to your car, Chris' arm was low around your waist, hand dangerously close to innappropriately low in public. You opened your mouth to thank him for dinner and ask what the plan was for the rest of the night when an unstoppable yawn came out first. And it was a big one.

You instantly put your hand up to hide the long yawn, waving your other hand to shoo it away as you finished. "Oh my gosh," you blushed, with a titter. "I'm so sorry."

"Am I that boring?" he chuckled as you came to your Jeep in the lot.

"No no no," you assured him, plaintively. "I'm sorry. What terrible timing. I didn't mean to."

Chris turned to stand in front of you, hands on your hips and a warm smile on his face as he studied your smile. "You look tired," he noted, gently.

You really couldn't deny it. In fact, you were already fighting the urge to yawn again.

"I was really hoping that espresso would kick in," you told him, your smile pulling to one side in an almost frown.

Chris cupped a hand to the nape of your neck, thumb smoothing up and down under your hair, and pulled you in for a hug. His arm wrapped around you as he cradled your head to his shoulder, cooing his sympathy. "My poor baby."

Your arms hugged him underneath his suit coat, smiling at hearing him call you his baby. He pressed a long kiss into your hair while his thumb continued its soothing sweeps. Exhaustion or no, you could have fallen asleep in those arms from that touch alone.

"Gimme a call tomorrow?" he offered, sending you home more than letting you leave.

Don't lie. You were a little relieved at the thought of going to bed early. It didn't stop your pang of guilt for cutting the night short, even if he was giving you permission. How could anyone be such a nice guy all the time?

"I'm sorry I'm so pathetic," you pouted as you both straightened up a bit in your hug to see each other.

His hand came forward to tuck your hair back behind your ear and he gave you a sweet smile. "Trust me," he nodded, "I know what it's like. Don't apologize."

"I feel terrible though," you admitted. "You're headed out of town again and I'm crapping out on th-"

"It's okay," he chuckled. "I'll be back by next weekend. Just get home safe and get some rest."

You tried to apologize again. "But-"

"No buts," he insisted, giving you a peck on the forehead. His head cocked to one side with a wicked grin before he grabbed a quick handful of your left butt cheek. "Well, maybe just a little," he shrugged and wagged his brow up innocently.

You made a gasping laugh, eyes wide with surprise and completely confident your face was as scarlet as your freshly colored hair. Chris laughed at your moment of shock andducked when you playfully smacked his arm. Mumbling for you to 'c'mere' through a wide and proud of himself smile,
Chris pulled you back to him and gave you a lingering kiss. He dotted another kiss on your nose as you parted.

"Shoot me a message," he instructed, pointing at you and walking backward a few steps toward his car. "Lemme know you got home okay."

You nodded. "I will," you promised, fishing around in your purse for your keys.

You unlocked your door and were just pulling it open to climb in when you heard footsteps nearby. Turning over your shoulder, you saw Chris coming back. Hands in his pockets, he shook his head with a smile and held up a finger for you to wait. You shut your door and he came straight to you.

His hands scooped up your chin, tilting your face to him for his lips to crash into yours. You suddenly found yourself wanting needing something to hold onto and one hand found a fistful of his suit jacket while the other met one of his wrists near your cheek. Your tongues danced for a few passion filled moments before he broke away, forehead to yours and sides of your noses brushing.

"God, you're beautiful," he said in a hush, eyes tipped down to your lips. "Have I told you that?"

Had he? Who cares? If he hadn't, well, he sure as hell did now. All you could do was flash a flattered smile while you felt your cheeks heat up again.

He kissed you again, lips pressed firm over yours for a pair of long seconds before he leaned back with a bit of a frown. "Fahckin' Switzerland," he complained.

You giggled, finally feeling the flush begin to leave your face, while you thumbed over the back of his hand. "It's just a week," you reminded him.

"A week?" he repeated, his brow raising in a kind of worried realization. "Bettah get one more."

You couldn't help but laugh as Chris quickly leaned back in and attacked your mouth with his, catching you a bit off guard. You shifted a foot behind you to keep your balance on a heel and gripped his wrist in surprise. He hooked his free arm around your waist to keep you close and upright, your startled laughter smothered by his open mouth kiss. He hugged you tight, turning his face down into your neck, smiling a nibbling and sucking kiss just below your ear while your arms folded round his neck.

Chris groaned plaintively, the sound humming into your pulse from lips pressed against your neck before they were lifted just high enough to trace words on your skin. "Fuck. I'm gonna miss you," he said.

"I'll miss you, too," you assured him, trying to control your racing heart.

Good god, that man.

A trail of small kisses along your neck to your cheek brought Chris' mouth back to yours with a subtle dancing sway in your hug. He inhaled deeply on the last kiss, letting the breath out in a sigh with a smile as he let you go. He reached past you and opened your car door, a bit reluctantly gesturing for you to get in. You smiled your thanks as you climbed in and gathered up the skirt of your dress to hold it out of the way as he shut your door. You started the engine and put down the window for you both to say goodnight. He stepped back, wearing that boyish smile that melted your heart with one hand in his pocket and other sending you off with a small wave.

_Fuck Switzerland._
Emotions are dumb. Dumb and confusing. How can you be excited and sad at the same time? How is it possible to feel simultaneously giddy and bummed? By seeing pictures of Chris Evans in Geneva. That's how.

The nerve he had. Looking all handsome and casual sexy in photos of him at the IWC launch. And then, if he weren't already being cruel enough, he had the nerve to put on another tuxedo for the gala. Inconsiderate, that's what he was. Standing there, all debonair dreamboat. Just rude. And that was the good part.

The bad part was actually a two-parter. First, and most obviously, you were working in Los Angeles while he was jet setting in Geneva. But the other part? Well, that was a little heartbreaking. Because he looked kind of spent in damn near every photo. Photos he posed for with other celebrities didn't look so bad. The more casual pics that showed up online, where he seemed off guard or distracted talking to someone, had him looking run down and almost unhappy sometimes. You were pretty sure it was jet lag at first. But then the gala photocall pics showed up and it occurred to you. There wasn't a real smile in any of them.

Barely a grin. Not a genuine, toothy smile. Not on the red carpet. Not in the press shots with the gala props. Nothing. Just a stare into the lens. Not even a smoldering one. Just...there. His body language read stiff or uncomfortable. His hands seemed perpetually trapped in his pockets, which was ordinarily boyish and cute, but it struck you as more hiding than relaxed this time. He didn't come off as enjoying himself and there was only one photo you saw that looked like he was having fun or laughing. Maybe there were more somewhere, better ones, but from what you saw, he was not having a good trip.

You hadn't heard much from him. Switzerland lived nine hours in the future. With your long hours, it was practically impossible to speak on the phone. When you were off, he was sleeping and when he got up, you were sleeping. And that was the simplest version that didn't include you not being able to take calls sometimes and not knowing his event schedule for the trip. You made due with texts that sometimes had rather obnoxiously long delays between delivery and reading times. But the gala pictures you saw were the catalyst to ring him up.

You waited for a good moment to call. The first shot for Kingdom for the day was an inside scene, Alvey was sitting in his office for a long talk with Lisa. There wasn't a chance anyone would need you for awhile. You snuck off the set and settled onto the ground against the corner of the gym away from the crew foot traffic and did the time zone math in your head, hoping he was free to answer your call while the phone rang. You let out an imperceptible sigh of accomplishment when he said 'hello'.

"Allô? Grüezi?" you smiled.

From the other end of the line, Chris laughed outloud. "You speak French and German?" he asked, still airy with laughter.


"Well, it sounded convincing," he noted.

"Nice," you laughed, pleased with yourself. "So, anyway...hi."

"Hi, babe," he replied, after a small chuckle.

Aww. Babe. Te-he.
"How are you?" The instant you asked, a small, worried knot twisted in your stomach and you bit at your thumbnail.

"Good," he breathed out, after a moment. "Pretty busy, but good. You workin' today?"

"Yeah, I am," you said, smiling with a wave at one of the gaffers who went by you. "Taking a break for a minute. Thought I'd see if I could catch you."

"Caught me." You heard his smile on his voice. "What's up?"

You held your breath, thinking for a second. "Just calling to see how things were," you said, trying to sound breezy. "I saw some pictures from the gala."

"Oh, yeah?" he asked, sounding perk ed up a bit in curiosity.

"Yeah," you stalled, biting your lip. "You looked pretty handsome in your monkey suit." There was a modest chuckle from Chris before he thanked you, giving you time to work up the nerve to ask, "So, how's everything going? You looked a little...tired."

There was a moment's pause and your stomach dropped. Your mind raced. Why was he quiet? Maybe he was with people and couldn't talk. Did you use the wrong words? Damn. You shouldn't have said anything at all. Should have just left it at 'how's it going'. Was he uncomfortable? Way to call him out again, dumbass.

"A little tired, I guess," he answered. You could almost see the shrug in his voice. "Jet lag, probably."

"Sure," you agreed. "Jet lag." Only, you didn't think it was just jet lag, and, after another good chew of your lip, you nutted up and went on. "I'm not saying you didn't look good, because you really did. Like, wow, I mean really. You and tuxedoes, sir. Damn." He gave you a humble snigger. "But you...Well, I just thought you didn't look like yourself. You seemed a little-"

"A little," he repeated, sounding kind of defeated. "Yeah."

Ugh! You hated to hear that tone. The one that, had someone used it in your presence, earned them an instant hug. Or, in some cases, a free drink.

"I mean, I don't think I saw a single honest smile in the gala pics," you explained.

There was an exhale on the line. "Yeah, now that you mention it, maybe not. I don't know."

This wasn't sounding better at all. If you weren't already sitting on it, you would have kicked yourself in the ass for bringing it up. Coulda just been a friendly 'hello', but nooo. You had to poke the bear. Might as well keep going.

"You alright?" you asked, back to nibbling on your nail in worry. "'Cause I know you said sometimes-"

"No. You're right," he cut in, definitely sounding off balance. "I'm usually better than that. At remembering to smile, I mean."

"I'm sorry," you told him. "I didn't mean to make it a big deal, it just struck me. Ya know? I just wanted to see if you were alright."

"I am," Chris assured you.
"You're not mad, are you?" you worried.

"Why would I be mad?" he asked.

You shrugged. "I don't know. Like, maybe I was nitpicking or something for noticing and bringing it up. I didn't mean to put you on the spot...again."

"No," he told you. "You're not." There was another pause. "It's actually...I guess, it's kinda nice you noticed." You finally started to feel a little better. "Not a lot of people would...I appreciate that you called."

"Of course I'd call," you assured him. "I was just a little worried. I mean, I know you're a grown man and all, but...I don't know. I just thought maybe you could use a friendly voice."

"It's good to hear your voice," he said and you thought you heard a little smile in it again. "I'm glad you called."

_Oh, thank goodness_. That's better.

"Well, you know me," you smiled back. "Just a little fuckin' ray of California sunshine."

It was back. The boisterous, happy laughter and you could practically see him smiling from Switzerland. Your own smile beamed proudly.

"That you are," he agreed, his laughter slow to wind down. "God, I miss you."

Your cheeks warmed, and not from the morning sun you sat in, as your smile widened and heart felt like it was floating in your chest. "I miss you, too."

"What time are you off tomorrow?" Chris asked, still sounding like a smile was there. "I'll be back around 7. Wanna get a late dinner when you're done?"

"Yeah," you nodded, still smiling like an idiot. "If you're not too tired from your trip. Send me a message when you land and I'll call when I'm out."

"Deal."

Talking to Chris made you feel better. He was okay and he sounded like himself by the end of the call. It was a bit rough to see how uncomfortable he looked in the photos from his Switzerland trip. But knowing he was on his way back to LA had you giddy and checking your watch throughout the day. He'd be in by 7-ish and filming was set to wrap by 7:30. _Perfect._

When you got a text that he was delayed in London for a mechanical issue with his flight, you shrugged it off. Now you wouldn't feel rushed out of work. When his next message said they were trying to find another plane to put them on, you frowned. _Okay_. That just means you'd have time to feed Archie and change clothes. When Chris sent a text saying they were boarding and would be about four hours late? _Screw it_. Take your time.

You finished up some chores at work, a little laundry and organizing, and enjoyed your commute home with the windows down and radio up. Archie got his dinner and a nice, long walk on the beach. You picked up some clutter around your apartment, payed some bills online, got a shower, and cleaned out your DVR a bit. All while checking the time like it was a compulsion. You hadn't heard anything from Chris by 10:30 and figured he was still in the air. Call time for you was 7 a.m.
and you started doing the math of how much sleep you might get versus how much you needed. Either way, you had a sandwich.

You took Archie for his pre-bedtime constitutional. When you got home it was just before eleven. Even if he did call, you couldn’t go anywhere now. Maybe you could try again tomorrow. You curled up in bed with a last check of your phone at 11:14. Nothing.

_Dammit._
Chapter 13

You woke up to the sound of your alarm and that sneaky bastard, Archie, curled up at the foot of the empty half of your bed. What got you going for the day was a voicemail from Chris. Checking your phone while you nudged Archie off the bed with your toes under the blanket, you smiled.

"Hey, [y/n]. I'm so sorry. It's...quarter after 12 now. Sorry to stand you up tonight, but I'm just getting out of Customs. I didn't think it'd be this late. Can I get a rain check on dinner? Maybe tonight, after you get off work?..Shit. Hope this didn't wake you up. Sorry if it did. And I'm sorry about dinner, again...This is me, being really really sorry. Gimme a call or text when you can. Goodnight."

Even if you thought he'd actually stood you up, how could anyone be mad after an adorable little message like that? The sun wasn't up and you were sure he wouldn't be either. You got up to start getting ready for work, wearing a smile and intent on calling him back later that morning. You figured after the long day traveling that he would be sleeping in. Maybe you'd just wait until your lunch break to be sure.

Hiding out on your break in the hair and makeup trailer, you gave Chris a call. Grinning like a schoolgirl, you barely got out a 'hello' before Chris was into an apology.

"Babe, I am so sorry," he said earnestly.

Swoon. That word. Babe.

"We didn't land till after 11 and by the time I got through Customs," he sighed. "I'm sorry. I really wanted to see you."

"That's okay," you said with a melodramatic sigh. "I only stayed up all night listening to my stomach growl, doubled over in the pains of starvation and wallowing in the sorrow of being forever alone while I ugly cried and sang Adele songs. But, ya know, whatever. It's cool."

"Ohh-kayyy," he groaned. "You know what, sassy?"

"I'm just kidding," you assured him. "I made a sandwich and went to bed."

"You and that smart mouth 'a yours," he grumbled.

You laughed. "Eh, I amuse myself."

He chuckled and sighed. "You gonna let me see you tonight?" he asked.

You hummed a moment, as if the decision were actually hard to make. "Mmmaybe," you teased.

"Please?" he hoped.

"Well," you shrugged, "since you said 'please'."

"So sassy," he noted. "You're killing me." Chris chuckled. "What time are you off?"

You told him around 7 or so and he told you to text him when you were leaving, he'd meet you at your place. You had a quick lunch and spent the rest of the day basically just watching the shoot. Everything was filmed inside and without any fighting today, so you had little work to do for anyone. It made for a long day, but everyone was on schedule and you were out on time. You sent a quick text to Chris before you headed home.
You managed to beat Chris to your apartment. It gave you a few minutes to get Archie his dinner. While Archie ate, you traded your 'crew' t-shirt for a plain white soft ball tee with blue sleeves and kicked off your shoes for sandals. It was too warm for your Cap sweatshirt, but you definitely didn't want to be seen in anything Team Kulina. You hadn't discussed plans in detail to know what to wear and figured you'd just change depending on how he showed up. You didn't see Chris outside the window and didn't have any messages, so you took Archie out for a quick walk for a couple minutes. Coming back up to your building, your gaze was drawn down to your phone with a text from Chris just arriving.

**Flip Cup Hero:** Out with another guy already. Damn

You stopped and looked around. It was hard to see anything too far away in the street lights, but, a few spaces away, you heard an alarm chirp on and saw the unmistakable silhouette walking along the sidewalk. You didn't bother replying to the message. Archie's tail started wagging and he gave his leash a tug. You let him go when Chris stepped into the yard. He bent down to greet Archie, picking him up to hug at his chest and carry as he came over. Archie sniffed excitedly at any piece of Chris his nose could get at and you laughed. Stopping in front of you, he put your dog down, giving Archie's sides a furious rub. Chris stopped, peering a little closer at Archie for a second before he straightened up and pointed down at him.

"Is that a Captain America collar?" he asked, with a half smile and a squinting eye.

You shrugged. "What can I say? The sap misses you when you're gone."

Chris smiled wide, taking a knee beside Archie. "Did you miss me, buddy?" he asked, rustling Archie's ears vigorously. "Huh? Did ya?"

You stifled another laugh, hiding your smile behind your hand and shaking your head. "Look," you began, "if you just came over to snuggle my dog, I'm gonna go grab something to eat. I'll come back when you two are done bonding, or whatever."

Chris stood up, slipping Archie's leash over his wrist. "No," he scoffed. "I came here to snuggle you."

He leaned over the dog standing between you and gave you a kiss. Archie groaned at your feet for being ignored and you smiled when Chris straightened back up. He gave Archie a soft bump with his knee.

"We'll hang out later," he promised, looking down at Archie. Chris turned his gaze back to you, smiling at your lips pressed together and your head shaking while you tried not to laugh. "And you," he noted, pointing a finger at you. "I'm gonna snuggle the shit outta you."

You could only hold on for half a second before you burst into laughter. "Are you threatening me?" you asked, your eyes almost watering from laughing so hard.

"Oh, it's not a threat," he assured you, nudging Archie out of the way to move close enough to hug you.

You wrapped your arms around his neck while your laughter settled down. With his free hand around you, he squeezed you tight, leaning back to pick you up off the ground for a few seconds. When he put you down, he pressed a kiss to the side of your neck.

"I missed you," Chris said, leaning his head back to look at you before giving you a quick peck on your forehead.
"I missed you, too," you smiled.

Chris let you go and you turned to open the building door. You held the door for the boys to pass and made a comment about chivalry being dead. Chris just shrugged, mumbling something to Archie about women's lib you didn't quite catch as you all started up the stairs. Whatever it was, it was probably worthy of the light shove you gave him when he didn't repeat it for you. Chris gave you a frowning scowl, stepping aside on the stairway and insisting you walk ahead of him and Archie, ya know, for their safety. You gave him a purposeful bump with your shoulder as you passed him and turned your nose up in the air as you went on. You heard him chuckle behind you and you shook your head.

"So sassy," he noted, disapprovingly, and when you looked over your shoulder, you saw he was addressing Archie.

"He loves my sass," you insisted, defensively, jabbing a finger at Chris a few steps down.

"Hey," he complained, furrowing his brow. "This is a private conversation, if you don't mind."

You laughed out loud. "Oh, by all means," you gestured him to carry on, "keep talking about me behind my back."

You continued on up the stairs while, behind you, Chris told your dog, "See that? That's how you-"

"How you what?" you asked, turning around and coming down a stair, with your brow raised in curiosity.

Chris grinned, tightly pressing his lips together, trying to suppress the laugh that shook his chest. He shrugged his shoulders, his brow rising and head tilting innocently. You employed a similar method to hide your own smile, pulling your lower lip into your mouth and shaking your head.

"How youuu don't...treat a lady?" he tried digging out of a hole.

"Uh-huh," you nodded, as you rounded the corner of the landing to climb the last section of stairs.

"Baby, I'm sorry," Chris pleaded from behind you. "Archie made me do it...He's kind of a little shit, sometimes."

"Oh, he's a little shit sometimes?" you wanted to clarify.

Chris' hand reached up to your waist, hooking a finger into the beltloop at the back of your shorts to stop you. You turned around to see his brow wrinkled up in an apology above sad eyes and a frown. You shook your head and tutted.

"I thought you were a professional actor," you teased. "I've seen better pouts on-"

You didn't get to finish. Instead, you let out a small yelp as Chris tickled your side. You slapped his hand away while he laughed at your failed attempt to be offended and not smile. Climbing a pair of steps to stand just below you, he pulled you over his shoulder, pausing a moment for you to quit squirming and balancing himself on the staircase. You let out a startled gasp and hooked an arm around his side and planted one against his back to steady yourself as he carried you up the rest of the stairs. Despite your hushed, yet emphatic, plea to be put down, he held on. Arm belted over your waist, he shook Archie's leash off his wrist and used his free hand to check your pockets for your apartment key.

"Dude. Would you stop screwing around?" he chided, quietly, pulling the keys out of your pocket.
"You're gonna bother the neighbors."

"Seriously?" you asked, trying to turn to see him.

Chris turned, fumbling with the keys in his left hand as he tried the lock. He held them up behind his head for you to see, asking, "Key?"

With a groan, you tapped at the right one and folded your arms to hang against his back in a show of formal protest...and defeat. Archie looked up at you from behind Chris, his tail sweeping the floor where he sat and head cocked curiously to one side. Chris unlocked the deadbolt and was on to the handle when you heard a pair of voices and footsteps coming up the stairs. You smacked him on the back, whispering in a panic to put you down, afraid of the embarrassment in front of your neighbors but mostly worried you two would draw attention and someone would recognize Chris. He pulled the key and turned the handle, sliding in the door quickly and calling Archie to come inside. Chris shut the door and set you back down without letting you go. He held a finger up to his mouth and you were both frozen, listening to whoever was in the hall pass by completely oblivious. You both sniggered, eyes crinkled and smiles wide as if you'd gotten away with a crime. You felt a wave of relief that no one saw Chris.

"God, you're trouble," you playfully groaned, going after Archie to take off his leash while Chris locked the door and dropped your keys on the table.

You set Archie free with a light pat on the head. Straightening up, you were met by Chris taking the leash out of your hand and setting it aside on the table. He reached a hand up to cup your chin and turned your face to meet him for a kiss, soft and sweet until his other hand found the curve of your hip bone in his palm. His jaw slacking open, his tongue glided across your lower lip, asking permission. You let him in, his tongue slipping into your mouth on a sigh of an exhale. He pulled you in, his hand at your chin slipping around to the nape of your neck and the other pressing into the small of your back.

There were no complaints from you. You showed your approval with your fingers raking into the back of his hair and one hand curling up over the back of his shoulder. When the kisses got deeper and you shuffled backward into the hallway wall, you considered maybe Switzerland wasn't such a bad place for Chris to spend a week in by himself after all. Pressed into the wall, Chris' hand at your hip thumbed underneath the hem of your shirt while his mouth explored the side of your neck. The hand from your neck drifted down to cup and squeeze your breast, his thumb rubbing over the hardening peak he found. A whispered profanity came from you when he nipped at your earlobe and he let out a faint, breathy chuckle as he went back to devouring the curve of your neck and shoulder for a moment.

Chris' arms wrapped low around your waist, hugging you to him as he leaned back and pulled you with him, your toes could barely brush the floor. Your arm instinctually hooked behind his neck and hand tightened over his shoulder to hold on as you let out a tiny yelp at suddenly flying as he turned you away from the wall. Chris let out a short, amused laugh, moving down the hall toward your room. His knees bumped into yours as he walked and he chuckled while you pulled up your feet with a small, wincing whine of a prayer that he wouldn't drop you. He promised he wouldn't. You believed him.

He bent forward until your feet found the ground again. This time, in your room. You shared a laughing look, his blue eyes crinkled with a warm smile. You both moved back into a kiss, his arms still around you while you folded both of yours to hang over his shoulders.

The pace of the kisses quickened, their need becoming a bit more insistent. Tongues danced and breathes pulled deeper. His hands pulled back to your hips, the cotton of your shirt twisting in his
fingers. His tongue took a long trace of yours before his nose nudged and he pulled back just a fraction. Foreheads touching and lips still reaching to brush each other's, he tugged up the hem of your shirt to pull over your head. Which was fine, because you were suddenly aware of how warm you were.

Your t-shirt tossed aside, he leaned back and peeled his own shirt off overhead, flinging it off his wrist as one hand cupped your cheek and he seemed to admire the sight of you for a moment. Holy Jesus Christ. The view you took in of his muscled arms and sinfully sculpted chest and abs had the warmth of your skin flaring to burn in your cheeks. How was he even real?

There was a new urgency as lips pressed and smeared hasty kisses and fingers fumbled over buttons and zippers. You kicked your sandals away as the shorts fell from your hips. Chris stepped out of his shoes and bent down to pull off his jeans and socks, tossing them aside to add to the pile of clothes gathering on the floor. He came back up, slowing to dot a few kisses up your stomach. You flinched and let out a startled giggle at the soft whiskers on his chin and warm breath tickling up your abs, your hands reflexively giving him a little push on his shoulders.

Chris smiled, maybe a little proud at the tiny shriek he'd gotten out of you, and you bit your lip with a grin. God, he was adorable. Hands back on your waist, Chris walked you backward until the edge of the mattress found the back of your knees and you fell down with a small bounce on the bedside. You inched back, giving him room to crawl over you, while his lips came to yours and you laid down.

Back in bed with Chris Evans. Third time seemed to be the charm. This time, before there was a question, you reached over to the nightstand. Your hand fished around for a second in the drawer before coming up with a condom. You pulled back from his lips and he looked over to follow your arm as you held it up. A broad smile took over his face and you both had a small laugh when he mumbled, "Thank god."

Chris sat up, tugging off his boxer briefs and rolling on the condom. If those few short seconds, your mind raced, all of a sudden worried. When was the last time you washed the sheets? Is your breath okay? Shit! When was the last time you shaved your legs?

Your mind blanked when Chris nudged a knee in between yours, a small, affectionate smile on his face when he carefully curled his fingertips into the waistband of your panties and pulled them down. Eyes on yours and your lip bitten smile, he left a soft kiss on the inside of your knee when you raised your hips to help. He lowered himself down, hands walking along the mattress on either side of you. He dotted gentle kisses on your mouth, lips lightly pulling at yours and his weight lowered over you and to his elbows. Your breath hitched, feeling him push inside you. He stopped, mouth a breath above your lips and eyes searching yours.

You nodded at his whispered question of if you were okay, arms folding behind his neck to pull him to you. Lips busy with kissing yours, his hips pulled and made an easy thrust. You drew in a breath, tongues twisting and fingers pressing into skin as Chris worked into a rhythm and you hooked a leg behind his.

You felt yourself heat up under him, fervent kisses hinting at sweat on warm skin. Chris nibbled and sucked at your neck and shoulder, his pace encouraged by the rush of your breath past his ear and the hushed profanity it carried. Clinging to his neck, you bucked your hips to ask for more and he obliged, pressing his mouth back to yours and giving you every inch of himself he had. Your hands palmed and fingers traced over the lines of his muscled arms and shoulders while he tongued deeply into your mouth, hips crashing into yours as you both climbed dangerously close to the edge.

A whimpered moan from you let him know you were ready and he pushed harder and deeper than
you thought anyone could. Your fingers dug into his shoulders, hips raising with his hand under your back to hold you close as the friction made you come undone. Bliss spreading out from your center, you tightened every piece of yourself around him. Chris drove on, his mouth pressed hard over yours. Your fingers combed through the back of his hair, arms pressing over his shoulders to keep you to him. He pulled away from your kiss, leaving you to pant for your breath while he buried his forehead into the curve of your neck and you bit playfully at his shoulder. His own breath heaving and laced with profanity, he made a few more powerful thrusts. Hand beneath you pulling you up again and the fingers of the other curling into your hair, he came hard, grunting against your throat. He wound down slow, hips still grinding to yours while he licked and kissed a trail across your collarbone. He let loose of your hair, fingertips walking down the strap of your bra from your shoulder so the path of his lips was clear. His full weight came down to you as he pulled out and rested his forehead on your shoulder, lips reaching out to brush soft kisses at what they could reach of your breast. You stretched and curled your fingers through his hair with a raking scratch along his scalp and he hummed contentedly. Your arm hung hugging his shoulder as you craned your neck to kiss him there and he gave a quiet chuckle. Chris leaned onto his elbow to look at you. You couldn't help a smile, hiding your eyes under your hand for a moment in embarrassment of the butterflies his bedroom eyed grin gave you.

"And now you're laughing?" he asked, his own laughter adding to the incredulity of his question. "Don't laugh at a guy after the first ti-"

You interrupted, pulling his head down and pressing a hard kiss to his lips to stop him. "I'm not," you promised, with a shake of your head and happy smile.

"You are," he insisted, giving your nose a quick peck. "Was it that bad? Because I thought-"

"That was pretty incredible," you finished, pushing a hand back through your hair to pull away some strands sticking on your sweat dampened forehead.

Chris dropped his head, with his own small shake and laugh. You thought you might have seen a vague hint of flush come and go from his cheeks and it made you bite your lip to keep your smile from going too wide. He looked back up, eyes running over your face before he curled a finger to draw a stray lock of your hair back with the others. He gave you a lingering kiss before scooting back and saying he was going to go clean up. On his way out, he picked up the clothes from the floor and put them on the end of the bed.

Oh, my fucking god. That just happened. You covered your eyes with the heels of your palms, letting out a long sigh with a smile. You sat up, reaching down to sift your clothes out of the pile. Wiggling your panties back on, you were just pulling your tee back on overhead when naked Chris came strolling back in.

You scooted on the bed to lean back against the headboard and Chris flung out his jeans to pull back on. He put a knee down on the bed and stretched along your side, his head coming to rest high on your belly and arms snaking to wrap around behind you. You laid a hand down his back and put them on the end of the bed. At a few quiet minutes, he lifted his chin, looking up at you through his lashes.

"Good lord," you marveled with a half smile. "Even your eyelashes are perfect."

He shook his head against your stomach with a chuckle. "My what?"

"Seriously," you said, your brow rising in emphasis. "You're...completely improbable."
Chris turned his head back down while he laughed, maybe a bit embarrassed. You scratched your fingernails lightly on his back.

"Improbable?" he repeated.

"I'm just saying," you explained, "you're, like..." You paused with a titter. "Come on. You know you're like the peak of human-

"Stahp," he said, reaching up a blind hand to try and cover your mouth.

You turned away, batting your hand to keep his at bay. Chris pushed up off the bed and onto his knees. He came forward, an off balance, tackle of a hug that wrapped his arms around your shoulders. He leaned back, pulling you over with him so you were folded over his chest. He squeezed you tight, pressing a firm kiss to the top of your head before relaxing his hold and you nuzzled against him.

"Alright," he said, his breath a mix of a fading laugh and sigh. "We need to talk."

"Talk?" you repeated, your hand splaying over his cut abs and brow wrinkling.

What could there possibly be to talk about? High five about? Sure. But, talk? Was this a good talk or bad? Who says 'we need to talk' after sex? Oh, shit. Was this a break up talk? Is this where he says 'thanks for the fun, hair department girl', but he's got to get back to being a celebrity? Did you just finally get laid, after wayyy too long, only to end up a notch in a bed post? Aw, come on! God. Dammit.

"Yeah," he said, shifting you with him as his shoulders moved against the pillow behind him.

*Here it comes.* You tensed, waiting.

"We have got to talk about dinner," he said, decidedly. "I am starving."

That little shit.

"Seriously?" you begged, leaning up and shooting him a dirty look before it fell away in relief and you shook your head. You chuckled quietly, realizing how absurd you were being for even thinking that in the first place.

"What?" he asked, oblivious, and brushing the back of his hand across your hair hanging over your shoulder.

You gave his chest a soft push. "Jesus," you groaned. "I thought you were- Never mind."

"What?" he insisted, a curious smile pulling his lips up on one side.

Go ahead. Tell him, dumbass.

"I thought you were..." You shrugged. "That you were breaking up with me."

"You what?!" he coughed out with a laugh. "What the hell wou- Why would you think that?"

You sat back on your heels, holding your hands out at him and letting them fall helplessly in your lap. "I don't know!" you whined. "I guess, I thought maybe you- Ugh. Don't make me say it."

"That I was just gonna fuck ya and leave?" he asked, his brow up and jaw slacking in surprise.
You nodded shamefully, pressing the palm of your right hand into your brow as you winced. "Maybe?"

He grimaced, tutting at you with a dipping shake of his head to one side. "C'mere," he said.

His hand looped at his wrist to call you over and his face was pinched in something akin to mild disgust. Your shoulders fell and chin dropped to your chest. You felt like a moron. No surprise there, right?

"I said, come here," he repeated. Chris reached up to take hold of your arm and pull you back over. "What's wrong with you?" he asked, his chest shaking with a soft laugh as you settled down against him again.

"I don't know," you groaned, draping an arm over his chest, fingers curling over his shoulder.

"You think we got through all 'a this trouble just for that?" he asked. "I'm not that big of an asshole."

"I didn't mean you were-"

"Calm down," he smirked, his grumbling Boston accent actually calming your ridiculous fear as well as his reassuring hug was. "I think I know what you meant. Nobody's goin' anywhere." He gave you a squeeze. "You have no idea how bad I missed you. I'm not leaving you." His thumb swept back and forth on your arm for a minute before he shifted and leaned around to look at you.

"But, seriously...What about dinner?"

Nothing beats waking up half naked with Chris Evans in your bed. But that fucking alarm clock sure can ruin it. You weren't necessarily a jump outta bed kind of girl. You always set the alarm with enough time to get in a snooze or two if you needed it. This time, you tapped the snooze button to get more time with Chris.

You'd ordered in sandwiches and watched a few shows out of your DVR last night. You held hands while you took Archie for his last walk of the night. When it was absolutely time for you to go to bed, Chris asked if he could stay. Of course, he could.

When you came out of the bathroom from getting ready for bed, he was under the covers. He'd already seen you practically naked, but you somehow felt your cheeks warm when he looked over at you and smiled. You tucked your chin down shyly, feeling unnecessarily self-conscious in your usual sleep shorts and camisole as you turned off the light and climbed under the covers beside him.

Chris pulled you close and you curled up on your side, lining yourself along him with your head nuzzled against his strong chest and limbs feeling the warmth of his bare torso and legs under the sheets. It wasn't long after that that his fingers moved softly across your back under the snug material of your top and he pressed a kiss into your hair. His hand came back to turn your chin up and, before you knew it, you two were back to groping each other and going for round two. You were glad he was still there in the morning, grumbling along with you about the alarm.

"What time is it?" he tiredly asked, rolling over, half on his stomach, to drape an arm across you.

"6:15."

"Fahck me," he grumbled, turning his face into his pillow for a moment.

You couldn't help a snigger at the idea that, yeah, you already did that. Twice. Mental self-high five.
Chris bent his arm to fold underneath you and gave you a hug strong enough to drag you over a couple inches to press against him. If you died right now, you'd go with a smile.

"I have to be at work by 8," you told him, turning to cuddle up to him and a leg sliding over the back of his knee.

"I'm supposed to meet my trainer at 8," he said, adjusting his head to rest his forehead against yours as he turned onto his shoulder to wrap his arm around you. "Stunt rehearsal at 1. Reshoots start on Monday."

"Well, in my humble opinion," you began, pausing to turn a kiss up to his lips and tracing a line across his clavicle tattoo and down between his cut pecs with your fingertip, "you look like you're more than ready to be Cap again."

He chuckled after dotting an appreciation kiss on your forehead for the compliment. "I'll be lucky to get through it this morning," he jokingly complained. "Somebody kept me up half the night."

"Who? Me?" you demanded, scandalized by the implication and leaning back to see him smiling down at you in his arms. "Pretty sure you started it."

"Pretty sure you weren't complainin'," he pointed out.

"No," you agreed with a confident pout, "No, I was not."

"See?" he smiled. "Told you we couldn't be terrible at everything forever."

"We're definitely not terrible at that," you nodded.

"When's your next day off?" he asked, his free hand combing through your hair near his cheek.

"Sunday," you said. "I've got plans at 11 but should be home before dinner."

"Think maybe you'd wanna have dinner with me?" he wondered.

"Hmm," you shrugged. "I might. You got time to go out if work starts on Monday?"

"It's a 7:30 call," he nodded. "I'd make time, anyway."

"What's got you so happy today?" Frank asked, nudging the toe of his shoe into your calf as you turned toward your counter for a different comb.

"Nothing," you said, brow wrinkling in a question. "Why?"

"Cause you got that shit eatin' grin on your face," he said, pointing a finger up at you.

"No, I don't," you scoffed, feeling your cheeks flush a bit.

"The hell you don't," he playfully disagreed.

You both smiled and said 'good morning' when Wendy came into the trailer. She interrupted you to give Frank a quick peck on the cheek and asked what was going on. You felt him watching you in the mirror as you fluffed up the top of his hair.

"She's got this shit eatin' grin she says she don't have," Grillo told her, his finger pointing at you
again and following you for a few seconds as you walked around to the other side of the styling chair.

"No, I don't," you insisted, the heat rising a few degrees in your cheeks.

"You are a bit glowy," Wendy agreed with her husband.

"She got laid," Frank decided, proudly. "My boy finally did it."

"Oh, come on," you whined, the blush undeniable now.

Wendy sniggered, her own cheeks turning a faint shade of pink in sympathy before she slapped Frank hard on the back of his shoulder.

"What?" Grillo demanded, his hands flying up in emphasis of his innocence. "I'm just sayin', it's about time he-"

"Frank," Wendy stopped him, giving his reflection a stern look from behind him, despite her smile.

You ducked and shook your head, taking a deep breath before you could get back to work on Grillo's hair. It was quiet for a minute. God love him. He tried to sit still in your chair, a smug grin on his face, but Frank's shoulders shook with the laughter he was trying to hold in.

"I'm sorry!" he burst out, turning around to hang an arm over the back of the chair and look at his wife, "but I'm just sayin', it's about damn time. How long's that guy been stringing her along? Since, like, fuckin' May? June or somethin'. Flying here and there, making this poor girl wait around."

"He didn't string anybody along," you explained. "We just...were in different places for a while."

"Thank god for reshoots, huh?" Grillo joked, cocking up a lascivious eyebrow.

"Thank god for reshoots," you conceded.

"See?" he insisted, wearing his own shit eating grin as he jerked his thumb at you and chuckled with Wendy.

You tapped his shoulder and looped your finger for him to right himself in the chair with a heavy roll of your eyes. Wendy told Frank to sit still so you could finish up. All you could do was shake your head while Frank smiled to himself. *Smug bastard.* But, he was right. You did have a grin on your face. And you probably were glowing. And that was okay. You waited long enough for last night. You deserved to grin. But first, finish Frank's hair so he can quit snickering at you.

Chris messaged you just before the lunch break. You answered back, sending him a frowning emoji when he complained how tired he was after his workout session. He was taking his own lunch break before he had to meet up with the stunt coordinators.

**Flip Cup Hero:** Gonna need an IV of Gatorade

**You:** Too bad the serum isn't real right?

**Flip Cup Hero:** Right!

**Flip Cup Hero:** Is it too much to say I'm glad last night finally happened?

Your hand went to your face, your knuckles pressed into your smiling lips as you blushed. This guy
just. never. stops.

You: No. Me too

Flip Cup Hero: Good

You: Just sorry it was a night we both had to get up early from. Especially you with the trainer! Poor baby:(

Flip Cup Hero: Worth it;)}
Chapter 14

Sunday afternoon at the zoo was the last event in the marathon sleepover weekend that was Karen's daughter's birthday party. Little Sophie turned 9 on Friday and the celebration kicked off with dinner, cake, and presents with family and some neighbor kids. Saturday afternoon corralled a half dozen shrieking 8-10 year olds tear assing around the house, swimming, and singing Justin Bieber before camping out in the living room watching movies till the wee hours. A day so chaotic, even FEMA wouldn't touch it. You could practically feel the relief that Karen had for you being there to help chaperon Sophie and the three friends who came with her.

Waiting at the restaraunt counter to pay for and get the last part of your lunch order, the girls picked out a table while you and Karen chatted. You caught her up on your new Universal job and she told you about her software engineer husband taking a new job with Activision Blizzard. Inevitably, talk turned to your days on the Kingdom set. Karen mentioned seeing the video of you and Frank "sparring" at Wizard World on his Instagram page and noted you two had become fast friends.

"You know," you agreed, carrying a tray of drinks to the tables the children had commandeered in the shade of the outside seating area. "I'm as surprised as the next person. Helluva guy to work for though. He's just been so awesome."

You and Karen divvied up the food and drinks as Karen went on. "Well, since you've got the inside track, you let me know first if Grillo and his wife ever split up."

"What about Allen?" you smiled, taking a seat for lunch.

"Everybody's got the list you get a free pass for," Karen winked. "Grillo's at the top of mine."

"That's terrible," you laughed.

"Everybody has a list," she assured you. "Who's on yours?"

You had to give it a moment of thought. Chris Evans used to be at the top of your lists, but he was plainly disqualified. A guy can't be on the free pass list, or any of the others, if you're already sleeping with him, right? But, come to think of it, there wasn't anyone on the top of the list. There really wasn't a list at all, anymore. For god's sake, you already have Chris Evans. What more could you want?

"Guess I haven't thought about it lately," you shrugged with a laugh at yourself for not being able to come up with one name on the spot.

"Speaking of men to sin with, you still hear from Chris Evans anymore?" she asked, reaching over to Sophie's table for some napkins for you two.

You shrugged, thankful to have a large bite of burger in your mouth preventing you from answering. You chewed slow and tried to think fast. It's not that you wanted to lie or keep secrets from Karen, but you definitely were afraid of any judgement she'd have for you about dating Chris. She's been your friend since you met each other on a Warner Brothers show that only made it three shows past the pilot four years ago. When she gave you the warning to avoid getting involved with actors, you new she meant well and she meant it.

"I see he still comments sometimes on Grillo's posts," she went on, dipping a fry into some ketchup.

You swallowed your food and took a long drink before you decided to just tell her. "I do hear from
him," you admitted. "Actually...a lot."

The pace of Karen's chewing slowed to a stop as her eyes rose from her food to meet yours. "Really?" she asked, sounding a bit suspicious. "How often, exactly?"

"Like, practically everyday," you said, a hint of a wince on your face as you tried to spoon feed the news carefully and bracing for any backlash.

Karen put down her sandwich and wiped her fingers on a napkin before she leaned into the table. "You're not still..." she trailed off. "Are you?" You nodded and Karen sat up straight as a bolt with a small, but scandalized gasp. "Noo," she breathed out, quietly.

You nodded again and it took her a moment to process your silent contributions to the conversation.

"Since when?" she asked, clearly in a bit of shock.

"Since Atlanta, kinda," you told her. "Actually, really Rhode Island, I guess."

You took several minutes to summarize everything. The random calls and texts, working with Frank and getting to Rhode Island. The trip to Boston for the Red Sox game and the film's wrap party. About everything he tried harder to do better at and did.

"Jesus fucking Christ," Karen said at the end.

Beside you, the girls giggled and Sophie wagged a finger at her mom. "Ah-ah," she shamed her for the language.

Karen waved her off. "This time it's completely appropriate," she assured the kids. "I'll tell you why when you're older."

Karen turned her attention back to you. "Are you shi-" She stopped, glancing from the corner of her eye to the kids' table. "Are you kidding me?" she hissed.

You blushed a little, taking a drink to cool your cheeks. "Dead serious."

Karen slumped back into her seat as if the wind had been knocked from her. Her lips moved in bewildered silence for a moment before she sat up again and asked, "Didn't I-"

"You did," you agreed. "And I'm sorry, but...Well, he's persistent."

"Apparently," she seconded, with a bit of a huff.

"You're disappointed in me, aren't you?" You were afraid of the answer, but had to know anyway.

Karen sighed, her shoulders sagging a bit and head tipping. "No," she said. "But I'm worried. I just don't want to see you get hurt. And those bas...people like him can hurt as good, if not worse, as anybody else."

"And I appreciate that," you promised. "You have no idea how much I really do. But, he's- I don't think he's the kind of guy you're afraid of." Karen went back to her burger as you went on. "He tries. He tries harder than I do, I'm sure. He makes the time, as best he can, you know? He wants me around. And when he's gone, he calls and messages whenever he can.

"He's kind and incredibly thoughtful. We laugh all the time. For crying out loud, he took my dog out for the night when I fell asleep on the couch. How could he be an as...a jerk if he does that?"

"They can't all be the same, right?" you suggested, with a hopeful smile.

She sighed again. "For your sake, and his, I hope not."

"For his?" you repeated, with a bit of a laugh.

"Yeah," she nodded. "Cause if he is, I'll frickin' kill him."

You laughed and Karen finally broke a smile. "Get in line, Kare Bear," you told her. "You'll be behind Frank Grillo."

"At least I'll have a good view while I wait my turn," Karen smirked, hoisting her paper cup in a toast to Frank. "You're serious about this though?"

"Pretty serious a few nights ago," you smiled, coyly.

A devilish smile spread across Karen's lips. "Well?" she pressed, expectantly.

"God bless America," was all you could think of to say. Your smile said the rest.

"Well, okay then," Karen nodded, stretching her hand high and toward you. "Hit it for hittin' that."

Rising off your chair a bit, you gave Karen the highest of fives. A wave of relief went over you. That went over better than expected.

You wound your way through the zoo. The girls showed little sign of wearing out. Karen, on the other hand, was pretty much over the whole weekend. Standing in line for ice cream, the last stop for a long afternoon, you stepped out of line to take a call from Chris and keep an eye on Sophie and a friend who already had their treats.

"What are you doing?" Chris asked. "It sounds busy where you are."

"Surrounded by 9 year olds in a zoo," you told him.

"Sounds like," he chuckled.

"No, like, for real," you laughed. "I'm at the zoo. For Karen's kid's birthday weekend."

"The one you taught to say 'eat me'?" he asked.

"That's the one," you said, still pretty proud of that.

"Suprised Social Services even let's you around kids anymore," he quipped.

"Kids love me," you promised.

From her place at the counter, Karen called you over for your ice cream cone and asked, half jokingly, if you were talking to Chris. When you nodded, she laughed and told you to tell him she missed seeing his ass in the costume everyday. You shook your head, but Chris had heard his name.

"Tell me what, now?" he asked.

You groaned. "That Karen misses seeing your ass in the Cap costume everyday."

He laughed outloud. "Jesus. She never stops, does she? Wait. I thought she liked Grillo's ass?"

"She's a multitasker," you shrugged.
"Well, tell her, thanks," he chuckled.

"No," you shook your head. "She doesn't need any more encouragement."

"So, I guess she knows," he said, almost a question.

"Yeah. Your name came up at lunch, sooo," you admitted, shrugging before a lick of your cone.

"Oh, yeah?" He perked up with curiosity. "Knowing Karen, I'm kind of afraid to ask how that happened."

"It wasn't anything bad," you assured him.

Chris laughed again. "What then?"

It was your turn to laugh. Because there was no way you could say it with a straight face anyway. "We were talking about who's on the free pass list," you told him, with a hint of shame. "She asked if I still talked to you since Atlanta."

"Hold on," he told you, somewhere between curious and 'aw, hell no'. "The free pass list?"

"You know," you began, "the list of hot guys-."

"I know what the free pass list is," he interrupted, sounding a bit insulted you even tried to explain. "Now, who the hell is on this list?"

'Aw, hell no' it is then.

"There's no list," you promised, taking a bite of your frozen snack.

"Bullllshiiit," was his drawn out, Boston thick response. "Who's on the fahckin' list?"

"Seriously, ask Karen," you laughed. "I drew a blank."

"Sure, ya did," he scoffed.

"Dude, I'm dating Captain America," you reminded him. "It's kind of all down hill from there."

"Gahd damn right it is," he agreed, sounding more than a little smug.

You laughed. "You're ridiculous."

"You're the one talking about the list in front of a bunch 'a 9 year olds," he pointed out.

"Yeah, because in the world of things that should embarrass someone, that's right up there next to whipped cream, banana split bikinis," you shrugged, taking another bite.

"What the fuck ever, sassy," he chuckled. "That's enough outta you." He paused, like he was listening to someone else. "Hey. Would you still go to dinner with me if Stan and Mackie are there?"

You were just about to say it didn't matter to you when you heard Anthony yelling into the phone. "Polka Dot, help! He won't feed us. He's being a shitty host. All he has in his fridge is beer."

"Don't listen to him," Chris groaned.

Behind him you heard Anthony carry on. "Don't- Don't be shoving me, man. Rude ass, mother- I'll talk to Polka Dot whenever I want...This house needs a woman's touch. This is shameful."
"I'm sorry, babe," Chris laughed over what sounded like a small scuffle of some kind. "Dude! Stop tryin' 'a-...Sorry. You still there?"

"I'm so disappointed this isn't a facetime call," you tutted.

Chris seemed to take a breath to compose himself before he was back on the line. "Sorry," he said again. "You want some extra company tonight? You don't have to say yes, if you don't want to."

"Say 'yes'!" Anthony yelled.

"Shad up," Chris complained, loudly away from the phone.

"Mannn," Mackie whined. "I'm hungry!"


You met the trio of troublemakers at a Mexican restaurant where they were already a cervesa and a shot into the evening. You asked for a margarita when the waiter came around for dinner orders and a second round for the guys. You detected a recent trim in his style and noted the blonde back in Chris' hair, keeping your mild jealousy to yourself. Everyone caught up with each other over chips and salsa. Sebastian and Anthony were obviously on hand for the next few weeks for reshoots. You listened to them talk about the shooting schedule and to Sebastian and Chris talk about the after parties at the Golden Globes.

"How come you didn't go to the Globes?" Anthony asked you, around a bite of fajitas.

"Me? No," you tittered and shook your head with a wave of your hand. "Besides, I was still with Frank in New Orleans."

"Did you leave her in NOLA with Grillo while you hit the Globes and those parties?" he turned to chastise Chris. "Man, what the hell is wrong with you?"

Chris dropped his head with a shy smile and a shake of his head. He shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know, man...Schedules."

"Sorry, Polka Dot. You coulda at least been Stan's date," Mackie suggested.

"I wouldn't leave you in NOLA with Grillo," Sebastian snuck in, reaching a hand over the table to yours, with a slow head turn and cocky eyebrow raised toward Chris.


"You know what," Chris began a threat, pointing back and forth between his co-stars across the table from you two. "Both of you can kiss my ass."

"I'm not sayin' nothin'," Anthony shrugged, getting ready for another bite of food. "I'm just sayin'."

"You're married," Chris reminded Mackie, pointing his way and then to Sebastian. "And where's your girlfriend?"

"M'New York," Sebastian mumbled, proudly through a mouthful of chips and salsa. "S'What's yer point?"

"That you two got your own girls to worry about," Chris said. "Don't invite yourselves along for
dinner just to try and start trouble with mine."

You all laughed. Chris was the last to join in, taking an extra second to give Stan and Mackie a brow raised look that seemed to say he had some kind of dirt on both of them. Mackie held up his hands in a sign of submission and Sebastian shrugged it off.

"And you're one to talk," Chris jutted his chin at Sebastian. "Where was Margarita while you were at the Globes?"

"I thought this was about you ditching [y/n]?" Sebastian nodded back.

"I didn't ditch her," Chris said, looking to you for help.

Anthony pointed a questioning finger at you. "Survey says?"

"He did not ditch me in NOLA," you confirmed. "I was working."

Yes, you were. On the other hand, it's not like you had the opportunity to say no. Honestly, like you mentioned to Grillo, you weren't exactly interested in the red carpet. Still, maybe it would have been nice to at least have gotten asked. No. Pfft. Never mind. It's way too early to even complain about something like that. Christ. You've barely been a functioning, long distance couple for more than a couple months. Get over yourself. But still...

"See?" Chris chimed in, a little confident.

"Yeah, whatever, man," Sebastian smirked, over the top of his beer. Swallowing his drink, he asked, "You know you have to shave that thing off your face before tomorrow, right?"


You snickered. Intrigued by clean shaven Chris, a sight you hadn't actually seen since Atlanta.

"Can't have bearded Cap," Anthony agreed.

"Hobo Cap," Sebastian suggested, pointing the idea at Chris with his finger, with a bright smile and perked up brow.

"Vagabond Cap," Mackie added.

"Tramp Cap," Stan offered, with a discerning frown.

You sputtered a laugh into your drink, waving your hand to beg them to stop. Beside you, Chris shook his head and did his best not to laugh. Sebastian handed you an extra napkin to wipe at your chin from your drinking mishap. You took it with a quick 'thanks' and shake of your head at your mess dribbling down your cup and your hand.

"Now with star spangled kerchief," Anthony advertised.

"That's enough," Chris grumbled, a self-decripacting grin on his face.

You thought you saw a hint of red in his face and you smiled. You gave Chris a nudge as you wiped at your hand. Sebastian and Anthony struggled to come up with more unkempt versions of Cap and Chris slapped his hand on the table.

"Alright," he said. "New topic. Let's move it along."
"How come you're not working on the reshoots?" Sebastian asked you.

You shrugged, without a good answer. "I've got Kingdom into February anyway," you said, trying not to sound too let down.

"It won't be the same without you," he noted.

"That's what I said," Chris chimed in, gesturing a hand out.

"They already fucked up his hair," Anthony said, stabbing his fork in the direction of Chris' hair.

You looked at Chris and he shook his head with a grimace. "I don't know," he shrugged. "All I said was, it seems a little lighter than before."

"S'Hard to see in this light," Sebastian agreed, as he chewed. "The cut's alright though."

You combed a hand through his hair, trying to see what they were talking about. "I don't know," you mused. "Maybe. But it's an easy fix, if they say it's wrong tomorrow."

"Wouldn't 'a happened in the first place if you were there," Mackie winked.

You felt your face warm at the compliment. "Thanks," you smiled sweetly.

"You gonna at least come visit?" Stan asked.

"Can I do that?" you asked, remembering the ironclad confidentiality paperwork you had to sign on the job.

"I don't see why not," Chris said, with a thoughtful pout. "Probably just put your name down with lot security, right, guys?"

Sebastian shrugged his agreement and Anthony nodded, saying, "Find out tomorrow."

"Shouldn't be a problem," Chris smiled.

"You owe me and Stan a rematch at Cornhole," Anthony sneered your way.

"Oh, I'll be there," you promised.

"You should call off 'sick' tomorrow," Mackie suggested. "Get the losing over with quickly."

"Or I just show up on my day off and let you sweat it out till then," you shrugged.

"That's what I'm talkin' about," Chris smiled, putting up a hand for you to high five.

"Yeah, but no boots allowed," Sebastian chimed in.

Anthony nodded. "No boots."

"Fine," you shrugged, with an arrogant nod that looked Anthony up and down. "Rain or shine, no boots. And we'll still kick yo' ass."

"Boom," Chris nodded.

"Sweet Christ," Sebastian laughed. "You're rubbing off on her. She's getting as cocky as you are."

"I don't see the problem," Chris innocently shrugged, with a smirk.
"Of course, you wouldn't," Stan sassed back. "Anyway, who's up for a movie?"

"Movie?" Anthony parroted, his brow raised in enthusiastic curiosity.

"I wanna see The Revenent," Sebastian nodded, taking a bite of his dinner.

Chris shook his head with a disinterested, yet sour, look while Mackie shrugged with a small 'eh' of deference. You nodded. "Could be good," you suggested.

"Bear fight," Sebastian offered.

"Bear fight," you knowingly said, smiling and bumping fisted knuckles with Sebastian when he offered his in solidarity.

"You go have your bear fight," Chris smirked, dismissively.

"Oh, don't worry," Sebastian said, taking out his phone. "Bear fight is on."

You gave him your number, Sebastian promising to let you know before he goes to see it. Beside you, Chris laughed and shook his head. It kinda looked like maybe he was pleased to see everyone getting along so well. You weren't unhappy about the situation either. You had definitely lucked into a good group of people.

Flip Cup Hero: You're still at work?

That's weird. It was Monday, after all. Of course you were.

You: Yes. Going to lunch now

Flip Cup Hero: Good. Do me a favor. Find Grillo and kick him in the balls as hard as you can for me

What the hell? That sounds excessive.

You: Ummm why?

You had literally just sent your question when a photo from Chris arrived at the same time. A screen grab of Frank's Twitter feed. More specifically, a screen grab of Frank's Twitter feed which prominently displayed the photo he took of you surrounded by those handsome bastards who tried to help Frank piss off your 'boyfriend'. Damn it, Frank! That he had the nerve to throw gauntlets with the hashtags was the best worst part. [This is work for some people. For us it's a Sunday #breakinghearts #AlveysAngel #TeamKulina #wegotyourgirl #KingdomCrew]

You: Oh my

Flip Cup Hero: Yeah

You were at a loss for a moment for a reaction. First of all, still an epic picture. Secondly, you did also like the reaction it got from Chris when he met you outside your apartment that night. And, honestly, those hashtags were a little inspired. You actually snickered and blushed a bit reading them. You knew Frank didn't mean any harm, but this was the definitive proof that he couldn't stop poking at Chris for fun.
You: He does come up with some good hashtags

Flip Cup Hero: A regular Shakespeare

Flip Cup Hero: He's gotta post THAT one?? #wegotyourgirl? Wtf I swear I'm gonna kill him one of these days

Uh-oh. Stop with the snickering. He might actually do it.

You: Please wait until the show gets cancelled. Rent's due at the end of the month. Need the job

Flip Cup Hero: Fine. Be sure and tell him to thank you for me sparing his life till then

You: Done. Thanks:

You: How's your hair? Too blonde?

Flip Cup Hero: Hair say it's alright but I think it's different

You: Maybe you're just being grumpy?

Flip Cup Hero: Maybe. You'll know for sure when you see it in daylight. I'd believe you.

You: Aww:) thanks for the confidence!

Flip Cup Hero: Well, you are kind of a pro at the whole hair coloring thing;

Back on set after the lunch break, you found Frank outside his trailer talking to Wendy. Seeing you come over with a small frown on your face put a toothy grin on Frank's, while he listened to Wendy talk. You had your phone in hand, ready to show him the photo Chris sent. Frank pointed your way, asking Wendy to hold on a second.

"Yes, dear?" he innocently smiled.

You held up your phone. "Really?" you complained. "I'm supposed to kick you in the balls for this, you know."

Wendy checked the phone and shook her head, tutting at her husband as he chuckled. "What? That's a good picture," he shrugged, crossing his arms over his chest with a smug smile. "The fans love behind the scenes shit like this."

"That's not why you put that up and you know it," you chided him.

"Did you see the page?" Frank asked, pointing at your phone.

You backed out of your messages and opened up your Twitter app. A few taps later and you found Frank's page. Your head tipped to the side with a small shake while you fought a smile reading an exchange between Chris and Grillo.

[@FrankGrillo it's a wonder how that poor girl puts up with you idiots]

[@ChrisEvans good help is hard to find but I hit the jackpot. She likes it #TeamKulina #AlveysAngel]

[@FrankGrillo you definitely don't pay her enough for dealing with all of you]
[@ChrisEvans money can't buy this kind of happiness. Look at her smile]

[@FrankGrillo all I see is four jokers with faces only a mother could love]

[@ChrisEvans don't bring mothers into this. Cap can't take me and my boys #TeamKulina #NavyStRepresent]

[@FrankGrillo my crew will take yours any day #TeamCap #bringit]

Posted up with Chris' last jab was a selfie from on set. Framed upfront and center outside of a soundstage was Chris, the sun putting a slight squint in his eyes, with an arrogant smirk and a cocked up brow that said he wasn't worried. With him were Sebastian, Jeremy, and Anthony, behind him and angled off his shoulders. All four were caped to hide their costumes, but Sebastian gave the camera a menacingly hard stare, Jeremy's scowl behind dark sunglasses was worth his weight in gold, and Anthony pushed his jaw forward, brow wrinkled and teeth bared to get their point across.

[@ChrisEvans that the best you got? #crossbones #brockIsNotImpressed]

[@FrankGrillo it's all I need #brokenBones]

_Holy crap._ What in the actual hell? You had to laugh. And you laughed hard. You waved a hand, unable to explain when Wendy asked what was so funny. Instead, you just handed her your phone to scroll through while you crushed your eyes closed and held your gut, trying to find some composure.

"Yeah," Frank nodded. "See that? I may start it, but he's no angel either."

"Jesus Christ," you sighed, wiping a tear from the corner of your eye. "You two shouldn't be allowed to use the Internet."

"Frank," Wendy groaned, slapping the back of her hand into his bare arm before handing you back your phone. "You're going to get her in trouble one of these days."

"A little jealousy's good for ya," Grillo defended himself, rubbing at the spot Wendy had hit. "Gets the blood pumpin'. Am I right?"

Frank gestured toward you and you shrugged. "One of these days," you warned, with a pitying shake of your head. "Keep it up, and one of these days- murder. He's gonna kill you."

"Nah," Frank waved a dismissive hand. "It's all in good fun. He knows that or he wouldn't keep playing along."

"Think that'll fit on a tombstone?" Wendy asked, giving you a smile and your shoulder a squeeze as she passed to go to the set.

"Hey," Grillo insisted. "One day we're gonna look back on all these little scraps and realize how much I'm actually helping."

He might have a point. He might not actually be wrong.
Chapter 15

The end of January was coming up. You were getting into the deep end of the shooting schedule for Kingdom. A lot of Frank's work was already in the can. You were looking forward to February and some shorter days for you, hoping to spend some extra time with Chris. Especially since you had about three or four days between the end of Kingdom filming and the start of your job for Universal. Maybe six, if things stayed a little ahead of schedule like they had been. Come on, no reshoots or rewrites!

While the shoot was winding down, Frank took up more time at the gym. He invited you along for a midweek workout, telling you he was serious about his offer in New Orleans for some pro tips and some sparring time. You took him up on it, Wednesday morning before a mid-morning call. The people he introduced you to around the boxing club were all nice and welcoming. Frank coached you through some basics and gave a thoroughly impressed nod, calling you "a natural". He posted a 16 second video, an excerpt from the end of a series of endurance testing two minute drills. Off screen, Frank barked his encouragement, telling you to "Get that jab up. Get it up! Come onnn...8 seconds...5...Finish strong! That's it!". He boastfully tagged it on Instagram and Twitter [Getting it in with the Cincinnati Kid before work. Harnessing natural talent w/ @CaliStyle82 #AlveysAngel #riseandgrind #fortuneboxinggym].

You lucked into an early day on Thursday. Today might be the day to test out whether or not you can get on the lot to see Chris. You were tidying up your workstation before leaving when Frank came in.

"Knock, knock," he said, walking up the steps into the trailer.

"Hey, boss," you smiled, dropping some towels into the laundry bin.

"Hey, kid," he smiled back, taking a seat in an empty styling chair. "Ya feeling it from yesterday?"

"Little bit," you winked, downplaying the ache in your shoulders with a confident smile. Another dose of aspirin, some stretching, and you'd be fine.

"Good," he nodded.

"Something I can do for you?" you asked, sweeping a small pile of loose pins into your palm from the counter.

"Yeah," he said, leaning forward, elbows on his knees and hands clasped in front of him. "We need to talk about your job."

"That sounds a bit ominous," you said, with a wary grin.

"You 'bout done here?" Frank asked, gesturing a looping hand across the trailer, and you nodded. "Good. Let's go grab something to eat and run over a few things. Alright? Meet you down the street when you're done."

"Okay," you agreed.

Frank left with a smile and nod as his goodbye. You restocked the cupboard with fresh towels and thought that was a bit odd. It didn't really worry you, though. Frank had never let you down before and he seemed in a good enough mood. Finishing up at work, you were only about ten minutes behind Frank. You met him down the street at the restaurant near the set that had become kind of the
unofficial stomping ground of late crew drinks and dinners and the occasional business meeting spot. You caught sight of Frank at a table and went over to meet him with a smile.

"Have a seat," he said, gesturing to the chair across from him.

Your semi-regular waitress came up to hand you a menu as you were sitting down. "Can I start you two off with a drink or appetizer while you look over the menu? Glass of rosé?" she asked.

Frank took the suggestion, ordering you both a glass of wine. The waitress nodded and headed off to the bar. You skimmed over the menu and asked Frank what was up. He glanced up over the top of his menu with a kind smile. Setting aside his menu, he folded his hands on the table.

"I wanna talk about getting some things down on paper," he told you.

You put down your menu to give him your full attention. "Like what?"

"I want to extend your contract on the show," Frank's said, sitting back in his seat for a moment as the waitress returned with your drinks. "Thanks, doll," he smiled to the girl.

"I'll give you two a few minutes," she nodded.

You smiled your thanks to the waitress as Grillo went on. "I want to give you an open ended contract," he explained. "Show's doin' real good, might get picked up another season or two. Hopefully, more. So, I wanna make sure you're in on this...if you want to be."

*Of course!* You're not an idiot. Arguably the best, most fun job you've ever had and he wants to contract you out indefinitely? Where's the pen? You're signing!

"Are you serious?" you asked.

Frank nodded his answer, pulling back from a sip of his drink. "Yeah," he said. "We're gonna put you on a couple principles. Obviously, you're still gonna work on me. It'd lock you in for premiers and other promo events, so there'd be a bit of traveling sometimes. Most of that, you already know, is LA local anyway. But, there's a catch."

"Isn't there always?" you smirked, fingers twisting your glass of wine by the stem for a distraction for your excited, fidgety hands.

He laughed. "It's not too bad 'a one," he promised, holding up a hand. "Being under contract, you'd have to be available exclusively for us. I know you take these other gigs to fill in through the year and that salon job, but, when we're in production, we need you there. That may mean passing on some offers people are throwing your way."


"Now," Grillo went on, raising his palm off the table in a calming move, "I know that's kind of a risky commitment for someone like you who's depending on moving around for work. But, if you sign on, there's a pretty decent pay bump in it that I think will help lessen the hardship."

A little extra money never hurt anyone. You were already making a decent rate on the show and you weren't financially uncomfortable. But how much more comfortable would you be if this bump were lessening hardships from lulls in work?

"We can keep re-contracting season by season," he suggested, "but, honestly, it's gonna work out a lot better financially if you take the big deal." His hand pointed a finger in warning. "*Don't* let just
that influence your decision. This thing could take up some big chunks of your time. You might miss out on some big dollar studio productions." He took another drink while you contemplated what he was offering. "If you're interested, I'm gonna have Rick send over the contract for you to read. Run it over with a lawyer, whatever, and let us know if you got any problems with it."

"Yeah," you said, still a bit stunned. "Send it over. I'm interested. I am very interested."

Frank's smile went wide. "Excellent," he nodded. "It'll be over later today."

The waitress came back and you ordered your meals. As she left, you turned back to Frank. "An exclusive, open ended contract," you repeated. "Seriously?"

"Completely," he laughed. "Told you, I take care of good people." He raised a pointed finger again. "And, I'm gonna do you one better."

"How could you possibly?" you doubted.

He leaned back into the edge of the table. "I'm gonna offer you a contract as my personal stylist," he told you.

You blinked. His face was straight, rich, brown eyes locked on yours. He was dead serious. You forgot to breathe for a second and coughed yourself back to reality. Frank smiled, a silent chuckle shaking his shoulders at your reaction.

"Now you're just messing with me," you insisted.

Frank shook his head, settling back into his seat with a laugh. "I'm not," he promised. "It'll be here an' there stuff, but there'll be travel required. You'll do cons with me, some press appearances, movie premiers. Like the other one, it's gonna eat up some time you could be working on something else, but your travel expenses would be covered, with a per diem, and you get to see some sights. I could give you a little leeway once in a while, if you had a production gig going, but I'd need you pretty available. On the other hand, it's pretty much gonna walk you onto any project I get attached to, so there's some long term potential that'll help fill out your year and take some of the complications out of you trying to work other studio jobs."

You needed a drink. A long one. And Frank chuckled while you took it and shook your head after.

"Frank," you began, but he finished for you.

"I know, I know," he groaned, waving a dismissive hand. "You can't thank me enough. You don't know what to say. Yeah yeah yeah. Forget about it. This is business. You get it, because you earned it."

"This is unbelievable," you shook your head, a goofy and disbelieving grin on your face.

Frank waved the waitress over. As she walked to the table, he held up a pair of fingers. "We're gonna need something a lil' stronger," he smiled at the girl. "Lemme get a couple 'a Jamesons, neat and, when those are done, bring a couple more."

The waitress was gone with a smile and you put your forehead in your hand. "Holy shit, Frank," you muttered.

"I know, right?" he chuckled. "Bet you thought you were getting fired, or something, huh?"

You laughed. "I always hope not, when you say you want to talk to me."
"Nah," Frank smiled. "We've been working on and off for what, two years? You're practically family by now. I'd claim you on my taxes, if I could."

"At this point, I'd let you," you told him with a sure nod.

The waitress brought your new drinks and Frank held out his to toast. "To tax fraud," he quipped.

"To tax fraud," you happily agreed.

"So, now you got two contracts coming," he reminded you. "Take your time, go over everything with a fine tooth comb, and talk to whomever about it. I don't want you getting into anything you're not 100% good with."

"I have a feeling it's gonna be okay," you winked. "But...are you sure you want to be stuck with me that long?"

Frank leaned into the table to speak softly and you leaned in to listen. "Honestly," he said, looking around for a quick second, "I'm just trying ta keep you around to piss off Evans." He sat back with a wink and a smooth smile over the edge of his glass of whiskey. "The rest is a bonus."

"You're a terrible human being," you said, with a mischievous smile.

"Hey," he shrugged, "it pays the bills."

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You finished your late lunch with Frank an hour later. Walking out to the parking lot, Frank told you to keep an eye on your email, that he was going to have his assistant forward you the contracts to review, and to have a good night. You were pretty sure your night couldn't get any better. You could barely keep the smile off your face and control the occasional excited giggle that crept up out of nowhere as you drove to the studio lot to try your luck at seeing Chris.

You practically walked right in. The guard at the gate gave you some visitor credentials to wear, the sound stage number, and directed you where to park after a quick check of his computer. You parked and snaked your way through the alleys and paths to the sound stage. After a quick check of your purse by security and a warning about no filming or recording of any kind, you were waved into the building.

There were a few green screen sets inside the large hangar style building. You quietly made your way to the middle of sound stage to the hot set in use, finding a space to lean against a large equipment trunk and sneak a view of the scene. Scanning around you, there were several familiar crew faces and a couple people sent you a small wave when they noticed you come in. In front of the cameras, a bruised face Chris was having a talk with Sebastian and Anthony. You thought you remembered seeing this scene shot in Atlanta and were a little disappointed when the director called 'cut' before you pick out any change in the reshoot. You did spot Chris' hair though, and, yeah, it did look a shade or two too blonde under the lighting. You snickered to yourself and crept forward to see if there was a moment you could say hi or at least somewhere you could wave from.

The crew moved in, resetting props and touching up the actors. Chris went to watch the monitor while he got a few notes from Joe. Sebastian's face lit up from the back edge of the set when he saw you. He waved with a wide smile, unable to do any better while a girl you didn't know worked on his hair. You stopped a respectful distance from Chris, figuring you'd wait patiently for him to finish. You glanced over your shoulder, back to Sebastian. His eyebrows rose and he pointed at you as if he were trying to tell you something, but before you could figure it out, someone grabbed you from
behind.

There was a victorious yell of "ah-ha!", and a startled yelp from you, as someone picked you up off your feet in a bear hug and you realized it was Anthony who had snuck up on you. He held you up, giving you a little shake from side to side before putting you back down. You turned around, laughing as you swatted at his arm. The ruckus had gotten Chris and Joe to look over, along with practically everyone else, and you felt your cheeks flush in embarrassment. Joe gave you a little wave and Chris sent you a warm smile for a couple long seconds before turning back to listen to Joe again. Mackie gave you a hug and asked how you were.

"Good," you nodded. "Real good, actually. Had a pretty good day at work. How's all this going?"

Anthony looked around with a shrug. "Not bad," he said. "We miss you around here."

"But at least I came by to say 'hi','" you noted.

Mackie smiled and Sebastian, now free from the stylist, came over to join you.

"So, what's the verdict on his hair?" Sebastian asked, giving your arm a nudge with his elbow and jutting his chin toward Chris.

You chuckled and shrugged like it was hard to admit. "It does look a little light," you said, wagging your hand indecisively.

"Told you," Anthony said, smacking the back of his hand into Sebastian's arm. "I swear, [y/n]," he tutted, "not even a week on set without you and this whole film is shot to hell." He looked around, dramatically yelling, "It's all shot to hell!"

Sebastian turned away, putting a hand on your shoulder for support, and you covered your mouth, both of you trying to hide your laughter and pretend you didn't know the guy. Chris and Joe, and everyone else- again, looked over. Your face was as bright as your hair, you could feel it. Thankfully, Sebastian gave your shoulder a pat before turning back and giving you a hug, letting you hide your red face down in his chest until you both could stop shaking with laughter.

"You alright over there?" Chris called, an eyebrow raised in curiosity of the spectacle Anthony had made of you three.

"It's all shot to hell," Mackie answered back, loudly, "but we're gonna be alright. I got this. Don't you worry 'bout nothin'."

Chris nodded, warily, if not still a bit confused. He flashed you a crooked smile as he went back to the monitors. After a moment, the director called everyone back to their marks. You shuffled aside and, as you were looking down at your feet, to step over some cables, you bumped arms with Anthony Russo as you passed each other. You apologized and he recognized you after a small double take.

"Hey," he smiled, noticing your hair. "Wow. That's some red hair, now. So much for purple from Wizard World, huh?"

You laughed. "Yeah. Decided to try something new."

Chris nodded, warily, if not still a bit confused. He flashed you a crooked smile as he went back to the monitors. After a moment, the director called everyone back to their marks. You shuffled aside and, as you were looking down at your feet, to step over some cables, you bumped arms with Anthony Russo as you passed each other. You apologized and he recognized you after a small double take.

"Hey," he smiled, noticing your hair. "Wow. That's some red hair, now. So much for purple from Wizard World, huh?"

You laughed. "Yeah. Decided to try something new."

He pointed at your visitor badge hanging around your neck. "I know you're not working," he said, putting a hand on your shoulder to turn you with him as he started toward the camera and monitors, "but, lemme ask you a quick question. Come over here." You skirted around some people until you were close enough that he could point at Chris on one of the monitors. "Does that look right to you?"
"What? His hair?" you asked, a bit surprised.

"Yeah," he nodded.

You looked up from the monitor and over the bank of screens to see Chris directly. When you looked back at the screen, you realized Joe had come over to join you and his brother. Joe folded his arms and rested his chin on his fist, waiting for your answer.

"Honestly," you hesitantly shrugged, "it's just a shade too bright, but on screen, in this light, you couldn't really tell that much. If you're worried about continuity, that is."

Joe nodded in his hand and Anthony said, "Ya know, I thought so."

"No one else will probably be able to tell," you assured them.

"You did," Anthony pointed out.

"Yeah," you shrugged, "but that's only because I did the coloring and was touching up roots for a couple months. I doubt anybody-"

"No," Joe interrupted, thoughtfully, staring at the image of Chris on the monitor. He looked over and tapped one of the PAs on the shoulder. "Find what's-her-name from Hair about Evans' being too blonde. Have her take it down a bit before tomorrow."

Okay, you knew no one had been on set more than a few days together. But Joe calling Chris' hairstylist "what's-her-face" when he and his brother were using your name by the second day in Atlanta made you feel pretty damn good about yourself and pretty prideful.

"Thanks, [y/n]." Anthony nodded. "You gonna stick around for the night?"

"Oh, I really hadn't- Well, I mean, I," you fumbled.

Joe went back to his chair near the camera at the end of the monitor bank and gestured to an empty chair. "Stick around for a while," he told you.

You felt another soft flush come to your cheeks as you slowly took a seat. Oh, boy. This was kind of weird. You never had a seat on set before, and definitely not a front row seat next to the Russo brothers. They had to have been more than a little aware why you were on set. They were always nice guys in Atlanta, but this new level of welcome made you think somebody let them in on the secret in New Orleans or they had been very perceptive. Either way, your seat couldn't have just been a reward for giving your opinion on Chris' hair color.

You watched the scene run for a pair of back to back takes. It was a different perspective to see the simultaneous angles tracking on the monitors instead of standing back on the sidelines. It was also kind of a thrill to hear the director brothers whispering their thoughts back and forth on what they were watching. When Joe called the scene, Chris came back around the monitors to check the tape with Joe. He stopped at the end of the table with a quick double take at seeing you sitting next to the directors.

"First thing," Joe said, putting a hand on Chris' shoulder when Chris bent down to lean on the table, "we're gonna need you to take a bit tonight, or first thing tomorrow, with Hair. We need to get that color sorted out."

"Sure," Chris nodded, giving you a quick glance from the side of his eye and a small smirk before Joe moved on to review the tape.
You watched from the comfort of the director's chair behind the monitors for the next couple of hours. You traded a little light conversation with the Russos here and there. You mentioned the deal with Kingdom and Grillo you were offered and they congratulated you. When shooting for the day wrapped, Chris, Sebastian, and Mackie walked with you off set. They parted ways with you to go to Wardrobe to return their costumes, but Chris had his assistant, Josh, show you to his trailer and told you he'd catch up with you there.

You took a seat on Chris' couch, taking advantage of the quiet to start skimming over the contracts that Grillo had emailed to you. The message attached to the contract as Frank's stylist included a heads up about three projects he was considering that would put you under a studio contract as his hairstylist. You scroolled through the first few pages, looking for the salary offer. Frank was right. Although you and he were clearly not on the same page for what constituted "a pretty decent pay bump", because damn. That was a goood bump. Between Kingdom optimistically getting a couple more seasons ordered and Frank's personal contract guaranteeing work, you either didn't have to worry about big job hunting after your upcoming Universal project wrapped or you had a sizable deposit to make to the savings account toward opening up your own business.

You were biting your thumbnail at the possibilities when Chris came into his trailer, effects makeup gone and in a pair of jeans and a t-shirt. You smiled, looking up from your phone when he said hello. He came over, leaning his arms into the back of the couch to bend down and kiss the top of your head. He stood up again, going to the fridge and offering you something to drink. You politely declined, as he helped himself to a bottle of water and you read over the last few lines of a paragraph you were in the middle of.

"So, what?" Chris began. "You're gonna be a director now? Hanging out with the Russos, like some big shot."

You laughed, looking over the last few words on your screen. "I might dabble a little," you pouted, thoughtfully. "I hear it's so easy, guys from Boston can do it."

Chris' shoulders dropped, his hand with his drink coming away from his mouth and an eyebrow arrogantly climbing up. "Is that so?"

"That's what I heard," you innocently shrugged.

Chris put down his water on the counter and walked purposefully over to the couch. Putting down a knee into the cushion and lowering his shoulder, he hooked an arm behind you and took you with him as he stretched out along the couch and over your lap. He pulled you close, your head burying into his shoulder as he worked his free arm underneath him to tickle your side and he told you, "Take it back!"

You tried to squirm away as his weight over you held you down. You could barely manage to tell him "No! ...I won't. ..Stop it!" through your laughter. You tried to fight fire with fire, but it wasn't working. Your hands were too tangled up between you, and he was winning.

"Take it back," he insisted, nudging your hand down from his side with his elbow, seemingly un-phased by your tickling.

You couldn't take it anymore. "Okay!" you yelled. "Okay. I give. I take it back. I take it back!"

Chris loosened his arm around you, letting you straighten up a bit. He smiled up at you, proud of himself. You pinched his arm in spite and he let out a small but offended 'hey' as he rubbed the spot on his arm. Your phone chimed in a new text from somewhere underneath the muscly man draped over you. He propped himself up on an elbow on his side for you to get at your phone and he
jokingly asked if it was your boyfriend calling.

"Scorsese," you said, checking your phone. "Asking for advice."

"Gimme that," he scoffed, grabbing your phone.

Chris saw the message preview from Frank's assistant, Rick. [Sent first draft by mistake. Current offer is in new email...] Chris' brow furrowed in confusion and he gave you back your phone, asking, "Who's Rick?"

"Frank's assistant," you told him, swiping open your phone to reply.

"What's he talking about, 'current offer'?” he asked, twisting and righting himself to sit up beside you. "You negotiating something with Frank?"

You slid over to lean against his arm and could see him eyeballing your phone as you typed a quick thank you message. "Not exactly," you half shrugged. "He took me to lunch today to talk about some contract options."

"Contracts for what?" Chris asked, pulling up his arm to put around your shoulders.

"One for Kingdom," you answered, settling into the space under his arm, "and the other to be Frank's stylist."

"Huh," he nodded, thoughtfully. "The show's getting renewed?"

Rick sent back another text, telling you to call with any questions or if your attorney needs to meet with the studio's over any issues. You wished him a good night, with your thanks again, and that you'd see him tomorrow on set. You did a quick check to make sure you had a new email in your inbox as you went on.

"Actually, it's an open ended contract for the life of the show," you explained. "So one season or ten, I'm set."

"Doesn't that kind of tie you up for other things?" he cautiously pointed out.

You nodded, setting aside your phone. "But the pay and annual increases make it very worth it," you said. "And the contract for Frank keeps me busy with press appearances and events and automatically gets me on any production he signs on to."

Chris hummed quietly. "Are you going to do it?"

"Hell yeah, I am," you laughed. "I'd be an idiot not to."

"Sounds like," he nodded.

"Well, I know it's no Marvel contract," you said, turning to look up at him, "but you could pretend to be a little excited. This is a hell of a deal for the little workers like me."

Chris smiled and kissed your temple. "No," he said. "It does sound like a good deal. ...I'm just saying, you're kinda stuck there, ya know?"

"It's a great place to be stuck," you countered.

"I know," he agreed. "It's just that you being locked in with Grillo means maybe you don't get on any of my projects."
A smile slowly pulled up one side of your mouth. "Are you- Are you mad you can't hire me?"

"Mad's a strong word," he scoffed, his head ticking back.

"I don't think I'd work for you anyway," you said.

"Why the hell not?" he facetiously demanded, almost sounding a little offended.

"That'd be too complicated," you told him, giving him a nudge. "I don't mind straightening up your hair every once in a while, but I couldn't work for someone I was dating."

"Afraid you'd get too distracted on the job?" he asked, bending his head down to kiss your neck.

You laughed, leaning away as he bent to follow with you. "That is exactly why I wouldn't."

Chris nibbled at your neck for a moment before pulling you back up to his side. "You want one of my lawyers to look over those papers for you?" he asked.

"No, thanks," you shook your head. "I'm actually pretty good at this."

"That one of your many talents?" he asked. "Contract legalese?"

"A business degree helps," you winked. "That and living from contract to contract the last few years, ya pick up a few things."

"You're just full of su--"

A knock on the door interrupted Chris. You don't know why, but you sat up and scooted away. It's not like your parents just came home while you had a boy over or something. Geez. It was only Chris' assistant reminding him the hair department was waiting to correct his coloring. Chris told him he'd be right there.

"Forgot about that already," he grumbled.

"I'm sorry," you shrugged. "They asked. I gave them my opinion."

"It's okay," he smiled, reaching over to pull you back again. He cupped a hand to your cheek for a long kiss before he stood up. "Can you wait around for this?"

"I can't," you said, accepting his hand to pull you up off the couch. "I've gotta get home and take care of Archie. I really shouldn't have been here this long."

Chris grabbed his water off of the kitchen counter and kissed your cheek on the way to the door. "I'm glad you came by," he told you. "You should do it whenever you can. It's kinda nice coming back and seeing you waiting in my trailer."

You tittered shyly and he stepped back for another kiss. "Oh, yeah?"

"Yeah," he smiled. "You off this weekend?"

"I am playing hooky all weekend," you bragged, following him to the door. "Got a thing I'm stepping out early from work for tomorrow, then off until Monday."

"Stepping out?" he mused, walking down the trailer steps and holding the door open for you. "I don't know if that sounds like something I should be worried about or not."
"It's a friend of mine's birthday," you elaborated. "A guy I know is spinning at The Viper Room, so we're going over there after dinner to hit the whiskey bar and dance."

"The Viper Room?" Chris parroted. "Are you fuckin' kidding me?"

You shook your head, walking along with him a little ways toward the hair department. "What's wrong with that?" you asked, with a bit of an offended laugh.

"Nothin'," he said, holding up his palms. "I'm just sayin', you don't strike me as a Viper Room kind of girl."

"I'm not sure if that's an insult or a dare," you scoffed. "I go for the music. I got a couple friends who've played there."

"You want me to have bail money ready for you?" he joked. "That way I can see on Saturday?"

"I'm not gonna sit here and be judged by a guy who, I'd bet even money, has been in divier and douchier places than The Viper Room," you challenged, pointing a finger his way. "You do you and I'll take care of me."

With a wave goodbye and a cocky smile, you turned to head back to your car. "You're so sassy," he said after you. "Have fun at your dive bar." You laughed and shook your head, listening to him keep calling after you. "Don't start any fights you can't finish. You don't want to end up somebody's prison bitch." You flipped him off as you walked on. "Hey, don't listen to what people say. Orange is not the new black. You hear me?"

You turned around, walking backward a few steps, to give him a sarcastic smile and both middle fingers. His knees buckled as he leaned backward in an exaggerated sigh with a wide smile, his hand coming to his chest like he'd been wounded.

"My god," he hollered after you. "That's beautiful! You sure yah naht from Bahstin?"

You laughed out loud, dropping your offensive gestures and blowing him a kiss, as you turned back around and went home.
Chapter 16

Dolled up in heels, a pair of skin tight jeans, and a shimmering silver cami, you couldn't help but laugh to yourself as you and your friends filed in the downstairs door at The Viper Room, Chris' little digs replaying in the back of your mind. You and your friends were waved the cover charge, earning your hand stamps from your DJ friend's guest list. Squeezing in and lining along the bar, you bought the first round of shots to start the party portion of your friend's birthday off right. The second shot toasted your new job as Frank Grillo's personal hairstylist and your Kingdom contract.

After a lot of laughs and a few drinks, your group moved upstairs to dance the night away. The room was pretty crowded, the colored spotlights cut through the dark club while you made your way to the stage to let your DJ friend know you had arrived. Greeted with a peck on the cheek, your evening's emcee, Tony, gave you his headphone free ear while you two shouted a small conversation back and forth behind the turntables and your friends danced below. You let Tony polish off the last of the drink you'd brought up from downstairs as trade for a song request and you got another friendly kiss and hug before you left him.

Down on the dance floor with your party, you all hooted and wailed at Tony's shoutout for your friend, Annalise and her 33rd birthday. Your former across the hall neighbor from your original LA apartment, she was one of the first friends you made when you moved out to LA. She'd moved out to 29 Palms with her Marine Corps husband two years ago, but you still got together now and again for girls nights and mutual friends' parties. Her husband, Rob, and a couple other significant others rounded out your large group and kept the random bar flotsam at bay for you ladies flying solo.

The waitress wandering the floor had eventually gotten fresh drinks in everyone's hands. The heat of the room and dancing put a glisten of sweat on everyone's skin and flashes from selfies spotted eyes. There was a bit of a sing-a-long as Tony let Sweet Disposition run from the end of a mix. Bouncing on your toes, drinks held high, you and a few of your friends serenaded Annalise, promising that you wouldn't 'stop till it's over'. You felt a hand slide across the small of your back and you turned, fully prepared to be offended and knee some guy in the nuts, barely catching a shot of blue light swiping over the face in the dim room to see Chris smiling at you.

"Holy shit," you said, craning to his ear to be heard as he gave you a quick hug. "I thought you were some asshole trying to cop a feel."

"Nah," he smirked, with a slight head shake and turning down to your ear. "I'm the asshole trying to cop a feel."

You put your arms around his neck and laughed. He held you tightly to him for a long moment and, just before he let you go, both hands slid down from your waist, each grabbing a handful of your ass. You felt an extra flash of heat in your already alcohol warmed cheeks and you gave him a playful slap on the arm. Cheeky bastard. Literally.

A hand touched your elbow and you looked over to see Scott smiling his hello. He held his arms out with a pouty head tilt, like an ignored puppy, while he waited for you to unwrap yourself from Chris' arms. You gave him a quick hug and he promised you he wasn't 'gonna try and grab your ass'. You gave him your thanks and a big smile. What a gentleman.

"What are you guys doing here?" you asked, over the music.

"We figured we were both up on our tetanus shots so why not come by for a drink," Chris smirked. "Who's the birthday girl? It is a girl, right?"
Tony faded out The Temper Trap, the beat tapping a bit sharper as it turned into Tommy Trumpet and the lights pulsed. Behind you, your friends yelled their approval and Chris and Scott smiled. Apparently, they approved of the party so far. You pointed around the dance floor, naming names and relationships for the next minute or so as you stood between the bent low ears of the Evans boys. 'Freaks' became 'Ain't A Party' and you grabbed the birthday girl to start introductions.

You were relieved at how chill your friends were at meeting Chris and his brother. Maybe it was the drinks or being in a club in Hollywood that didn't surprise anyone too much. Besides, they knew you'd worked on Chris' film. Some of them worked different industry jobs themselves, so it probably wasn't all that impressive to see a celebrity nearby. Thank god, right? Because you were definitely surprised. Not that you were complaining.

Scott dismissed himself to the bar and you turned to Chris to ask, "What are you really doing here?"

"Hooked up with Scott for food after work and he asked what you were doin' tonight," he answered over the thumping song. "Thought we'd come say 'hi' on our way downtown. You want me to go? We were gonna head over to-"

"No," you shook your head. "Stay. Have fun. No one minds."

"You sure?" Chris checked. "I know you have plans. We were just gonna pop in and out."

"Stay," you assured him with a smile. "Test the limits of your vaccines at our divey, little dumpster bar."

Chris hooked his fingers into your belt loops and tugged you close. "Smart ass," he called over the noise.

"Apparently, you like my ass," you pointed out.

He gave your right butt cheek another squeeze. "I do," he nodded.

You laughed and Scott returned with a pair of plastic bottles of beer. He handed one off to Chris and tipped his to you before he took a long drink. You hoisted your drink in kind and Chris lined his arm around your waist to keep you close as the crowd danced and jostled around you. You and the boys started to bounce and nod while Tony began a new mix. The room howled when Flo Rida's Low came up.

Drinking and dancing, Chris laughed about how Tony strung the music along. How could anyone mix T-Pain, with Demi Lavato, to The Weekend, some Daya, and round it out with Tipsy and Hey Mama and make it sound so good? You boasted up to his ear that that's what made Tony great and Chris punctuated his agreement with a kiss on your neck before you had a chance to lean back and continue your subtle writhe to the music in the small space between Chris and Scott. You blushed at the idea of him showing you affection in front of your friends and in a public place. You figured the bad lighting, his ball cap, and beer gave him a bit more courage. Again, so not complaining.

David Gueta and Nicki Minaj disappeared, and Pitbull asked the crowd to give him everything. The waitress came by with a round of beers for you and your crew, courtesy of Scott, and you were leaned back into Chris' chest as you both bounced and tipped along while Ne-Yo and Nayer belted out their hook. From the stage, Tony looked around to find you. He pointed you out and then motioned around in a circle of your friends. The song dropped to nothing but a bass beat before stuttering to a wordless Latin pulse. Tony winked your way and announced this was 'for [y/n] and my birthday baby, Anna'. Annalise screamed the loudest when her favorite song, Bailando, came up from the beat and she grabbed your hand to peel you off Chris, knowing you were responsible for
Drinks overhead, you and Annalise popped hips and turned snaking bodies to her favorite song. Twisting and shimmying while you sang out with wide smiles and a puckered lip, sultry look into each other's eyes before laughing in absolute amusement at your ridiculous and failed attempts to seduce the other. You barely made it a minute through the song before Rob stole his wife away from you. You weren't lonely for more than a second before Scott slid up to you and put a hand high on your waist. You laid your arm over his to his shoulder, your smile gaped in awe, thoroughly impressed by his smooth salsa moves as he finished off his beer in one long pull and you both stepped forward and back, hips shifting in sync with each move. You let out a joyful laugh when Scott flashed you his best 'Blue Steel' and when he pulled you around with him in a tight turn. A glance over to see if Chris saw had him looking on with a disappointed shake of his head.

Chris took off his cap, stuffing the bill down in his back pocket, and stepped up. Pressing his beer bottle into Scott's chest, he pushed him away. Scott grabbed the drink before it fell and laughed at his brother. Chris grabbed your hand, bringing you to him and spinning you out to his arm's length. He pulled you in again, your back into his chest and wrapped up in his arms before his hands drifted down to your waist. His fingers folded over the curves of your hips, keeping you close as you moved in unison, shoulders shimmying and body wriggling with your hands resting over his. You rolled with the beat, feet scuffing and hips swishing in rhythm, and head tilted back to his shoulder as you sang along and danced into him in your own little world. He hugged one arm across you and splayed a hand over your lower belly to hug you against him. Your drink-free hand found its way back to palm over the side of his hip and he nipped once at your neck. You bit your lip and shook your head, completely delighted by your current situation.

You managed to twist around and slip your arms up to dangle your hands from either side of his neck. Chris tightened his arms around you and turned his face down to your neck. You could feel his breath on your skin and a soft kiss brush your shoulder as Chris shifted, one leg pushing between yours as he pulled your hips closer with a hand pressed at the small of your back. Chris' mouth kissed its way up to your jaw and you couldn't help a playful nibble and tug at his earlobe as your hips rolled, looped, and ground to the music. You felt the heat and vibration of a small moan from him against your throat before he graced your pulse with an open mouth kiss. **Holy Jesus Christ.** Patrick Swayze had never made you swoon and sweat so much about dancing as Chris was right now.

By the time the song wound down and the Latin rhythm perverted into a bouncing remix of Take Me To Church, Chris' mouth had found yours and it took someone passing by and accidentally bumping into you to remind you that you were in a West Hollywood bar and not a hotel room. You broke apart with a breathy smile. You definitely did not regret telling him to stay and join the party.

"Did you drive tonight?" Chris asked, lips ghosting past your ear.

You shook your head, no. There were a few sober people in your party running the carpools that would make sure people got home or crashed together somewhere safe if they needed it. You obviously were one of the ones boozing it up. Your sway to the music all but stopped. Instead, you were just hugged together in the middle of the dance floor and you nodded when Chris didn't so much suggest as say that you should go home with him tonight. Scott reappeared a moment later, with a new drink for himself and to return Chris' beer to him with a push of the bottle into Chris' arm. Chris laughed, letting you go to take his drink and give his brother a smothering hug that nearly took them both off balance.

Tony's run of the music was over at midnight. He disappeared for a while to pack his equipment and the new DJ took over. He joined you and your friends for a drink and you introduced him to Chris
and Scott and anyone else he didn't already know personally. The party lasted another hour before the room started to thin. The music was good, but it didn't measure up to your friend's and everyone streamed out to the parking lot. You hugged and kissed your goodbyes to everyone and caught up to the Evans brothers waiting for you outside Chris' SUV.

It was a short drive from Sunset to Chris' house in Laurel Canyon. Just a few miles drive and long enough to cool off and dry the sweat with the breeze through the rolled down window of Chris' car. You admired the beautiful homes as Chris navigated the roads of the upscale neighborhood. Pulling up in the driveway behind a gated wall, Scott reached up from the back seat to clap Chris on the arm and say he was headed home for the night. You all climbed out, Chris checking with his brother to be sure he was okay to drive home. He was and Scott came around to you on the far side of the car to give you a hug goodnight with a peck on the cheek. Chris came over to join you, trading a firm handshake and half hug with his brother before Scott climbed into his car and drove away. You followed Chris inside.

Chris' house was gorgeous. Of course it was. You took an admiring look around as you walked behind him to the large, open kitchen. If it was this impressive in the lamp light in the middle of the night, you could only guess at how good it looked in the daylight with its giant windows. Chris dropped his hat, wallet, and keys on the kitchen counter and opened the fridge to take out a pair of bottled waters. You took a seat, perching yourself at the island on a cushioned stool as he put a water down in front of you. He leaned back against the counter, opening and taking a long drink of his own water.

"Nice place you got here," you quipped, taking your water and twisting the cap off for a sip.

Chris' head ducked with a small shake. "It's alright," he chuckled, looking up at you through his lashes and maybe with a hint of pink in his cheeks.

You smiled at his humility. Sigh. *Just adorable.* You cut your drink short, surprised by the loudness of the chime from your phone. You'd forgotten to turn the ringer down after leaving the club. You excused yourself to reply to a thank you/goodnight message from Annalise, sending a string of hearts and kissy faced emojis, and to turn off that effin' ringer because holy shit was that loud. Chris came around the island to stand behind you, bending down to wrap his arms under yours and rest his chin on your shoulder. You sent a laughing smiley and thumbs up back for Annalise's kissy face, dancing girl, birthday cake, and every alcoholic drink looking emoji jumble.

"Girls actually send messages like that?" he joked, turning a quick peck into your cheek.

"It's shorthand," you explained. "This whole thing would've taken, like, at least 5 minutes with real words."

Chris chuckled and nodded his understanding. "Do you send the snake emoji when you say you're going to The Viper Room?"

"Pfft. No," you scoffed, turning to give him a sour look. "Obviously, I send beer glasses, CD, and music notes."

"Oh, well, yeah. Of course," he laughed, as if he should have known.

"Still surprised you showed up," you told him. "Didn't think you had it in ya to go out slummin' it like that."

"Are you kidding?" he asked, his voice a little softer and a register lower, breath dampening the curve of your neck before he placed a soft kiss on your shoulder. "You dance the way you did
tonight an’ I’d slum it anywhere.”

You were a little too tipsy not to giggle at his sultry compliment. His lips slowly worked their way along the line of your shoulder. You reached a hand back to curl around the nape of his neck, scratching lightly along the line that separated skin from hair. A hand palmed across your belly to move down over the top of your thigh, his fingers splaying and squeezing ahead of your knee before they came up to your hip with a firm drag along your leg.

"Wanna follow me," he suggested, his words almost a growling whisper in your ear before a soft, open mouth kiss below your jaw.

"Why, Mr. Evans," you jested. "Are you trying to get me in bed with you?"

"I'm tryin' ta do a lot worse than that," he smiled into your neck.

"Ah-ha," you smiled, as he nibbled at your ear. "The awful truth, at last. Well, I have news for you, mister. That's not gonna happen."

He picked his mouth up off your shoulder just long enough to ask, "Why not?"

"Because I have no idea where your bed is," you said, matter of factly, stubbornly putting your hands on your hips.

Chris turned his head away, laughing loudly and shaking his head for a moment. "You're adorable when you drink," he noted.

"You should see me when I'm drunk," you bragged. "Life of the party." You jerked a thumb back at yourself with a wink and he laughed again. You took a look around. "So, do you have a map or something? A visitor's center?" you suggested, still somehow able to play the joke with a straight face. "Trail of breadcrumbs, perhaps?"

"Jeeesus," he groaned, with a smile as he straightened up. "But ya can't drink the fahckin' sass away, can ya?"

You shook you head and profoundly explained, "It's in my soul."

"You're so lucky I like the sass," he told you, a knowing raise of his brow with a slight tip of his head as he held out a hand for you to take.

You slapped your hand into his and took a quick swig of your water before you stood. "Sass and an ass," you noted, with a long blink and a cocky nod. "It's apparently what I got to work with."

Following Chris back through the house, you smiled as he pulled you along by the hand and shook his head at your self-deprecating humor. "It's working for you just fine," he assured you.

You stopped for a moment. Ahead of you, Chris turned over his shoulder to see why you let go of his hand. You tipped a shoulder into the wall and crossed an ankle over your knee, holding up a finger to ask him to wait. You pulled off your shoe, grumbling under your breath, "Not that far. Pfif! We already covered my apartment, like, ten times by now."
Chris laughed at you, his eyes crinkling and brow rising in amusement. "Christ, you're so cute when your mad," he chuckled. "You want me to carry you?"

'No," you spat, sounding quite offended.

He shook his head and started down the hall again. Holding your shoes to your chest, you fell back in line and jokingly asked if you were there yet. Chris laughed again, stopping beside an open door. He swept an arm out for you to go ahead and you nodded cordially as you passed through the doorway. Coming in behind you, Chris snapped on the lights and you took a look around, shrugging your approval with muted enthusiasm.

"Not bad," you noted. "If you go for ginormous and well appointed rooms with views. So, this is where the magic happens, huh?"

Chris moved to stand in front of you, taking your shoes from you and dropping them onto the floor behind him. He inched close, everything about him just a fraction away from you. A smirk played at the corner of his mouth and you flashed a smile, teeth pulling in the left side of your lower lip as you eyed the tiny distance between you. His eyes didn't leave yours, but you felt his fingertips trace gently up your forearm.

"You get kinda chatty after a couple drinks, huh?" he mused.

"Chat, sass, and ass," you proudly noted. "The trifecta."

Chris' fingers had found their way up the length of your arm, a pair of fingers pulling aside the thin straps of your top and bra to slip down off your shoulder. You glanced at the newly bare skin and back at Chris. He smiled innocently and shrugged. You shrugged in reply before crossing your arms over your belly and pulling your sparkly top off overhead.

"That solves that," you said, decidedly.

You tossed your shirt onto the end of the bed and waited, cocking up an eyebrow at him before your eyes ticked down to his shirt. You gestured a hand up at your side, the move and your expression asking what he was waiting for. Chris' smirk turned smile and he took a small step back to undo the buttons on his shirt, making a show of each pull as he looked up at you through his lashes with a grin. Shirt open, a snuffle of a laugh came from him as he tugged the sleeves down his arms and threw his shirt aside with yours. You shook your head, a disappointed pout and finger pointing out the t-shirt he still had on. His gaze flitted down to your bra and back up, his brow wagging the insinuation that this was a one for one trade.

"Fine," you said, playfully snippy.

You made a big deal of taking off your jeans, balling them up and shooting them onto the bed like a basketball. Your lips puckered to one side and you stuck your hands on your hips, a chin jut challenging him to top that. His chest popped with a stifled laugh and he shook his head, stepping out of his unlaced boots and sighing as he took off his jeans, as if it were an inconvenience. He flung his pants onto the growing pile of clothes and held up his hands with a slight raise in his shoulders to say it was your turn. There weren't a lot of options to choose from anymore. You bent an arm up behind you and undid the hooks of your bra in one quick pinch. Rolling your shoulders forward to slip the straps down your arms and effortlessly flinging the lacy material to lay with the other pieces of your outfit. Chris' head bowed, with a breathy smile and his chin turning up to the side.

"Fuck it," he shook his head. "You win. I can't take anymore."
He quickly grabbed the back of his shirt and yanked it off over his head, dropping it to the floor and coming back to you with his hands holding your hips and mouth crashing into yours. The prize you apparently won in striptease chess was a pretty darn good one. Chris' hands smoothed across your back, hugging you close as you wrapped your arms behind his neck. Pulling back, ever so slightly, he dipped down, hands cupping the backs of your legs and lifting you up. You wrapped your legs around his waist, locking your ankles together as he moved with you to the bed. He bent down, laying your back to the mattress and sweeping the pile of clothes onto the floor with one hand. Honestly, why did either of you go to the trouble, just to have that happen?

You loosed your legs from him, planting your feet and elbows to scoot back onto the bed, but Chris had other plans. He smiled coyly, curling his hands behind your bent knees and giving you a quick tug toward him, your ass precariously close to the edge of the mattress and heels teetering on the bedside. You let out a tipsy giggle, biting your lip and tilting your head to see him sink to his knees on the floor and stretch his hands to your hips to pull away your panties. You helpfully lifted your hips while he lead the last bit of clothing up your legs, past your knees, and off one heel at a time. A feather of a touch trailed up your calf and you picked your head up to see Chris running his eyes over you and his hand finding your knee to guide it away. He ducked from your view, warm breath and soft lips on the inside of your thigh letting you know where he was. Chris pushed at one heel and your leg draped over his shoulder and down his back. His kisses moved along your leg until his mouth found your middle and his tongue licked a long, slow line up. There was an instant reaction from you, a tickle in your gut and small hitch in your breath. Your mind wondered for a moment, simultaneously disappointed and appreciative of reshoot-ready, clean shaven Chris' mouth on you. You couldn't help the phase 'beard burn' crossing your mind while you considered what you might be missing out on with this wholesome looking version of him between your legs.

Your thoughts came back to the moment, reveling in the feeling of Chris' tongue sweeping and lips pulling sucking kisses at your most sensitive spots. Jesus Christ. You weren't sure if you said that in your head or if that actually got out of your mouth when you felt Chris slide a pair of fingers into you before a lavishing lick of his tongue. You thought you felt a smile on your skin before a toe curling bend of his fingers working in and out of you, and you secretly hated and admired the smirk you imagined him wearing at the buck the flick of his tongue pulled from your hips. You reached out a hand, fingers twisting in his hair for his attention as his free hand caressed over your flat stomach. There was a new coolness to the wetness between your legs as he took away his mouth and looked up at you with a proud, if not fiendish, grin on one side of his lips. He smiled up at you through his lashes, turning his face down to kiss the line separating hip from leg and fingers slowing to a teasing pace while the pad of his thumb circled your clit in place of his tongue. You curled a finger at him, beckoning him up to you.

Chris rose from the floor, climbing onto the bed a limb at a time, his body hovering low over yours. He drew a line with his mouth from your navel to your breasts that left warm then cool spots from open mouth kisses on your skin. He followed you as you scooted away from the edge of the bed, catching up to you as you found the pillows under your head and his lips captured yours. You reached a hand up to hook over the back of his neck and the other reached between you, your fingers finding the hard length of him and giving a few twisting pulls to make sure he was ready. The grunt of an exhale that smeared its way against your cheek and lips was as good as any nod that he was.

He turned away from you, stretching to reach the bedside table and pulling a condom from the drawer while your hand kept him distracted. Chris made short work of the foil wrapper, tossing it aside as he managed to one-hand the condom into place while his mouth was preoccupied with yours again. He’d worked you up into a bit of a frenzy and your fingers pressed into his back and shoulder likely told him as much as his tip made a purposefully teasing slide between your lower lips before
he pushed inside.

The pace of his stroke matched the one set by his kisses. Deep and even, a kind of romance to it all. A kind that a long night with a shot of Patron, a blowjob, 2 whiskey doubles, a long neck Bud, and a grind with Chris Evans and Enrique Iglesias was a little too tame for. Your fingers combed into the back of his hair, hand pulling him down closer as your tongue dipped confidently into his mouth to ask for a little more from him.

Chris answered the request, shifting his weight on a knee and elbow as a hand slipped under your back. You sucked at his tongue and bit at his lips while a heat crept over you and a tingle started to spread out from your middle. You arched your back from the mattress, your hips rising to his, and lifted your head to nibble and lick at his ear. He hissed a breath in at a playful nip of his earlobe and you wrapped your arms tight behind his shoulders when he sat back, pulling you to sit with him.

You smiled a firm kiss against his mouth, as you shifted in his lap and found one of your legs splayed to one side of him with the other folded under you. His cadence broke, the kissing rose to a fever pitch in the pause and his hands palmed and pulled over your back to hold you as close to him as possible. With your leg tangled beneath you, you took advantage to raise yourself up and line yourself to him, consequently making him slip outside of you. He made a plaintive sigh, his expression a mischievous pout at your temporary absence and his hands gripping your hips to call you back. Turning down your chin to your chest, you took your turn to tease and brushed soft kisses over his reaching lips as you lowered yourself over him just enough for his tip to press against your entrance. The move made him impatient and he tugged down from your waist. Taking advantage of his breathing from parted lips, you tongued him deeply as you relented and lowered yourself slowly onto him again. He greeted your return with a quick buck of his hips up and one hand hooked over your shoulder to keep you with him while the other pressed you forward from the small of your back.

Chris began a new rhythm, fast and assertive, that you synced yourself to. You raked a hand through his hair when he broke his mouth away from yours to trail kisses from your throat down until he took his hand from your back to cup a breast to lave and suck. His hand squeezed and massaged your breast as his mouth went back to your neck, the pace of his thrusts threatening to make you come undone as you ground back against him and pressed open mouth kisses into his shoulder. Chris stepped it up, wrapping his arm back around your waist to hold you firm to him as your breaths came shorter and faster and you writhed against each other. With his teeth scraping over your collarbone to close in a nip of a kiss, you let go, clenching around him as pleasure took over and you hissed out a short chain of earnest profanities and praises over his shoulder. Chris squeezed you tight, keeping you still to him as he drove on, coming moments behind you with a shudder and his own four letter words muffled by his mouth in the crook of your neck. You came down together, enjoying the ride when an occasional slow pump up came from Chris before he lost the strength of his formerly impressive erection.

"Jesus Christ," he whispered a halfhearted complaint against your jaw, as his lips drug up to yours. "I take back everything I said about you goin' to shit bars in West Hollywood." He gave you a lingering kiss that pulled your lower lip away with his. "You should go more often if it gets you worked up like this."

You giggled, watching your hand as you pushed it back through his hair. "It's the music," you told him, turning your gaze down to his with a smile. "The bar's a bonus."

"If that's all it takes, I'm gonna have to put some Enrique on my phone," he said, with a last push into you that made your smile and breath flinch together.
Chris smiled at your reaction and gave you a light pat on the ass to have you move. You backed up off of him so he could go get cleaned up. Alone in his room, you took a look around to finally notice the clean, but masculine, decor and simple furnishings. A small smile played at the corner of your mouth when you heard Chris’ footsteps start to pad back in from the adjoining bathroom. You climbed under the covers, settling into the pillow as he turned off the lights and crawled onto the bed to lay over top of you with a heavy and tired groan of a sigh as if he would sleep right there.

"Wrong spot?" you asked, giving him a gentle poke in the arm as he nuzzled his cheek on your shoulder. "Is this your side?"

He turned his head up to see you and flashed a smile in the dim room before he rolled off to the free space of the bed, finding his way under the covers with only a minor amount of fuss and exaggerated sounds of struggle. "No," he said, finally still on his stomach and draping an arm over your belly. "Sleep on whichever side you want. Just be there in the morning."

"Sounds fair," you smiled, stifling a bit of a girlish giggle.

You woke up slowly on your own. You hadn't had the forethought to set an alarm on your phone and, apparently, Chris didn't need one set for him this morning or, at least, not this early. The sun was just starting to change the color of the world outside the windows and you rubbed at your eyes with your free hand. The other was trapped under the covers and held there by Chris' arm still lying over you. It seemed neither of you had moved much from the positions you fell asleep in and that little thought made you smile. The smile was short lived when you realized nature was calling and you had to move.

Eyeing your predicament, you slowly moved your leg over to find the mattress edge. You pulled yourself carefully to the side of the bed, the covers and his arm slipping gently off of you. One foot found the floor and you managed to get off the bed without a sound, checking over your shoulder to see Chris was still asleep. Moving like a thief in the night, you picked up your underwear from the mess of clothes on the floor as you tiptoed your way to the bathroom. You took a minute to put your bra and panties back on, giving yourself a proud nod in the mirror when you noticed they matched pretty well, considering you hadn't exactly picked them out thinking you were going to end up showing them off to anyone the night before. Good job, self! You used the bathroom and took down what was left of your updo. Combing your fingers through your hair, parting out some tangles, and twisting it all up into a messy bun, you shrugged. It was the best you could do in a foreign bathroom, but it still looked cute.

You peered out the bathroom door and saw Chris just the way you left him. Creeping across the room, you went back to the clothes on the floor to root out what was yours. Top and jeans balled up in one arm, you were just reaching down for your shoes when Chris moved and you looked up. His eyes were still closed and head ticked back on his pillow, as he opened one squinting eye. "Mm mm," Chris disapprovingly hummed and shook his head on the pillow. His arm over your spot in the bed grabbed the covers and folded them back. "Too early," he mumbled, patting at the mattress beside him.

You snickered, putting your shoes down beside the bed and sitting back down on your side, one leg folded under you and your clothes in your lap. "I gotta go," you said.

His face grimaced and head ticked back on his pillow, as he opened one squinting eye. "Just a wham, bam, thank you ma'am?" he scoffed.
"Well," you shrugged, giving your most resigned to the situation frown you could manage, "these walk of shames don't just happen on their own, you know."

He shut his eye, his laugh muffled by a tired rub of his face down into his pillow and a blind hand reaching out to find your arm to pull you down. "Walk of shame, my ass," he mumbled.

You tugged back against his pull to keep yourself upright, with a chuckle. "I have to go," you told him. "Archie's dying to get out at home."

"Five minutes," Chris said, opening his eyes to tired slits and curling a finger at you.

"Two and a half," you counter offered, twisting away to put your clothes at the foot of the bed before sliding back under the covers.

"What?" he smirked, shifting onto his side to put an arm under your neck and pull you close with the other. "Got a getaway driver out front?"

"I was gonna cab it," you chuckled.

Chris kissed the top of your forehead. "You don't have an address to tell 'em," he told you, with a soft snort of a laugh.

"42 Wallaby Way, Sydney?" you suggested.

Chris laughed into his pillow. "No," he sighed, out of the end of his laughter. "No, baby, that's not the address. But I like where your head is at."

"Well, you got a mailbox," you reminded him. "Pretty sure I could figure it out."

"You're naht takin' a fucking cab home," he complained, a brief grimace taking over his face. "Fuckin' walk 'a shame bullshit," Chris grumbled and trailed off, turning his face down into the pillow beside your head. "I'll take you home."

"No. It's so early," you insisted. "Don't worry about it."

He lifted his head off the pillow to give you an appalled and questioning look. "What kind of a bum do you think I am?" Chris demanded, sounding more than a little offended.

You turned your head to see the alarm clock on his bedside table. "It's 7:06," you pointed out, looking back at him.

His eyebrows rose up his forehead and he frowned thoughtfully before he shrugged and fell back into his pillow, closing his eyes. "Well, fuck that," he said, nuzzling his face back into a comfortable spot. "Have a safe trip home."


Chris bent his head down to your shoulder and cuddled up close, draping a leg over you and folding his arm behind you to lay down your arm. "Punk," he mumbled into the skin peeking out from the cup of your bra before a soft kiss.

You stayed there for a couple of quiet minutes before you scratched your fingernails a few times along his forearm to make sure he was still awake. "I gotta go," you gently repeated.

He gave you a squeeze and drug his head back up on his pillow. "Five more minutes."
"No 'five more minutes'," you laughed. "You keep getting five minutes and I never leave!"

"I'm okay with that," he shrugged, peeking open one eye to see you. Chris smiled innocently when he was caught looking. "Alright! I'm up!" he declared, turning onto his back and whipping the covers to the foot of the bed in an exaggerated fit.

You laughed at him as he rolled and turned to his side of the bed, put his feet on the floor, and rubbed his hands up and down his face. You couldn't help but take a moment for yourself, admiring the lines and bulges of his broad shoulders and strong back and watching the sinew twist as he moved his arms out for a long stretch. **Good god, is this guy hot.** You have little shame to speak of. You shook your head with a smile, crawling down to the end of the bed to untangle your clothes from the covers and get dressed. Chris headed for the bathroom, telling you, "Ten minutes."

You dressed and put your shoes on and Chris started a shower. You stepped out into the hallway, looking left then right, trying to figure out which way to go. You found your way back to the kitchen, looking around corners and peeking into rooms as you went, taking in your surroundings. In the kitchen, you checked the cabinets for a glass and helped yourself to some orange juice. After all, he still owed you a bowl of cereal. You perched on the arm of one of the small couches near the wall of glass doors overlooking Mulholland and the Hollywood Hills. It was a hell of a view, with the valley still shadowed ahead of the sun's full rising and a bit of fog coming off the pool in the backyard to warn you of a chill in the morning air.

Sipping at your OJ and balancing your feet up on the points of your heels, you checked your phone. Not surprisingly, there were a couple excited texts from some friends about you going home with Chris Evans. You bit at your lip to hold down your smile while you copied a reply to both, asking them to keep your secret. You knew it was safe with them. You also figured it'd be a while before they woke up to reply, if they replied at all, and pocketed your phone as Chris came into the room. You watched for a moment as he picked up his wallet and keys off the counter, pulled his hat on, and stuffed his wallet into the back pocket of his shorts on his way over. He came up from the end of the couch behind you to kneel on the cushion and rest his chin on your shoulder.

"Yeah, help yourself to some juice," he sarcastically offered, hugging his arms around your belly.

"Oh," you said, in mocking surprise, turning over your shoulder to look at him. "I'm sorry. Was the juice only for the talent? Does the crew get the water from the hose out back?"

"Smart ass," he griped, taking a hand off you to grab the juice from your hand. Chris polished off your drink in two long gulps and gave you a smack on the ass as he got off the couch. Your jaw dropped in feigned offense as you watched him take the glass to the kitchen and tell you, "C'mon. Let's go get Archie."
Chapter 17

There was something awkwardly funny about Chris driving you home. Something along the vein of dropping you off after the first date kind of awkward. It wasn't the first date, but it was the first time he was driving you to your home, not some temporary home for work in a hotel on a location shoot. It was home home and something about that made you want to snicker that you were still coming up with awkward situations.

Backing out of Chris' driveway, he turned on the radio. He had satellite and, of course, it was on a talk sports channel. You made some sarcastic comment about what a surprise it was to hear men talking sports in Chris' car and he rolled his eyes over at you at the stop sign.

"I was going to ask what you wanted to listen to," he explained, sarcastically, "but now I think we should listen to these guys talk about the game."

"That's fine," you shrugged. "We can listen to this." You waited a good couple of minutes before you looked over and, somehow straight-faced, asked, "What's the Super Bowl?"

Chris looked over at you, markedly unimpressed, flattening the brake just a tad bit harder than needed at the next stop to lurch the car forward. "I'm gonna pretend you didn't just say that," he grumbled. He turned back to the road ahead and started to drive as he seemed to sulk. "Football," he muttered, quietly. "It's football and you know it."

You somehow managed to keep from laughing or smiling. "That's the one with the weird, brown ball and the guys in tight pants all pile up and try to hump each other?"

"Yes," he unenthusiastically agreed. "With the weird ball where they're trying to hump each other." Chris looked over at you, mockingly exhausted with you, and shook his head. "You're fuckin' killing me, woman. You can get out an' walk the rest of the way." he offered, giving a quick look your way as he drove. "Just say the word."

You finally cracked a sly smile. "You wouldn't kick me out."

He glanced over. "Keep it up, smartass," he taunted. "Find out."

You chuckled and he hit the scan button on the radio. "Find something else," he said, shaking his head with a small grin.

The radio sampled new channels several seconds at a time. You watched the display, reading channel and song info as it changed, waiting to see what caught your ear as you put the window down for some fresh air. You jammed your finger into the button to hold the station and turned up the volume as you mimicked the electric guitar plucks of El Scorcho in the air with a happy smile, singing along when Cumo dropped back in on the 90's Rock channel.

"I wish I could get my head out of the sand," you smiled at Chris. "'Cause I think we'd make a good team." You started bobbing your head to the music. "And you would keep my fingernails clean." Chris glanced over with a small amused smile. "But that's just a stupid dream that I won't realize," you went on, your voice twisting up with the song. "'Cause I can't even look in your eyes without shakin' and I ain't fakin'," you sang, notching up the volume a few points and waving your finger to punctuate the words, "I'll bring home the turkey if you bring home the bacon."

Chris smiled wide beside you now, shaking his head at you as he saw you dance, bounce, and nod in your seat while your impassioned rendition ramped up with the song's crescendo and your next turn
of the volume knob. "I'm a lot like you so please, hello, I'm here, I'm wai- Waiting!" you belted out, crushing your eyes closed and pulling a fist to your chest for the drama the line deserved and Chris stopped at a light. Chris laughed and you turned up the radio obnoxiously loud as you carried on with your tiny rock show. "Oh-oh oh! I think I'd be good for you and you'd be good for me," you pointed from him to you, with feeling. A lot of it.

Still stuck at the light, Chris slumped down a couple of inches and leaned back into his seat, palming his hand onto the top of his head to dip the bill of his ball cap down over his eyes while he hissed out an embarrassed, 'Jeeesus', laughing in his chest and his cheeks reddening a shade.

"I'm a lot like you," you diva'd on. "I'm a lot like you and I'm waiting!"

Chris' lips pressed together tightly and his left hand briefly rubbed over and covered his mouth from where his arm rested on the door. He fixed his tearing eyes on the traffic light and shook his head slowly behind his fingers, in complete denial of the situation and blatantly refusing to look at you anymore.

"I think I'd be go-oo-od for you," you rocked on, leaning onto the console between you to serenade him, "and you, you'd be good for me."

The light changed and he leaned up fast to turn down the radio when the song faded out and he drove on. You fell back into your seat, laughing, uproariously and proud. You gave him a playful push in the arm for being such a grump and he gave you a judgmental smirk, shaking his head.

"Did you even see the guys in the next car?" he begged, coughing out a laugh, throwing quick, disbelieving glances your way between looks at the road.

You looked over your shoulder at the car in the next lane behind you. "What? They didn't like the show?"

"Jesus," he complained through a smile. "No. No, they loved it. The one guy was actually nodding along...Fuckin' hell. Never mind."

His embarrassment subsided in the next couple of blocks and you thought he looked thankful, thinking you couldn't rock out to Yellow Ledbetter. But you could hum along. And you did after awhile. Through the next light and another couple of blocks...before you couldn't contain your inner-Vedder and mumble-sang along with your best Eddie impression.

"I-I see them," you crooned, with soulful eyes staring at the side of Chris' head. "Round the front way, yeah. And I know and I know, I don't want to stay." There was a small head shake from Chris as he stared ahead, lips pursing in his effort to ignore you as you went on. "I don't want to stay...I don't want to stay. Oh-oh-oh-ohh."

Chris finally caved at the next light and looked over as you quietly wailed along and then wagged your head and swayed to the guitar plucking and strumming out the end of the song. His head dropped with another shake and he looked up at you with a wide smile. He leaned onto his elbow on the console and reached his left hand behind your neck to pull you over for a kiss. He leaned back to his seat with a laugh.

"You can't stop yourself, can you? You're ridiculous," he told you. He checked the color of the traffic light and looked back over at you. "God, you weren't kidding about that car karaoke thing, were you?"

You shook your head. "Man, I'll tell ya right now," you warned him, "you get some Freddie
Mercury on that radio and I will blow. your. damn. mind."

"Oh, I believe it," he smiled, his eyes wide and head nodding quickly to emphasis his agreement.

"Hey," you shrugged, with a confident tip of your head. "I told you what you were getting in to. But it's early this morning. I'll give you a break this time."

"We need to get you on James Corden," he chuckled.

"I would die happy," you swooned.

Chris' smile beamed as he drive on and stole a glance at you from the side of his eye. You behaved yourself for the rest of the ride home, even turning the radio back to his sports channel when he pulled to the curb near your apartment. He paused, giving him a questioning look when he dropped the car into park, took off his seatbelt, and put his hand on the keys at the ignition. He looked up, noticing you look at him, and stopped.

"Can I not come in?" he slowly asked, sounding more than a little confused.

"Did you want to?" you asked, almost as confused.

"I thought we could get some breakfast after Archie's taken care of," he suggested. "You not hungry?"

You considered it a moment. "No, I am. I just figured you'd want to go home and go back to sleep or had something to do today."

"Do you?" he inquired.

Pushing your lips to one side, you realized you had nothing. You had the weekend off and hadn't thought much further than Friday night. The vaguest outline of a plan you did have involved napping on the couch.

"Not actually," you admitted.

"Well, then, breakfast would be the start of something to do, wouldn't it?" he posited.

Yeah. That was actually pretty good logic. You agreed and Chris turned off the engine to follow you out of the car and upstairs. Archie was quite excited to see you and even more excited to get going on his morning walk. You quickly traded your heels for sandals and sparkly club top for a hoodie and the three of you were out the door. You fed Archie as soon as you got back.

"Well," you said, leaving Archie behind to eat in the kitchen as you went into the living room, "make yourself at home." You gestured at yourself, a finger circling at your face. "I'm gonna get a quick shower and fix this disaster and we can go get breakfast."

Chris scrunched up his nose in question. "What disaster?"

You waved both hands up and down you from head to toe. "The 'yeah, she definitely didn't sleep at home, bed head, raccoon eyed, bar and sweat smelling' disaster you see before you," you explained.

"That's not what I'm looking at," he said, tipping his head to one side with a thoughtful shake and grin.

"Yeah," you said, jutting your chin in doubt, "well, you're biased."
You heard him say after you, as you headed down the hall, "I think you look beautiful in the mornings."

A small, puckered smile pushed at your lips and you felt a soft heat come to your cheeks. You shook your head at his endless cuteness, turning into your bedroom to grab a fresh set of clothes before heading to the bathroom. You showered fast and combed your hair to let it air dry, finishing your jeans and tank top ensemble with a hair band on your wrist for later. Opening the bathroom door, you were treated to the faint smell of something cooking. Toast, maybe?

You dropped your dirty clothes in the hamper in your room on your way to the kitchen to investigate. You inched your head around the edge of the wall to peer inside and saw Chris turning a spatula in a skillet of scrambled eggs at the stove, with a plate of buttered toast waiting on the counter nearby. He looked down at Archie beside him when the dog stirred at your presence in the hall. Chris looked up and flashed a quick smile at seeing just your eyes and forehead hovering beyond the corner of the kitchen. You went in, side stepping and sliding your backside along the edge of the counter as you crept closer and stood on your tiptoes to be obnoxious and see what he was doing.

"You made breakfast?" you asked the obvious.

He shrugged, giving the eggs a couple turns. "I came in to make some coffee," he explained, inclining his head toward the bottle of cream near the coffee maker. "I figured why go out when I saw you had some eggs and stuff."

"Huh," you mused, before a purse of your lips.

"What?" he scoffed, throwing you a sideways glance. "I'm a guy, not an idiot. I know how to make breakfast."

Your brow and both hands rose in resignation. "I didn't say anything."

"Why don't you get some plates, sassy?" he suggested, waving you away with the business end of the spatula.

You smiled and took down a pair of plates, lining them along the counter beside him. While he divided the eggs between the dishes, you got the forks and salt and pepper. Chris added some toast to a plate and handed it to you. He pulled it back when you reached for it and shook his head.

"Nuh-uh," he said. "Kiss the cook."

Chris presented his cheek and you laughed before dotting a quick peck there. He surrendered your plate with a smug nod and grabbed the pot of coffee from the burner. He reached into the cupboard and grabbed a mug, pouring you some morning Joe and holding it out to your free hand. You were more than a little impressed as you added some cream to your coffee.

"You know where the mugs are?" you asked, watching as he poured himself a cup.

"I spent enough time here, haven't I?" he smiled.

You shrugged. "Yeah, we probably should talk about you chipping in for rent," you joked, walking out to the dining table. "Or at least contributions to Archie's college fund."

"Archie's in school?" Chris asked, with a hint of laughter under the question, as he caught up and set down his plate to pull out a chair.

"Not yet," you admitted, chewing on a corner of toast. "But he's got dreams, ya know. He's got a
"Yeah, I see that," Chris said, nodding with a raised brow toward Archie who sat in the middle of the living room sniffing at his paw curiously.

"Jerk," you mumbled into the lip of your coffee mug.

Chris chuckled, shoveling his fork down into his eggs. "So what do you want to do today?"

Sipping your coffee, you nodded, holding up a finger with a hum for him to wait. "Nap," you confidently said and Chris snorted a laugh with a mouthful of breakfast. "I was thinking about building a whole day around it."

"Last night was a little rough, huh?" Chris suggested, wagging his brow up. "A lil' hung over? Gettin' a little too old to go clubbing?"

*Oh, hell no.* You planted your elbow into the table and pointed at him with your fork. "Hey," you chided, "listen here, old man. I am not too old for last night."

"Old man?" he scoffed, taking up his coffee.

"Older than me," you shrugged, taking a bite of toast.

"By what?" he grimaced. "Like a year, maybe?"

"Maybe," you quietly grumbled in defeat. You perked back up to make your point. "But I can still hang with the best of 'em." Adding in a mumble ahead of your coffee, "Dance circles around your ass. Call me old..."

Chris shook his head, smiling as he chewed and swallowed. "So you just want to bum around here for the day?"

You shrugged again. "Like, all day? I don't really have a plan or care either way," you admitted, "but I wouldn't want to bore you if you've got better plans."

"Sounds like a good plan to me," he nodded, pointing his fork toward the window. "It's kind of a shitty day outside anyway."

You looked over the grey skies outside for a moment. "Yeah, that does kinda put a damper on things," you mused.

"So, we'll stay here," he decided. "Maybe go see a movie or do something inside in case it rains."

"A movie sounds fun," you agreed.

After breakfast, you and Chris lounged around your apartment. The clouds outside kept the living room a couple shades darker than usual and you ended up nodding off on the couch while the DVR played one of your backlogged Saturday Night Live episodes. You woke up curled on your side, cheek lying on Chris' arm that was draped over you while you were turned into the back of the couch. Archie's cold, wet nose found a patch of skin on your back from where your shirt rode up and he nudged you back to consciousness to take him outside. You tipped your head back to rest on Chris' chest to see him asleep with his head dropped onto the back of the couch. You rubbed at a small crick in your neck with one hand and gently picked up Chris' arm to un-seatbelt yourself from the couch and walk the dog.
"Where r'you going?" Chris barely managed to mumble, inhaling a large breath and stretching his legs out under the coffee table as you spun around to put your feet on the floor.

"Taking Archie out," you told him, bending your neck to the side to work out the dull ache and checking the clock on your phone.

"I'll go with you," he groaned out, with a wide stretch out of his arms.

Adorable. You sniggered softly to yourself as you stood. "You don't have to," you offered. "We're gonna be quick. Looks like it's about to rain."

Chris pushed back into the couch to sit up. "Well, then I'll take him."

"Why?" you laughed.

"So you don't get rained on," he answered, gesturing his palm toward you as he stood.

"I'll dry, if I do," you assured him.

Chris smiled and kissed your cheek. "Now you don't have to," he said, turning for the door and patting his leg for Archie to follow.

Okay. You shrugged and sat back down on the couch. That was unexpected and sweet. You watched Chris put Archie on his leash and head out, pulling the door shut behind them. The show on TV had stopped while you napped and you erased some things from the DVR while you waited. Your phone rang on the table and you smiled to see it was Frank's assistant, Rick. The two of you chatted politely for a few minutes before you moved on to business. Rick was setting up an appointment for you to meet with the studio to finalize your contract for the show and another to meet with Frank's team about the contract with him. You were just putting the times into the calendar in your phone, with Rick on speaker so you could type, when Chris came back.

"Okay," Rick said. "So, see you on Wednesday then."

"Can't wait," you smiled, holding the phone in front of you and giving a small wave to welcome Chris back as he hung Archie's leash by the door.

"Yeah," Rick happily agreed. "Take care."

"Bye," you said, hanging up the phone and putting it down on the coffee table as Chris sat down beside you, hat and shoulders spotted with small raindrops.

"What's on Wednesday?" he asked, waving a limp hand to reference your call.

"Setting up meetings to sign the contracts for Frank and the show," you told him, taking up your phone again to double check you set the reminders for the meetings.

Chris nodded and hummed his understanding. He scratched at Archie's head on his leg while you stood to go into the kitchen. Chris declined when you asked if he wanted anything to drink and you suggested you two needed a plan for lunch. You leaned into the edge of the kitchen doorway and folded your arms, preparing to offer some things you could make to eat, when your phone chimed from where you'd stashed it in your pocket. You stopped, mid-breath, before you were about to speak to check your phone. You laughed and unlocked the screen to reply.

"Who's that?" Chris asked, pulling his ball cap off to toss on the coffee table and scratching at his head as he leaned back tiredly into the couch again.
It was Frank, sending a picture of his new puppy, Frisco, chewing on one of his boxing gloves and you explained as much. A second message chimed in, saying the dog was free to a good home if he didn't stop chewing on Frank's 'shit'. You cooed a heartfelt 'aww' as you typed back that if Frisco ever came up missing, it'd be because you stole him and to be nice to the little guy, because he's clearly just trying to bond with Frank. You turned around your phone so Chris could see the photo.

"Cute," he said, his chin giving a small jut and his brow wagging up in a shrug.

"You're not free next weekend, are you?" you double checked, reading over the next message that came in.

"Not really. Why?" he asked, curiously looking you over as you stood in the kitchen doorway.

"Frank and Wendy are going out to Catalina," you told him, eyes flitting to your screen and thumbs already replying back. "They thought, if you were available, maybe you'd wanna go."

"No. Sorry," he said. There was a pause when he yawned and before he threw out, "You thinking about going?"

You shrugged, turning into the kitchen to get something to drink. "I might," you called. "I haven't been and I'm still invited if you can't go."

You heard Chris say something from the other room, but you couldn't make it out. When you asked for him to repeat it, he said 'never mind'. You took a bottle of water out of the fridge for yourself and headed back to the other room. Your phone chimed again in your pocket and you tucked your drink under your arm to free your hands to answer.

"Frank says to give you his condolences about your Patriots not going to the Super Bowl this year," you paraphrased the message from your phone, with a grin.

"Well, you tell Frank to go fuck himself," Chris grumbled, lazily flipping you off in lieu of Grillo himself.

"Aww, come on now. It's just a joke. Why so grumpy?" you laughed, sitting down on the couch and turning into the end to pull your knees up and face him. "Rain got ya down, sleepy head? You jealous about Catalina?"

"Honestly?" he asked. His tone and expression hinted that he didn't want to say something, but you nodded and he went on. "Yeah. Alright?" Chris dragged a hand through his hair, hanging his hand on the back of his neck till gravity brought it down with a small thump into his lap. "It fuckin' drives me nuts sometimes."

"What?" You blinked. Wait. Was he serious? Okay. Frank was a bit of a little shit sometimes, but, like he said, Chris was no angel either for playing along. What was the big deal about it now?

"It's not fair, ya know?" he shook his head, eyes turned down with a short sweep of a helpless hand across the room and voice akin to a grumbling complaint. "All those posts and pictures 'a you two, cuttin' up all the time. His assistant's gotta call you on your weekend off? Hashtags an' trips to Catalina. And now, he's got you boxing, like you weren't around those fuckin' muscle heads all day already."

"Muscle heads?" you repeated, with a grin you tried hard to help but couldn't because, honestly, it sounded hilarious. "You do know the show is about MMA fighters, right? They're kind of unavoidable. And I've met him at the gym, like, twice."
"You know, I see some of those comments people leave on your pics 'n shit; on pics Grillo puts up," he noted. His brow creased with a kind of new found hate when he added, "That one of you and the guys on set. Especially that one. ...I don't like you being around guys like that when I'm not around and- Quit fuckin' smiling about this! You asked and I'm being serious."

"I know," you said, as way of a plaintive apology, and tried straightening your face. "I'm sorry," you sniggered. "But what on Earth do you think is going to happen? That I'm gonna run away with some punch drunk boxer or something?"

"Why the hell not?" he shrugged, his face pinched with a bit of insult. "You fell for me, didn't you? Isn't that how it happened? You got a crush on some guy ahn set an' then..."

He trailed off and didn't finish, leaving a moment of silence in the air between you. Which was good, because you needed a second to process that. The usually swoon-worthy Boston accent that came through when he was hot about something had to be ignored. Because, did he really just?

"Wow," was all you managed to come up with, taking a long blink and angling your head up at the unpleasant taste the insinuation left.

"That's not what I meant," he sighed, putting up a hand to apologize and dropping his head. "What I meant was, if it happened before, meeting some guy, at work or wherever... What am I s'pose ta do about it, huh? Being off somewhere shooting, in Bahstin, wherever... Fahck," he hissed, scrunching his face and closing his eyes tight as he scrubbed his hands up and down his face with a deep inhale. His arms fell to his lap, hands hanging between his knees. "You're beautiful. You're amazing. You know that? You could get any guy to do whatever you want just by smilin' at him." He threw out a hand for emphasis. "What guy wouldn't be hittin' on you when I'm naht around?"

Try to forget that he thinks you're some kind of siren, luring men to do your bidding or to their doom. He couldn't possibly actually think you'd slip and let someone else take his place while he was off working or back home. No. But here he was, looking pretty unconfident about your character or his importance. Either way, it was a completely misplaced worry.

"I'm not that kind of person," you assured him. "You and me? I'll admit, us meeting the way we did, that's some kind of rare thing coming together I can't explain. But I do know you have nothing to worry about." His head came back up, eyes looking around the room while he scratched along his jaw and you hesitated, needing a moment to work up the guts for what you were about to offer. "You want me to cancel my contracts with Kingdom and Frank? I could-"

"No!" he winced, shaking his head and looking back to you. "No, don't. It's not that. It's not Frank. He's your friend. You know him a while now. I get that... I know it doesn't sound like it, but I like knowing you got Frank around like that. I know he looks out for you; always takes care of you." Chris sighed. "It's me. I'm the fuckin' problem." He stood up and started a short pacing path, one hand stuffed in his pocket and the other clenching in and out of a fist by his side. "There's something about- " He paused, staring hard out the window for a second, before shaking his head and going on. "I am jealous. Okay? ...Why him, huh? How come Grillo, and everyone else, gets to see everything first? Gets the extra time with you every day and the jokes and the nick names. ...I gotta do better. " He stopped and shook his head, going on as if he were talking to himself. "I gotta spend more time here. That's it. That's what I have to do." Chris turned to look at you again. "Take you to Bahstin with me, when I can, and stay out here. I don't need to be doing shit like this anymore."

Whoa. You didn't realize how your pulse had quickened listening to him go on. He didn't have anything to take out on himself. This conversation definitely wasn't supposed to go like this. It was just a joke about the Super Bowl, for crying out loud.
"It's okay," you promised, putting up a calming hand. "We're okay. I'm not complaining. And don't think that, to please me, you've gotta stop."

"No, I do," he interrupted, nodding to himself and a pair of fingers rubbing contemplatively along the front of his chin. "I want to. The only way this won't get messed up or I'm not gonna miss out is if I'm here." Chris paused, his hand thoughtfully holding his chin before gesturing a question out to you. "Is that what you want? ...Me? Out here?"


"Of course, I do," you said. "But I wouldn't ask you to give up."

"No. See?" he cut in, a new light in his eye, as he came to sit back down on the couch again. "That's just it. I'm not giving anything up. I'm just getting where I should be right now; where I shoulda been awhile ago."

It took an effort to swallow down the ginormous lump in your throat. Nobody had ever said anything so profound about dating you before. "Okay," you said, not quite sure what else to say.

Chris looped his hand for you to come closer and you tipped forward onto your knees and then on your hip to lean into his side. "I'm gonna be here more," he said, setting his head over yours as you both folded arms around each other. You stayed like that for a couple of quiet moments before Chris straightened up and said, "Let's get out of here. We'll go grab lunch and see a movie."

You drove to lunch, a way of returning the favor for Chris driving you home, you joked. There was a restaurant along the beach that was pretty empty because of the weather and you ate there while you debated movies and looked up show times. You ended up catching a matinee of the new Chris Pine movie and asked for your Chris' judgment on the fake New England accent Pine used. Chris gave a shrug of approval, noting the other Chris did pretty good, but there's nothing like a true New Englander's accent. You had to agree. But you were biased.

By the time you got home, the skies were giving way to sunshine and you decided to walk Archie down to the beach, feeling a little guilty he was getting shorted earlier because of the weather. You strolled along, hand in hand with Chris, carrying shoes and toes in the sand. Whatever sour mood he had earlier in the day over your long distance relationship and his jealousy of Frank had seemed to subside. You talked about how the first days of reshoots had gone and about the last weeks of Kingdom winding down. Walking along the water's edge, Archie wondered ahead of you, off his leash, and you tried to needle a few details out of Chris about Marvel's next move, but he wasn't budging.

"You know I can't," he complained, rolling his eyes at you when you asked him to tell you what the Russos were plotting for their next movie.

"They say Sebastian's been measured for a Cap costume," you noted, trying to lead something out of him.

"Nope," he said, shaking his head and his eyes fixed front. "I'm not even gonna dignify that with a response."

"You're done for," you teased. "People are ready for Bucky Cap."

"You know I'm in Infinity Wars, right?" he frowned at you, his brow creasing unhappily at the notion people might be eager for a new Captain.
"You'll always be Steve Rogers," you sweetly assured him, with a comforting hand on his strong arm, before you paused a beat and added, "It's just that nobody said there wouldn't be a better Cap."

"A better Ca- What did you just say to me?" he scoffed, plainly insulted, but fighting hard against a smile nonetheless. "That's it," Chris declared, dropping his shoes and latching his arms around your waist from behind, hoisting you up. He started walking toward the water. "In you go!"

Chris waded out a few steps until the surf was crashing up to his knees, your hands locked over his forearms in fear, raising your knees to ball up away from the lapping waves as you screamed a plea for him not to drop you in the cool water. "No no no! Please! I'm sorry!"

"What was that?" he asked. "I can't hear you."

"I'm sorry!" you yelled.

"Who's Captain America?" he asked, twisting at the waist, as if he were building momentum to throw you in.

"You are," you desperately assured him.

"Who is?" he demanded, bending ever so slightly at the waist to lower you and threaten you with a wave rolling in.

"Fuck!" you swore, before you let out a sharp scream and he leaned back again. "You are! You're Cap!"

His laughter bursting into your ear, he swung you around to the beach. He carried you at the front of his hip, heading back to the dry sand and setting you down on your ass. You turned around, smacking at his leg and trying your best, but failing, to scowl up at him while you grumbled that he was a jerk and caught your breath. Hugging an arm across your collarbone, Chris dropped down behind you, his legs splayed open past your hips, and pulled you back to rest against him. Archie came back from the surf and dropped into the sand along Chris' right leg.

"Ya bastard," you muttered, with a smile, elbowing him softly in the ribs.

"Nah. You know you love me," he insisted, arrogantly, before brushing your ponytail aside and pressing a firm kiss against the curve of your neck.

"Right," you laughed, glancing over your shoulder. "After that? Fat chance."

"Because I do," he shrugged, his eyes watching his fingertip tracing a line over the freckles on your shoulder.

His hand fell away when you twisted around to face him, feeling the heat building in your cheeks. "You-? ...Wait. What?"

Not you. Not the girl with the wild hair and polka dot rain boots. The girl who can't keep her foot out of her mouth for five minutes. Surely, not the girl from the hair department, who plays drinking games and shakes her ass in dingy bars. The nobody from Ohio, who casually swears too much and shitposts about her dog and job. Not her. Not you.

But, there he was. Leaning back on one arm in the sand, smiling warmly at you from under a Bruins ball cap. Hooking a finger to hang lazily in the belt loop at the hip of your jeans. Head tipping to one side to admire you with something more than the usual flirty fondness. Saying it.
"I love you."

*Holy Jesus Christ.* What a terrible time to be lost for words. You blinked, your jaw slacking open enough to pull a deep breath to hold onto.

"You don't have to say it," he shook his head. "I just wanted you to know."

You shook your head, clearing the thumping sound of your heart in your ears and swallowing the lump in your throat. "I want to," you said, fumbling, like you always do. "I mean, because I do...I love you, too."

An adoring grin came across Chris' lips. The longer he looked at you, the more his smile beamed. He wrapped an arm back around you and pulled you against him again.

"Well, now we got that settled..." he quipped, bending to dot a kiss on the point of your shoulder.

"Yeah, that's out there," you giggled.

"Oh, it's out there," he agreed. "There was a witness. You can't take it back now. Archie heard it. It'd break his little heart."

"Well, I could never break his heart," you promised, giving Archie's side a good scratching.
It all started with gas. The credit card reader at the pump was down. They all were. You filled your tank and dropped into line with the other gas station customers, eyes scanning the store while the clerk broke open a new roll of quarters to keep cashing out the patrons ahead of you. The line was painfully slow, but a small smile crossed your face as you panned over the magazine rack. Doing 'sexy stare' back at you was Chris from the mess of tabloids, health and sports magazines, and chewing gum on display beside you.

What the hell? you figured, reaching out for the glossy publication. You fanned the pages, as you scooted along in line, until you got to Chris' article. You admired the photos while you inched up in the cue, happy you grabbed the magazine because, as always- damn. And for the novelty of knowing that hot guy in the magazine, shilling expensive Swiss watches, was your boyfriend. Oh, yeah. And, now you had something to read over dinner. So, bonus.

You hit a drive-thru on the way home. You'd had a productive Tuesday, so far. Made it to the grocery and pet stores, got the laundry done and apartment cleaned, got the oil changed in the Jeep, and made it to the post office to mail some bills and a birthday card all by 2p.m. Don't forget Archie's walks. Look at all you got accomplished. Good job! You deserve a cooking-free meal.

Plating up your hassle-free, late lunch from Fatburger, you settled down at the dining room table. Burger in hand and Archie waiting with hopeful eyes, you flipped open your magazine to read. The journalist shadowing him around for the IWC events started with the usual BS. Just another writer talking up an actor's career in case the reader was unfamiliar with their work, a few lines about the upcoming Cap movie. Some fluffy description of Chris' personality, some eyebrow wagging assessments of his, ahem, physical body of work. Some things about his family, Boston, blah blah. Hitting up the bar after a press event, getting tipsy with Chris and his celebrity friends, after-partying at his hotel, flirty hands and suggestive comments, and- Wait.

What in the actual fuck? You started rereading lines, abandoning your burger and pushing aside the plate to put the magazine directly under your nose. You had to be sure you weren't misreading things. And, nope. This bitch is talking about Chris saying easily misinterpreted things, him buying drinks, and his "friendly" handsyness. And not in an objective reporter way. More like a 'hoping someone's getting lucky' way. The article ended without any mention of any blatantly inappropriate behavior with the writer, but alluded to some more questionable behavior at the accompanying photoshoot that same week. And, of course, no mention of a girlfriend.

Are they kidding with this shit? You pushed the magazine away, more than a little flustered by what you read. Why the hell did you even buy this stupid thing? After a minute of staring at the magazine across the table, you realized your heart was beating faster and there was a subtle shake to your hands. You took a deep breath. Now what? You can't unread something. But, at the same time, can you believe what you read?

Fuck. Do you ask him about it? Holy shit. Has anyone else seen this? What are you supposed to do?! Oh, yeah. Check the Internet. 'Cause that always helps.

You took out your phone. You fussed around with a few search phrases, looked back at the calendar to figure out when the interview may have happened in Geneva, added dates to the search, and tried a few other things. [Chris Evans photoshoot, Geneva, bts] was the trick. And talk about tricks. 'Trick' was the nicest thing you could think to call the ladies in the photos from the tabloid pictures you saw. Tapping on a few, the posting dates matched or the blurbs specifically mentioned the magazine shoot they were spongy on.
The photos got you hot under the collar. You felt your cheeks warm, this time from fury. There was no mistaking that these were the right pictures referenced in the article. There was Chris, on set in the same clothes for the shoot, hanging on to three different girls. Wrestling and laughing with a brunette, several holds or hugs with all three, cheek kisses, and, you'll be damned if that's not him with his face latched on to some blonde's neck. And just a week ago that son of a bitch tells you he-

"Oh, my god!"

"Mother. fucker!"

You actually yelled that. Unladylike or not, it was completely, 100%, totally understandable. In fact, that was probably the least you could do, given the level of pissivity you were experiencing. Oh, hell no. You stared at your phone in your hand, fuming for a long moment before exiting the browser. You opened a message to Karen, muttering profanities the entire time you typed.

**You:** You were right. You were so right idk why I didn't listen

**Kare Bear:** Thank you:) But what am I right about this time?

**You:** That son of a bitch cheated!!!!

**Kare Bear:** Mother fucker!!!! >:/

**Kare Bear:** R u ok? Where r u?

**You:** SUPER PISSED!!! At home

**Kare Bear:** Don't move. I'm on my way

You put your phone aside and tried to go back to your food while you waited. The few bites of your burger and some fries you did manage were hard to chew and swallow. You didn't seem to have an appetite anymore. You pulled apart your sandwich and fed the burger patty to Archie. At least someone was happy. The rest of your meal was destined for the trash. You had just tucked yourself into the corner of the couch to wait for the cavalry to arrive when your phone rang. It was Chris.

What? Did he have a sixth sense, or something? Maybe his ears were burning. The thought of Chris Evans on fire made you smirk. Shame on you. You tapped 'ignore' and turned on the TV for a distraction. You were supposed to go to dinner later. Obviously, you were in no mood to talk and were pretty confident no one was having dinner together, he just didn't know it. Man, you're catty, sometimes. But, you have an excuse today.

A voicemail notification lit up your screen, along with the obvious note about Chris' missed call. You flipped your middle finger at your phone as hard as you could, because that's real mature, and began skimming through channels. And, really? Today had to be the day some genius picked to run Captain America: The First Avenger? Screw the TV, too. You turned it off and threw the remote into the far end of the couch. You could just wait in silence. Silence that was interrupted barely ten minutes later with another call you ignored from Chris. Another ten minutes after that and Karen mercifully arrived.

You opened the door and bit your tongue. You had been prepared to start spilling all the gory details when Sophie said 'hello' and waltzed inside to hug Archie. Karen shrugged and apologized. She had been on her way to pick up Sophie from school when you messaged.

"Sweetie, why don't you play with Archie or watch TV for a bit," Karen suggested, as you shut the door behind her. "Mommy's gotta talk to [y/n] for a bit."
You grabbed the magazine and your phone and Karen followed you into your bedroom. First, you told her to read the article. While she did, she stopped for the occasional disgruntled and questioning look up at you as she went. Karen was just agreeing how bad the article read when she started to say it didn't quite sound like 'cheating' though. You showed her your phone and she took it all back.

"And who the hell is this hooker?" Karen demanded, looking through the pics you found.

She had to be talking about the blonde. "Some Swiss hussy from Hair or Makeup. I don't know, but I want to kill her," you said.

"I'll help you," Karen nodded, squinting angrily at the image on your phone. "Have you talked to him?"

You shook your head, just as your phone chimed a text message. Karen looked down at the device in her hand and then up to you, saying it was Chris. You both stared at each other, drawing a blank on what to do.

"Well," Karen shrugged, holding out your phone to you, "here's your chance."

You took the phone and read the message. Short and simple, asking if you were still meeting for dinner or if you wanted him to pick you up instead. You filled Karen in on the plans you had for later with him while you opened your messages to reply.

"Tell him to order in, 'cause you're not going," Karen scoffed.

That was actually kind of clever. You smirked and shook your head. He probably already saw the read receipt show up on his phone. You couldn't wait long. If you did, he'd probably call. And you definitely weren't ready for that.

**You:** Change of plans. I can't meet you for dinner.

Diplomatic, simple, yet effective. It should buy you two a minute to come up with a plan. You told Karen what you sent and she nodded her approval as Chris replied.

**Flip Cup Hero:** Um okay. Not for a bad reason I hope.

Bad? **Ha!** You have no fucking idea how bad, buddy.

**Flip Cup Hero:** Rain check for tomorrow after work?

"Nope!" Karen declared, saying what you were thinking.

**Ugh!** Just...how to say that besides just 'nope'? How about 'No, you cheating, lying, son of a bitch'?

You fumed for a moment.

**You:** Tomorrow's not looking good either

**Ha.** You were pretty proud of yourself for that one. You and Karen both had a mischievous snicker over it before you began to complain about not knowing what to do or say. You know he'll keep asking. Or, he'll just call. Like that predictable bastard happened to do just then. You and Karen shared a panic stricken look before she shooed you on to answer it. He sounded pleasant as ever when you answered the call on speaker.

"Everything okay?" he asked. "Nothing bad happened, did it?"
"You could say that," you shrugged. "Look, now's not a good time."

"What's going on?" he pressed, a tone of concern dropping into his voice. "You alright?"

"Peachy," you said, finding yourself scowling at the phone. "I'm just- We'll talk later. I got some stuff to do."

Like make a voodoo doll of Chris Evans to poke with a pin...or a giant knife...before you light it on fire and drop it into a chummed up shark tank.

"You don't sound okay," he noted. "Is somethi-

Karen gave you the 'cut' sign and you nodded. "Yeah. Hey, I'm really not into talking right now. Later, though. Okay?"

"[Y/n]," he tried again, "are you-

"I'll let you know later," you reiterated. "Gotta go." You hung up the phone and turned to Karen. "Well, that was fun," you frowned.

"Oh, honey," Karen cooed, waving you to come sit by her on the bed. "After you told me you guys were a thing, I didn't want to be right. It all sounded so good."

"It all sounded good," you nodded, resting your head on her shoulder. "It was the reading that ruined it."

Life had been exceptionally wonderful before you bought that god damned magazine. You were dating Chris Evans, he loved you and you loved him. And now...Sigh. Well, now, if he somehow magically appeared before you, you figured a good ol' soccer style kick to the nuts was a good way to start a conversation.

"Fuckin' reading," Karen grumbled.

"Fuckin' reading," you seconded and you both shared a sad chuckle, before you frowned with a petulant whine.

"Come on," Karen said, standing up and moving for the door. "You look like you could use a drink."

You followed her out to the kitchen. Sophie was set up on the couch, with one hand on the TV remote and the other rubbing Archie's side while he was balled up on the cushion beside her. In the kitchen, Karen pulled two glasses out of the cupboard and grabbed the bottle of Jack from the counter. She poured you a generous drink and a sip for herself, hoisting her cup with a silent toast to you. You spent the next half hour talking quietly about your current situation.

Clearly, you had some concerns. What else did he do that week? How many times had stuff like this happened? Holy crap. Were you just another hussy from the hair department?

"Way I see it," Karen noted, "you can either invite him over, or go somewhere, and hear his side...or you just walk away. Neither of which will be enjoyable or easy."

"That's for damn sure," you groaned, halfway to another sip of your drink before there was a knock at your door.

"No way," Karen insisted, as you both locked panicked gazes on each other and you set down your
Practically tiptoeing to the door, you winked into the peephole. Sure enough, it was Chris. You gave
Karen a worried look and held your hands up helplessly. She shrugged, shaking her head with her
own lost expression. Meanwhile, Archie sniffed at the door and excitedly wagged his tail, possibly
the only one to be happy about who was at the door. You swallowed hard and opened the door.
Chris smiled, a hint of concern putting a faint wrinkle in his brow, when he saw you.

"Chris. Hi. What are you doing here?" you managed, your mind a chaotic mess of all kinds of mean,
profane, and angry things to say...if there weren't an impressionable child in earshot.

Don't swear in front of Sophie. Don't punch him in the face in front of Sophie. Don't destroy him in
front of Sophie. Deep breath.

"I'm sorry for just showing up," he said, "but, when you bailed on dinner, you just sounded so-"

He stopped, catching sight of Karen in the kitchen doorway, arms crossed and lips pursed in
annoyance. If looks could kill... Chris' head tipped and curiosity mixed into his expression.

"Hey, Karen," he smiled, shaking off his questioning look to greet her. When she responded with a
jut of her chin, he did a double take before he looked back at you with a new confusion. More than a
bit reluctant, your shoulders fell as you waved him to step inside for an explanation.

"Am I in trouble?" he asked, giving a quick look between you and Karen before an awkward snort
of a small laugh. "Did I do something I don't know about? Because you two look like you've got an
axe to grind. Orrr I'm interrupting something else altogether. Hoping for it's 'something else
altogether' here," he suggested, with a small, playful smile.

"Come on, short stuff," Karen said, curling a finger of her outstretched hand for Sophie to come
along. "Let's take Archie out to the front yard to play. Grownups need to talk."

Sophie turned off the television and hurried to the door to pull down Archie's leash. She clipped it on
and handed the loop to her mother. Karen gave you a quick half smile, for encouragement or
sympathy, and a wary side eye to Chris as Sophie slipped out the front door with Archie following
behind. With the door shut, you heard Chris loudly exhale. You casually tucked your thumbs into the
tops of your pockets, fingers impatiently drumming over the front of your jeans. Chris stuffed his
hands into his own pockets, chin down and lips pulled tight over his teeth. He looked up through his
brow at you, like he was waiting for bad news.

"Obviously not 'something else altogether'. Okay, babe," he sighed. "Tell me why you're mad."

"Why I'm mad?" you repeated, with all the indignance it deserved.

You held up a finger, with a sarcastically pleasant smile, to tell him to wait. You disappeared down
the hall to your room, fetching the magazine. Rolled into a tube in your hand, with the pages still
folded open to his article, you held it up like it were the damned Olympic Torch as you came back
into the living room. You pressed it into his chest, with a little follow up push to make sure it stayed
there beneath his hand that came up to catch it. Chris fumbled with the unfurling pages until he could
see himself and the article in front of him.

Holding the magazine in his right hand, Chris shrugged with the other. "Okay. So?" he asked, not
quite getting it, apparently. "What? Did I say something wrong in here or..?"

"Did you read it?" you asked.
"I don't usually," he told you, glancing at the pages again, maybe hoping to skim a clue off the paper. "I mean, I was there, so why bother?...What's the point, ya know?"

"Maybe you should start reading them," you suggested, a slight glare leveling your gaze. "Or maybe your publicist, anybody. That way you know what you look like."

"What do I look like?" he asked, it coming off as a bit of a challenge to you.

You huffed out a disapproving snort. "Like some frat boy Lothario."

"The fuck?" he spat, plainly insulted and caught off guard.

"Did ya have a good time, flirting it up?" you asked, gesturing to the magazine in his hand by his side. "Were there enough friends and girls hanging on? Was the reporter cute enough? Did those twits at the photo shoot giggle enough at your stupid jokes for you?"

If he was mad a second ago, he was pissed now. Chris threw the magazine away into the couch, his brow creasing down and lip snarled up in disbelief. You crossed your arms, in no mood of your own.

"Are you kiddin' me?" he asked.

"Are you?" you bit back.

"What the fuck are you even talking about?" he begged, raising his hands and shoulders up in question.

"I'm talking about that reporter writing about her flirting filled days following Chris Evans around," you said, gesturing a quick hand at the magazine on the couch before folding your arms tight again. "About pictures with those hookers from hair and makeup you seemed pretty cozied up to at the photocall."

"Hookers from hair and makeup?" he parroted, with an angry huff.

"Yeah," you nodded. "Tabloids have behind the scenes pics of you hugged up with them during the shoot." You jabbed a finger back at the couch as a reminder of the photoshoot that went with the article. "Pics, of that shoot, of you all laughing, holding and kissing them? Ring a bell?"

Chris grimaced, waving a hand over the floor, and his eyes crushing closed as he shook his lolling head at you. "You're being fuckin' ridiculous," he complained. "That's not what happened."

"Really?" you sassed. "Because it sure as hell looks like that's what happened. It's right there, all over the fucking Internet, saying it happened, in stunning HD."

"Really?" you snapped. "Because it sure as hell looks like that's what happened. It's right there, all over the fucking Internet, saying it happened, in stunning HD."

"Will you shut up and listen to me?" he snapped, expression still wincing his displeasure.

You held out both empty palms toward him, sarcastically inviting him to go on. "Oh, sure. Please."

By all means. Asshole.

He cocked his head, giving you a silent moment's worth of an annoyed gaze, before he spoke. "I don't know what pictures you're talking about," he said. You jutted your chin in mocking agreement and he sighed and scowled at you again before going on. "Was I cutting up with the crew at the shoot? Probably. It was last month. I don't remember."

Oh, yeah? You pulled your phone out of your back pocket. The web browser was still on the tabloid
pics you and Karen had been looking at. You unlocked your phone and tossed it to him. Well, actually, that was definitely a throw. The loud smack the phone made hitting his palm proved that. Good thing that thing’s in an Otter Box.

He looked at your phone, making a few swipes at the screen, his shoulders sagging a bit as he went. "[Y/n]," he shrugged, "I don't know what to tell you. It's not what it looks like, that's for damn sure."

_Ha!_ It wasn't? Because your eyesight is pretty good and those are definitely his lips on some girl's cheek and on some other girl's neck with her hand on his thigh and- No! This bastard is not gonna tell you you're seeing shit!

"Which one isn't?" you asked, in pure, spiteful mockery. You lazily pointed a finger in little circles towards the pictures you knew he saw. "Was it the ones with the brunette you have your arms around for, like, a half dozen pictures or where you're kissing her cheek?" Chris let out a grumbling exhale as his weight shifted. "Or the one of the blonde with her hand on your thigh and your fucking mouth all over her neck?" Chris' head dropped in another shake while you paused a beat to see if there was an answer. "Hm? Which moment was your favorite? 'Cause that blonde bitch is mine."

"Baby, ple-" he began, but a sharp raise of a warning finger and a dirty look from you told him to stop with the pet names. "[Y/n]," he tried again, taking a step forward and lobbing your phone to join the magazine on the couch, "I know what that looks like...but, it's nothing. It doesn't mean anything."

"To who, exactly?" You needed clarification, because... "Because to me, and all of my family or friends who would see that, it means a lot."

"I was just-" Chris stopped to change his approach. "It was early in the morning. I'll admit," he said, holding a hand up to vow, "there was a lot of drinking the night before, with some friends I hadn't seen in a while, and I was probably still a little-"

"Ohhh ho ho, no," you shook your head. "Nope. You are not gonna 'I was drunk or it wouldn't have happened' me. Because, ya know why? That's a pathetic excuse. And it makes you sound like an even shittier person, because no matter what, if you really cared, it wouldn't have happened in the god damned first place."

That's it. Point made. Blood's beginning to boil. Time to leave before murder happens. You walked around the far side of the coffee table to get your phone from the couch. He turned to watch you, mouth dropping then rising like he had something to say but didn't know what it was. Ignoring his outstretched hand as he plaintively said your name, you went by him, grabbing your purse and keys off the dining table and heading out the door.

"Pull the door shut, when you leave," you told him, and you were gone.

It was only a few seconds, probably just long enough for him to process what you just did, before you heard the door open and shut upstairs behind you and him call your name. You kept going and heard a footfall start from the top of the stairway. _Nnnope._ You continued downstairs until you met Karen and Sophie in the yard with a forced smile. Chris was out the building door at your heels, asking for you to talk to him.

Turning around, you held up a finger to tell him 'no' while he protested. "[Y/n]," he complained. "You're really just walking away? Without letting me-"

Karen was by you in an instant, in full-on momma bird mode. "Don't even try that guilt trip shit and cause a scene in front of my little girl," Karen hissed, somehow managing to wear a pleasant smile to not upset Sophie, while her whispered tone all but threatened to castrate Chris on the spot. "[Y/n]
will call you, if she wants to talk to you."

Fucking high five, Karen! She hooked her arm around your elbow and hugged you close as you both turned to collect Sophie and your dog.

"I'm sorry," he said, behind you.

"She'll call you later," Karen politely reminded him, with a parting wave as your little group fell into step and climbed into Karen's car.

You hazarded a glance out the window while you buckled up. Chris was still where you left him, halfway down the front walk of your building and looking lost. Ever perceptive Sophie asked what happened and you smiled sweetly as you explained, "Sometimes, boys are dumb, Soph."

Karen nodded her agreement and pulled away from the curb. Slouching in the seat, you eyeballed the side view mirror to see Chris look after the car from the sidewalk for a moment before turning around and throwing his hands up in the air, looking like he was talking to himself. He might have looked a little miserable. Good. That was only fair. So did you.

You spent the rest of the day at Karen's place. You sat at the dining room table, the two of you helping Sophie with her homework for a bit before you moved to the kitchen to whip up some dinner before Karen's husband came home. Your phone rang for the sixth time in three hours. Staring at Chris' number on the caller ID, you cocked your head in genuine curiosity.

"How long do you think my battery will last if I keep letting it ring like this?" you wondered aloud.

"Just hit 'ignore' and send him to voicemail," Karen suggested.

"If it rings, it gives him hope that I'll answer," you pointed out.

Karen stopped, turning away from the open refrigerator to look at you. "That's diabolical," she told you. "I am so proud of you."

You smiled at yourself, enjoying, maybe a little too much, being childish and cruel. "Yeah, well," you shrugged, "he started it."

"You gonna listen to the messages?" Karen wondered.

"Hard to say," you admitted, glancing back down when the phone stopped ringing. You held up a finger for Karen to wait as you watched. About twenty seconds later, a voicemail notification appeared under the missed call and you pointed at the message. "That's six calls, three voicemails."

"So, are you done with him?" Karen asked, reaching into the cupboard for plates. "Or are you gonna let him stress about it for a while and try talk to him?"

"I'm definitely not in the mood right now," you shook your head. "I don't know. I'm so mad right now, I'd rather see him get hit by a bus than talk to him."

"Understandable," Karen nodded.

"What would you do?" you asked, unlocking your phone to stop the reminder chime for your missed calls from coming.

Karen sighed, leaning back against the kitchen counter. "Ya know, I don't know," she thoughtfully
admitted. "Part of me wants to know how far this got. Part of me's just rooting for the bus and could give a shit what he says. Then again, this wasn't just a fling. You said there was something there. Not even two weeks ago he's saying he-

"I know what he said," you winced, holding up a hand to stop her. "God. I can't believe I fell for it."

"So, I guess you have to figure out if it counts for something," she suggested. "Do you want to know what happened or are you okay with the little bit you think you know?"

"Yes," you said, emphatically, before a short pause in consideration and you whined, "And no." You groaned, dropping your head onto your folded arms on the top of the kitchen island. "Fuck my life," you complained.

Karen came over and soothingly massaged her fingers into your scalp. "You and Archie stay here tonight," she told you. "That way you don't have to worry about if he's still hanging out to talk to you."

"Thanks, Kare Bear," you mumbled.

"Any time, babe," she promised.

You woke up to a total of 7 missed calls and 2 texts since you left him standing in your front yard. The voicemails you didn't have the intestinal fortitude to listen to yet. The texts you read, despite knowing he would see the receipt time stamp on his phone. You didn't want that to give him hope or nerve to call again, but your curiosity got the better of you.

7:23 pm Flip Cup Hero: Baby please answer your phone. We need to talk about this. Please let me explain.

9:14 pm Flip Cup Hero: I'm not going to call anymore tonight. I know you have to be up early. Will you please call me tomorrow or answer if I call you? [Y/n] I love you. I'm sorry.

You let out a small groan of a sigh just as there was a soft knock on the guest room door. Archie stirred with a long stretch before trotting over to say good morning to Allen as he poked his head in the door. He smiled when he saw you sitting up in bed. Allen said good morning and you rubbed at your tired eyes, still stung from crying yourself to sleep the night before.

"Hey," he said, quietly as Sophie was still asleep in the next room. "I'm gonna drop you off at home on my way to work. You wanna stay here again tonight? Archie can hangout today while you're working."

"Thanks," you smiled, "but we should go home."

"Door's always open," Allen shrugged. "Coffee's on downstairs, whenever you're ready."

You felt like a secret agent, getting out of Allen's car, careful to check that you didn't see Chris' car on the street and keeping your head on a swivel all the way to your building's front door. You didn't feel confident that he wasn't around until you got into your apartment. Even then, you stopped for a minute to listen and peeked around corners before you hurried into the shower to get ready for work.

Your day already off to a rough start, you weren't quite your usual effervescent self and people
noticed. You played it off as being tired. You "guessed" that you hadn't slept well, though you pretended to not know why. People gave you their sympathy, offering you an extra hand or cup of coffee here and there. Don't lie. It was kind of nice to be coddled.

You kept your phone on for the day, against your better judgement. The device occasionally begging for your attention from your back pocket. Three more texts from Chris came by lunch.

9:32 Flip Cup Hero: Good morning. Can we talk today?

10:07 Flip Cup Hero: Please don't ignore me like this. I want to explain. I'm sorry

12:03 Flip Cup Hero: Can I come see you tonight after we're both off work? Please call me back. I'm sorry. I love you. I hope you're having a good day.

You groaned and rolled your eyes at the last message. You could practically hear him saying these messages. It was as aggravating as it was sadly sweet. You shook your head, opening up the reply box. You weren't interested in dealing with this now. There was still the pile of voicemails from the night before waiting for you.

You: Please don't bother me when I'm at work. No- you cannot come over.

You should have known he'd message you back.

Flip Cup Hero: Can we meet somewhere? We need to talk

You: No

Flip Cup Hero: Please

You: I'm at work. Please stop messaging me

That did the trick. He didn't reply. Your distractions were gone, but the unexplainable nauseated twist in your stomach wasn't. Every time your mind wondered back over the events of the day before, the feeling flared up. It soured your appetite for the last of your lunch enough that you threw it away. You went back to work, intently watching the scenes film, focusing meticulously on details and dialogue to keep your head Chris-free.
Chapter 19

When your phone buzzed in your pocket two hours later, you were fuming, prepared to light into Chris' ass about boundaries and respect. When the caller ID came up 'unknown', you hurried outside as you connected the call, ready to verbally bitch slap him for trying to block his number to get you to answer.

"Are you kidding? Really?" you begged into the phone, sounding quite bored at his attempt and trying to be quiet until you were off the hot set.

"Hell yeah, really. Bear fight!"

_Oh, my god._ Sebastian Stan. Good job, you snarky little brat. _Shit._ Save that number so you don't screw this up again. Well, if he ever calls you again.

"I'm so sorry," you whined, slapping your palm to your forehead as your unseen penance to him for being a bitch before you knew who you were talking to.

"For what?" he asked, sounding a bit confused.

"For being snippy," you explained. "I thought you were Chris."

"You thought I was Chris?" he parroted, with no less clarity then he'd had before. "No, it's Sebastian. I was calling to see when you were free to catch The Revenant."

"Sorry. No, I know who it is now," you said, still apologizing and feeling like an ass.

Which you should. You're so quick to fight lately. You need to go to the gym more or something. Find a healthy avenue for all this new rage.

"What'd he do to deserve all that anyway?" Sebastian asked, with a small laugh.

You huffed out a breath. "You wouldn't believe," you grumbled.

Sebastian laughed again. "Dumbass," he mused.

"Pretty much," you agreed, a helpless motion of your hand up for no one to see.

"Movie?" he reminded you.

"Yeah, I don't know," you hesitated, the struggle with the decision coming through in your plaintive tone. "I don't know that hanging out with you guys anymore is-"

"Wait a minute," he interrupted. "Anymore? Are you- Did you two split up?!" You're hesitant pause was apparently a good enough answer. "Are you kidding me?! What the fuck did he do? I don't fuckin' believe this. You guys are great together!"

"I'm at work," you said, taking a look around to see if you were being missed. "I really can't get into-"

"Alright. Okay," he relented. "I'll stop. I'm sorry...You still wanna hang out? Need to talk about it?"

"That's sweet," you began, "but it just happened and I don't really know what-"
"Say no more," he assured you. "You wanna catch the movie and just get away for a couple hours? We can find a late one after you're outta work."

"I don't know," you groaned.


You couldn't help it and smiled. "Bear fight," you accepted.

You met Sebastian at the theater. He was waiting off to the side in the lobby, smiling with a pair of tickets held up to proudly show you for the 9:45 showing of the movie you both had renamed Bear Fight. He greeted you with a friendly hug and squeeze, that you took as sympathetic and reassuring, while he thanked you for coming to hang out with him before letting you go. You waited out the short line at the concessions stand for you both to get drinks and a box of candy for you, your treat since he bought the seats.

"We don't have to talk about it," he told you, as you made your way to the theater. "But, if it makes you feel better, he did look like shit at work today. Was really short with everyone and looked pretty run down."

"A little bit," you said, giving him a half-smile.

"But, for right now, priorities," he announced, pocketing your stubs from the ticket taker. "Bear Fight."

"Let's do this," you smiled, raising a fist and trying to shake off the blues and get excited about the movie.

The theater was a bit crowded and you ended up off to one side and mid-way up. You enjoyed the movie, Sebastian and you stifling giggles and elbowing each other when Bear Fight actually showed the bear fight. It wasn't a funny scene, by any means, but you two idiots thought it was hilarious, elbowing each other and snickering for your own juvenile reasons.

Walking out of the theater after the show, Sebastian put a brotherly arm around your shoulder. "Have fun?" he asked.

"Who doesn't enjoy a good bear fight?" you asked, with a laugh.

"I know I said we weren't gonna talk about it," he said, as you crossed the theater lobby, "but I feel kinda guilty."

"Why would you feel-"

He cut your protest off, saying, "Because everything was fine. We were all friends before I opened up my big mouth and told him you liked him. If I'd 'a just kept my damned mouth shut..." He shrugged giving you a tug closer before letting you go to open the door for you to pass through ahead of him.

"You have nothing to apologize for," you promised him. "Seriously, we're all adults. ...Well, most of us, anyway."

Sebastian chuckled. "You want me to talk to him or something?" he offered.
"No, thanks," you smiled, politely. "Just ignore it, leave it alone, whatever."

"We're still friends though, right?" he asked, pocketing his hands in his jacket and a hint of worry showing in his voice and wrinkled brow.

You hadn't considered you would be. After all, he's Chris' friend and his co-star. They were friends first and they were sure to work together again. You, a lowly hairstylist, were completely dispensable in the studio's, or anyone else's, eyes.

"I guess," you shrugged.

"Don't sound too enthused," he smirked, with a snort.

"Well, I mean, you two-"

"I'm just teasin'," he smiled, giving you a hug goodnight. "Just 'cause he's a dumbass doesn't mean we can't still be friends. What? You'd give me the cold shoulder if you and me show up on a set together sometime? After tonight? After Bear Fight?"

You laughed, smoothing your hair behind your ears after the embrace. "No," you assured him. How you could not, looking at that smiling Romanian puppy?

Sebastian held up his fist to you. "Bear Fight for life," he smiled.

"Fo' sho',' you nodded, hitting the pound and lockin' it down.

On your ride home, your amusement at the movie with Sebastian slowly thinned and the radio barely kept the thoughts of your fight with Chris at bay. Whenever Chris popped back into your head, you cranked the volume up a little higher to exercise him out. Archie enjoyed his walk with you. You, on the other hand, twitched every time a guy passed you, thinking it was Chris come to talk to you. By the time you laid down for bed, you were beat. There was a tired tension in your jaw and shoulders, and when Chris crept into your thoughts, there was nothing to fight him off with. Archie climbed up onto the bed to lay his head over your hip when you finally cried yourself to sleep.

You met Frank at the gym at 7:30, a standing appointment from earlier in the week. There were already a couple of guys sparring in the ring and several guys working over the heavy and speed bags. Frank greeted you with an eager smile after a long pull off his water bottle. You smiled back, dropping your gym bag on the floor next to his. You deposited your car keys and took out your wraps, setting your gloves on top of your bag to wait their turn.

"See?" Grillo beamed. "You get a taste and you keep coming back."

You laughed, tipping your head thoughtfully to one side. "You know, it's kinda cheap therapy," you figured. You were this close to buying a monthly pass.

"Exactly," Frank nodded, tipping a finger toward you in agreement. "So, how you doin' this morning? You didn't go out boozin' it up last night to come in here all dehydrated and hungover, did you?"

"No," you sneered, before a grin as you finished wrapping your left hand. "I got a good night's rest and had a nutritious breakfast and everything."

That was mostly true. You weren't hungover and did have a healthy breakfast.
"Good girl," he nodded, smiling proudly, curling his finger for you to surrender the second wrap and your right hand for him to finish for you.

"Boozing it up this weekend, though," you added, with a playful smirk.

You got an amused snort and bob of Frank's head at your weekend plans. The filming for Kingdom was ending ahead of schedule, like you'd anticipated. You had the weekend off and plans to dance away your frustrations and the recent chronic ache in your heart. The wrap party was tomorrow and Saturday night your friend Tony was back at the Viper Room to fill in for a cancelled artist.

"How you and Chris doin'?" he asked, eyes down, concentrating on twisting the cotton strip around your hand. "How's this? Too tight?"

"Fine," you approved, as you spread your fingers for him to keep working around your hand.

"The wrap or you two?" he asked, taking a quick glance up through his brow at you.

Your mouth ticked involuntarily to the side and into a frown. "Why do you ask?"

Frank secured the end of the wrap to your wrist, giving the back of your hand a light smack to say he was done, and turning down to pick your gloves up off of your bag. He gave you a half smile and a shrug. Tucking a glove under his arm, he held out one for you to slide your hand into.

"I might'a noticed your eyes look a little puffy," he suggested, his focus on cinching the laces of your glove and his tone with just the slightest bit of fatherly worry.

You cleared your throat softly, hoping he didn't hear it over the noises in the gym. Don't be a puss in front of Frank Grillo. But he was right. You should have taken five minutes to put a cold towel over your eyes. Your 'sad girl cries herself to sleep a lot lately' was starting to show.

"And he might'a called me last night," Grillo offered.

You rolled your eyes, while he wasn't looking. "Oh, yeah?" you asked, trying to sound airy and indifferent.

"Yeah," he smirked, with another quick glance up. "Too tight?"

"It's good," you told him, testing the movement of your wrist under the laces. "So, what'd he say?"

A knowing smile pulled back one corner of his mouth. "The kid fucked up," he said as a summary, with a small snort and shake of his head. Frank knotted the laces and knocked down your gloved hand with his fist while he grabbed your other glove with his free hand. "How you holdin' up?"

You gave him a small, but appreciative, smile as you stuffed your hand into your second glove. "How do you think I'm doing?" you asked, sounding a little snarky.

"That's what I figured," he nodded, his smile a full smirk now. "You want me and the boys to go over and fuck him up for ya?"

"You know he's back in Cap mode," you half warned.

"Doesn't matter how big you are if you don't know what you're doin' with it," Frank noted, knotting your laces down and giving you a look to question the feel. You nodded that the tightness was comfortable. "He don't know what to do with it like I do," Grillo added, with a wink.

"No, Frank," you told him. "You don't have to go beat him up."
"I'm just sayin'," Grillo casually gestured, going to the clock on the wall to set the timer for a two minute drill. "You change your mind, you let me know."

"Of course," you winked.

Grillo started the clock and crossed his arms to watch you. "Just a warm up," he told you as you started swinging at the heavy bag. "So, he told me you're not taking his calls."

You turned to Frank. "What am I suppo-"

"Aht! Work the bag," Frank scolded, pointing a stern finger at you and then the heavy bag. You did as he said and he went on. "I'm not saying you should. I'm just telling you what he said."

"What'd he tell you?" you asked, switching combos and feeling your pulse start to come up and skin warm.

"Everything," he admitted, his folded arms flexing as he shrugged. "Called me thinkin' maybe you needed someone to check up on you, see that you're okay. He's pretty broke up about it."

"He is?" you doubted. "Ha."

"Watch that cross," Grillo pointed out. "You're lookin' sloppy there this morning." There was a pause while Frank eyed your developing technique. "Just 'cause he fucked up don't mean he isn't sorry or that he doesn't feel like shit. I mean, the guy's callin' me, for fuck's sake, trying to see if you're okay. That oughta tell you something."

"Little short on the sympathy," you told him between hits of the bag.

"That's okay," Frank told you. "Be pissed. You've got every right." The clock beeped. "30 seconds break." Frank moved up to hang an arm from the chain holding the punching bag and you dropped your hands and waited. "Maybe take some time and you calm down a bit and see if later you don't want to try talking to him."

"I doubt it," you groaned. Frank's brow wagged up in acceptance, a frown and a shrug to match, and you appreciated him not pushing the issue. "Think I'm gonna call Universal today and drop the production," you mentioned.

"You sure about that?" he asked, eyebrows raised with a hint of worry.

"Yeah," you nodded, shaking out an arm. "It's just a little job on the extras and I'd rather be available to travel than be stuck in the city right now."

Frank's lips pursed in a thoughtful pout as he shrugged. "Okay then. At least you can make Cleveland."

"Kinda looking forward to a change of scenery for a minute," you said.

"He's a good kid," Frank reminded you, and you gave him a halfhearted scowl and roll of your eyes as the clock beeped again. "Gloves up," Frank barked, leaning the shoulder of his raised arm in behind the bag as you started the next drill. "All I'm sayin' is, I love you guys. And, you two, you're good together and I was always rooting for you. Maybe just hear him out when things cool off. That way at least you know you both had a chance to say your piece and you see if it's too broke to be fixed. ...Watch that cross," he warned, cocking his head in disapproval. "Just remember, me and the boys are available to tune him up for you, if you think it'll help...or if, at least, it'll make you feel better."
"Thought you said you loved him?" you laughed.

"I can do tough love," he promised, with a fiendish smile. "Now, come on. Let's pick it up. 48 seconds. Let's go!"

Chris sent a trio of texts across the span of your day at work. Maybe he thought to just message, remembering you would be there today, or maybe he was trying a less intrusive approach for your attention. Either way, you ignored his first two and answered the third with a firm, 'I'm working. I don't have time for you right now'. He didn't bother you for the rest of your day. You figured if he wanted to know what you were up to, he could call Frank.

It took a while, but you worked up the nerve to listen to Chris' voicemails from Tuesday. Sitting in the living room of your cozy apartment before bed, you were cross legged on the couch and staring at the phone in your hands. Your thumb hovering over the 'play' icon on your screen, you took a deep breath and held it as you tapped the button and put the phone to your ear.

"[Y/n]," Chris' voice began, even and strong, "please don't ignore my calls. I wanna explain to you what happened. I know you're mad, but it's not what you think. Call me back, babe."

You bristled, a small shiver running through you, at hearing him sound almost unaffected and telling you you were wrong.

"Baby, come on," Chris urged. "Call me back. This is ridiculous. Just...let me explain what happened. Call me back or answer your phone. Please?"

Nuh-uh. 'Please' or no, he did not have the nerve to sound annoyed with you. Seriously?!

"[Y/n], would you please stop ignoring me?" Chris begged. You heard him sigh. "Sweetheart, I'm sorry. I know you're upset, but you've got to let me talk to you. Okay? So, please...call me back or answer your phone."

Okay. At least he was starting to sound like this was important. That's a little better.

"[Y/n], I know you're doing this on purpose," Chris said, the sound of the scolding a good measure more hurt than it was angry. "You always have your phone. This is important. Stop ignoring my calls and talk to me. Please. I'm not just gonna let you walk away. Call or text me back. Tell me where you are and I'll come get you or we can meet somewhere, but just let me talk to you. Come on, baby. We need to talk about this. Gimme a chance to explain. ...I love you. You know that. Call me back."

Fuuuuuuuck. He sounded more broken as the message had gone on, almost desperate. Wait. Actually, that's a good thing. He doesn't deserve to be happy and carefree about what he did. Hearing him say 'I love you' and calling you anything but your name was enough to piss you off, but at least you got some satisfaction in hearing the misery and remorse creep in there at the end. Maybe he was telling the-

No. Stop. You've got the last day of shooting in the morning. You don't need to get all in your head and start analyzing things so late in the day. Just go to bed.

There wouldn't be much time to change between work and the wrap party when the day ran a little longer than expected. Instead, you, and many others on the crew, lived it up in your shorts and
Kingdom gear at the bar the show had taken over. Everyone was excited about the prospects of coming back for more seasons. The atmosphere over the booze and food was energetic and the music loud. Lots of laughter and hugs and many pictures were had. Your favorite picture, and the one you would make Frank's caller ID pic for your phone, was one someone snapped of you chatting up Frank in one of the green leather booths. You were clinking a pair of shots of Jim Beam's Family together, heads tilted to one another, with Frank's arm hung around your neck and his smile a heartwarming mix of pride and fondness. At least work as his personal hairstylist would keep you two in regular contact.

The way things were going lately, the thought of losing touch with anyone else, no matter how brief, made you feel a little sick. Spending weeks and months on end, long days and nights with casts and crews means friendships invariably form in different ways and in different strengths. The shoot in Atlanta had given you some surprising new friends that you were suddenly without and the lack of warning they were going to disappear was like a punch in the gut every time you thought about it. Of course, Chris was out of the picture. With no Chris, you expected no Anthony or Sebastian again. No matter what Sebastian promised or how many bear fights there were, it would still be too awkward.

The whole crew shut down the bar. You headed home feeling the best you had for the last few days, with hugs and cheek kisses from Frank, Wendy, Kiele, and the boys and plenty of smiles from the good times you had with all your work friends. At home, you took care of Archie and fell asleep on the couch with your hand hanging over the side to rest on his belly, completely exhausted. Finally, a good night's sleep.

You'd been good the last couple of days. You had gotten in a great workout with Frank, had a bit of an appetite back, and had concentrated on work, instead of being mopey and bitter. Chris hadn't called since you texted him last and you were ready to blow off some steam with some of your best girlfriends. You caught up with your friends for dinner, and a little pre-game cocktail, and you were stamped and in cover-free to dance and listen to your friend Tony DJ another night at the Viper Room by 9.

You weren't "trying". In fact, with a lazy ponytail, some boot cut jeans over a pair of wedge sandals, and a plain tank top dressed up with just a few long, layered chains and you were surprised when the guy waiting at the bar beside you even said 'hello'. You gave him the traditional "I'm not really interested in anything you'll be offering, but here is a chin jut and 'hey' in acknowledgment of your existence" while you waited for the barmaid's attention. The persistent little bugger was cute, but a bit tipsy. He didn't quite pick up the cues, but he wasn't annoying enough to completely be rude to. Instead, you tolerated his compliments and comments on the music like he were any other buddy to wait in line with.

You were finally able to wedge yourself up to the bar's edge, waving your cash for the bartender's nod that your turn was coming. You smiled and nodded politely as your bar fly continued to circle and managed an elbow on to the bar beside you and leg up on a stool. The more he went on, the funnier he got and he helped the time pass a little faster. He actually wasn't so bad. There was a hand at your shoulder and you turned, expecting to see your new friend's hand and more than a little surprised, and irritated, to see it was Chris' instead.

"Seriously?" you complained over the music, only partly turning out from the bar, your arm laid out on the wood to keep your place in line.

"Can we go outside?" Chris asked, leaning forward a bit to speak in your ear.
"Are you kidding me?" you scoffed, feeling your temper flare. "You actually-

"Please?" he tried again, a begging look in his eyes.

"You know this guy?" your admirer asked.

You don't know why you actually answered him, but you gave a groan of a sigh and nodded. Chris gave the guy a quick once over and looked back at you.

"You're not actually here with this guy, are you?" he doubted, maybe a bit too assertively.

"Like it's any of your business," you said, cheeks flushing from the embarrassment of being hit on by this kind fool and at Chris maybe having seen it, as much as for Chris getting territorial where he had no right.

"Hey, buddy," the guy edged in, putting a hand on your arm. "Do you mind? We were talking."

"Hey, listen, pal," Chris said, tiredly. "Lemme cover the next drink and you move on. Save yourself the trouble and go hit on some other girl, alright? She's naht interested."

"We're not doing this here," you promised Chris. "For crying out loud."

You rolled your eyes at the testosterone in the air and slipped your arm from under the would-be suitor's hand only for it to come back right away in some kind of sweet, albeit a bit boozy, chivalry that otherwise would have been reassuring and sweet.

"Is he bothering you?" the guy asked, a genuine furrow of concern in his brow.

Ordinarily, that might have been cute. But this was just a slow car crash happening in front of you and you gave the guy a polite smile as you started to speak up and decline his "help" before Chris interrupted.

"Hey," Chris said, taking the man by the wrist and moving his hand off of you and to the bar with a quick snap. "I said, she's not interested. I tried to be nice about it, but I'm not gonna tell you again."

The man stood up from his stool, squaring himself to Chris and putting his drink on the bar. *Uh-oh.* He wasn't a bad match for Chris, height wise they were about eye to eye, and only a slight bit lacking in the appearance of brute strength. You caught a glimpse of the barmaid rolling her eyes and waving over a bouncer as the man stepped onto Chris and gave him a shove in the shoulder.

"Yeah?" he scoffed, "And she said she's not interested in talking to you tonight, so go fuck off."

Chris straightened his shoulders and tried to warn the hapless sap away, saying he wasn't looking for a fight but "I'll lay yah ass out if ya want it" and coming in a couple of inches to size up your hero.

"Jesus," you griped, with another hard eye roll, exhausted at the situation. "Chris, just-

You didn't have a chance to finish before the stranger accepted the challenge from Chris moving up on him and drew back, swinging on Chris. The cross was no match to Chris' sobriety and the punch narrowly passed by Chris' jaw as he dodged the fist. Apparently, a good amount of the stunt training stuck with him, or he was some barroom brawler in his own right, as Chris parried away the errant throw and he gave the poor bastard a hook in the gut that coughed some of the breath out of him. In the same instant, a bouncer arrived, grabbing your underdog from behind and tying up the arms of your tipsy Romeo, twisting him away from Chris before he could retaliate. The bouncer threw a look at the bartender who inclined her head and pointed at the man he held, telling him that was the one to
"The fuck, Chris?!") you demanded, with a new fury out of your overwhelming embarrassment, a grimace on your face, and a shove in his arm. He barely rocked back, but what did you expect for hitting a brick wall? "He didn't deserve that. God! What are you even doing here?"

"I figured you'd be here," he said. "We need to talk."

"What?" you spat. "Are you following me?"

"No," he shook his head, face pinching with irritation. "Your friend is here and you like his music." He gestured toward the stage. "I took a chance and got lucky, alright? I've been in this shit hole for over an hour hoping you'd show up. Now, will you do me a favor and come outside with me?"

You huffed and shot a quick look toward your friends on the dance floor, happy and unaware of the little scene that just happened. If you gave him a minute now, they wouldn't even know he was there and they wouldn't make a fuss about it. They wouldn't miss you. They'd blame the long line at the bar for your absence. You were the only one who needed a drink, after all, and you figured you'd probably need it more after you talked to him. You stepped away from the bar, giving up your place in line.

"Two minutes," you told him, turning on your heel for the door.

Chris grabbed your arm and you turned around. He inclined his head the other way, a suggestion to go out to the parking lot instead of the street. You pulled back your arm, gesturing for him to lead the way and you would follow. Outside, he kept going a ways from the door until there was a dead spot along the building where you could talk in private.

"What?" you started off, impatiently at best.

He looked like a kicked puppy. His head dropped with a small shake, "I don't really know what to say," he admitted, raising his shoulders to his ears.

He looked up at you through his lashes and you gave a quiet groan. Not today, Satan.

"Think quick," you warned him. "Two minutes is ticking."

"Don't be like that," he said, plaintively, lolling his head back to one side.

"Like a bitchy ex-girlfriend?" you suggested and he cringed. Noting the sting the use of 'ex' seemed to give him and trying your best not to care, you went on. "Because I kinda feel entitled to be a little mad right now."

"You're right," he said, holding up a hand to agree. "That's fine. I get it. I'm just sayin', gimme time to explain."

You folded your arms and shifted your weight to one hip while you waited. Chris took a look around and rubbed the side of his index finger on his chin. He took about a half step closer, leaning a shoulder into the wall of the building as he looked back to you.

"Baby," he began, "I don't even know how to say how sorry I am. I made a big mistake. 'Sorry' isn't good enough."

"Nope," you agreed, with a sarcastic pop of the 'P' sound to help illustrate your profound displeasure with the whole situation.
"I don't know what I was doing," he explained, his fingertips still touching at his chin. "It was selfish and I was lonely and- I was drinking, a lot, with some friends. Sometimes I- Fuck. I was feeling pretty low without you and I wasn't thinking straight, when the flirting started from them and I- I'm sorry."

"That's not a good explanation," you criticized.

"No, it's not," he admitted, brow raising with his shoulders. "It's a shitty one. I fucked up! You can't make it sound any better than that. That's all it is. A fuckin' mess."

"I gotta go back inside," you told him, rolling your eyes at getting no satisfaction from his story.

"Gimme another minute," he hoped, holding out a hand. "I didn't handle things very well the other day and I'm sorry for that, too. It just- I was surprised and-"

"Yeah," you huffed at the understatement of the year. "So was I."

"Dammit, [y/n]," he grimaced. "Stop that."

"No. You know what? It’s okay. Alright? I get it," you said, with a shake of your head and a shrug of acceptance. "You do a good job of selling this," You gestured a hand over Chris. "The nice guy, good looking charmer, the whole fun to date package. But some people just aren’t ‘the settle for one person’ type. I get that, now. You’re not that guy, and that’s cool, but I’m not the girl who’s okay with being somebody’s side chick. Some people are just made that way, and that’s fine, but that’s not me. I prefer to be with somebody who thinks I’m as important to them as they are to me. So, sorry. Maybe that’s me being selfish, but whatever. It’s done."

Chris rolled his eyes and shook his head, hands rising and falling to his side as he straightened up from the wall. "[Y/n], that's not true and that’s not fair."

You scoffed at the notion that it wasn't. "You know what's not fair?" you demanded. "Being over 30 and, apparently, still having to sit down and expressly verify dating exclusivity with another adult. But, well, guess that one’s on me. Maybe I should’ve known better with a guy like you."

“What the fuck’s that s'pose to mean?” he scowled.

“A guy like you,” you repeated, waving a hand over him. “Some Hollywood hotshot making girls swoon with his smile and-"

"[Y/n]," he interrupted, begging through a groan, his head tilted to one side, "don’t-"

"I'm not," you cut him off in kind, holding your hands up in surrender. "I'm done."

"Wait," he said, his brow furrowed to match the plaintive tone of his plea. "[Y/n], come on."

"I'm here with people," you reminded him, doing your best to keep your growing impatience and irritation in check.

"I know. Your friends are probably lookin' for you," he conceded, turning his eyes down for a moment. "I can do this better. Just gimme a chance to try. I won't keep you from your friends. I'm gonna wait for you at home."

"Don't do that," you whined, shaking your head with a long, tired blink as you pinched at the bridge of your nose.
"Why not?" he asked.

"Because just looking at you pisses me off!" you seethed, hands rising and gesturing in strained frustration near the sides of your head.

_Ouch. Geez. There it is. That hate you've been bottling. That was supposed to make you feel better, finally taking some of the anger out on him. But, somehow, it cut you as bad as it seemed to cut him. You'd never seen a more wounded expression on his face and a weight dropped in your stomach. You could actually see him swallow down what you said and your gut twisted. God fucking damn it._
_It wasn't supposed to get to you like that, him hurting. Everything really wasn't fair._

Chris took another small step and reached out for your hand. "Baby, please," he said, quietly. "Come home with me...or let me go home with you. Just...let me be near you, lemme talk to you. That's all I'm askin'."

You shifted your weight, the heel of your shoe scuffing in the silent pause. You eyed your hand in his, his thumb running softly over your knuckles. If you weren't still pissed, you'd melt at the soothing touch and doleful eyes. But, _ugh!_ You were still so mad.

"No," you shook your head, your expression hard with resolve. "No. You hurt me. I am so...mad at you, I could-" You inhaled a calming breath through your nose. "I can't talk to you right now and you coming here was inappropriate."

You took your hand back, Chris' face wincing and eyes closing tight as he shook his down turned head. You headed back inside, ignoring him saying your name behind you. You flashed your hand stamp to the guy at the door and headed straight for the bar.
If you weren't driving and didn't have a Kingdom promos photocall for Grillo to do at 10 a.m., that was stuffed into the morning last minute because of a schedule snafu with a couple of the guys, you probably would have shut down the bar. After you left Chris in the parking lot and headed back inside, your first order of business was a shot from the whiskey bar. The second was to dance it off with your friends with a beer in your hand. Happy to entertain distractions, you even let a handsome fellow with black hair and well meaning, brown eyes chat you up and buy you that beer at the bar. He wasn't a bad dancer, but you cut him loose after a few songs when a couple hopeful questions clued you in that he was looking to maybe get something started, either tonight or down the road. He took it in stride though, with a smile and a kiss of your cheek when you let him down easy, telling him it was ladies' night to forget a boy. You couldn't help but smile when he said his goodbye with a footnote that it was a shitty way to spend Valentine's Day eve, "that guy musta been a fucking idiot", and to let him know if you change your mind. Sigh. Thanks anyway, random hottie.

You drove home with the windows down and the top of the Jeep open, cranking the radio up in willful defiance of the local noise ordinances. The wind in your face and tangling through your hair cooled you off on the way home, in more ways than one. Parked a few doors down from your building, you checked the clock on the radio. Not bad. 12:58. Your 10 a.m. call for Frank wasn't gonna hurt much, if at all. You put up the windows, turning the music down a bit to still listen as you slid out to close the roof of your SUV. Locking down one of the latches onto the windshield, you practically jumped out of your skin and hit the back of your head at hearing someone beside you ask, "Need a hand?"

Turning out of the door quickly, you rubbed at the tender spot on your head as you ungracefully backed into the car door to see, and scowl at, Chris. He took a long drag off the absolute last burn of a cigarette and dropped the butt to the ground, snuffing it out under the toe of his boot as you muttered a curse to yourself, reaching back inside to turn off the radio and strip the keys from the ignition. You told him 'no', closing your door and all but stomping around to the passenger side to finish locking up your car. He followed, hands stuffed harmlessly in the front pockets of his jeans and an expression somewhere between 'please, don't hate me' and 'dog in the rain'.

"I thought I told you not to come here," you grumbled, grabbing your phone off the passenger seat and slamming your door closed harder than you meant to.

Chris' eyes followed the door shut, his brow quirking up, maybe with a touch of surprise, at your rough maneuver. "Sorry," he said, letting his breath go after he turned back to you. "But, you don't answer your phone and you're not gonna see me or give me the time at the bar. What else am I supposed to do?"

"I can think of plenty of things you can go do," you flippantly told him, walking around the front of your car to check both ways before crossing the street.

Chris jogged across the street after you. "[y/n]?", he tried again. "Baby, come on."

You turned on your heel, sticking a finger in his face as he stopped short to keep from running into you at the curb. "Don't 'baby' me," you warned. "I have to be at work in the morning," you pointed out. "I don't need this tonight."

Though you started back for your apartment again, he followed, saying behind you, "I know. I'm not trying to upset you."
"Then what are you doing?" you asked, hotly, turning around again with a huff.

Chris scoffed. "I'm trying to tell you I'm sorry," he bit back, brow furrowed with his own aggravation. "For fuck's sake, [y/n], I'm trying to tell you that I don't want to let you just walk away. I'm fuckin' miserable without you. It drives me nuts that you don't answer my calls. We used to talk everyday. I miss that." His eyes ran up and down you. "It's killing me seeing you like this."

"Yeah?" you shrugged arrogantly. "Well, you shoulda thought about that sooner then."

"You gotta believe me," he implored, his head tipping to one side. "[Y/n], I never wanted to hurt you. You should know that. I'm not that guy." He sighed. "I wanna be with you. Just you. Give me another chance. I made a mistake. It won't happen again. I'm beggin' you, just gimme a chance. Baby, I meant everything I ever said."

"Everything you ever said?" you checked. You blinked as long as the breath you took in before a shake of your head. Pointing over at your building, you snapped. "Like when you had the balls to stand there and feed me some bullshit about missing out and wanting to be here, knowing full fuckin' well what you'd been up to in Geneva? Or, what's worse, when you came back to town and the first thing you decided to do was fuck me? Now-" You shook your head in disbelief. "Now, you're trying to sell me the same line, like you deserve to be here or something? And, oh, my god!" you practically growled, brimming with very near rage at your next thought. "That you pull all that shit and then can look me in the eye and say you love me?! ...Unbelievable!" You threw up your hands, eyes dragging up and down him like claws. "You got some fuckin' nerve, pal."

"I know!" he snapped back, a new redness rising up his neck. "Don't you think I feel fahckin' terrible about this?! I'm not proud. I'm not. I'm fahckin' torn up about it and there you are, tryin' ta be all high an' mighty while you're off havin' a good time, partying with your girlfriends. Letting guys buy you drinks and dance with you, pawin' all over you." He flipped an angry hand up at you. "That's some real fuckin' class right there," he scoffed, jutting his chin and glaring down at you. "Yeah, I saw that asshole with you when you went back inside."

"You don't get to say anything about that," you reminded him, leveling your eyes at him.

"The fuck I don't get to say something about that," he argued. "[Y/n], I love-"

"Don't," you cut him off, making it crystal clear he should not finish that sentence with a quick raise of your finger to silence him. "Don't you dare. I swear to god, if you say 'I love you', I will punch you in the god damn throat."

"Just let me talk," he insisted, still worked up but his shoulders relaxing some.

"Let you talk?" you parroted, with more than a little scorn. "Think of all the talking we've ever done. Maybe you'll see a spot in there where you should have told me about Geneva."

"I wanted to," he admitted. "I almost did."

"Yeah? And?" you lead him on.

"And I changed my mind, because I didn't want this to happen," Chris explained, his hand blading up from his side to reference the argument you were having. "Christ. I didn't want you upset and mad at me. I didn't want to fight and I, sure as hell, didn't want you to leave."

"Well," you shrugged, "at least you had one moment in all of this where you thought about actions and consequences."
"Fuckin' hell!" he griped. "You always gotta be a smartass. Would ya just let me talk?!

"All you're doing is talking, Chris," you hatefully pointed out. "It's just that I'm not hearing anything good. It's all bullshit and excuses, like you think I'm some kind of an idiot. Fuck. Maybe I am. I mean, I'm standing here listening to you, aren't I?"

"Jesus fucking Christ, [y/n]. Just stop it," he complained, balling a fist by his side at how apparently infuriated he seemed to be with you. His head fell backward for a moment before he straightened up and opened his hand up in a question. "You know why I said all that stuff, about missing out and staying in LA for you? Huh?" he dared you. "Because you called me. Sitting alone in fuckin' Geneva with a beer in my hand in the middle of the god damn day, feeling fahckin' sorry for myself, and you called me. Not because you wanted something from me, just 'cause you were worried that I looked like hell in those photocalls. And ya know what? You were right. I felt like shit from the moment I got off the plane. Missing you, loaded schedule, fuckin' jet lagged and all. Sitting there thinking 'what the fuck am I doing' with everything...everything about you. It was after...after I fucked up, when you called, and it hit me what this could be.

"I knew it. I fucking knew it, right then. You're it." He held out his open hands to you to make his point. "You're what makes me happy. Not all this movie an' endorsement bullshit," he shook his head, with an empty and broad wave up in the air as if he were warding off stardom itself. "I like how I don't have to try with you. It's just you an' me and that's enough. You're not taking my name out for a spin or asking to go to someplace crazy or do some wild shit. Everything's just comfortable, natural. It's peaceful with you. It's like...like instead 'a bein' here, I'm back at home, when I'm with you. The noise an' the bullshit, it just all shuts off. Doesn't matter what we're doing or where we ah', everything's just...better.

"Those pictures? That's all it was. That's all that happened. It was wrong and selfish and I'm sorry. Jesus fucking Christ am I sorry, but I can't take it back. God knows, I wish I could. I want to, but I can't and I'm sorry. You have no idea how much I regret that I did that and it hurt you so bad.

"You called me an' I figured out I don't need that anymore," he went on, his expression and voice softening as earnestness replaced his irritation. "I don't need people kissin' my ass an' hangin' on. I'm not some 20-somethin' year old prick scammin' numbers in bahs. I don't want women slippin' me hotel keys. I'm over it. 'Cause none 'a that ever made me feel even half as good as bein' with you does. That's why I came back here and said those things. That's why I told you I love you. Because it's true and that's what I want. I just want you and I'll do whatever it takes to make it up to you. Just let me try.

"You," Chris emphatically said, pointing directly at you and a kind of helplessness coming to his face. "You said that this, that you 'n me, is something rare that you can't explain. You said that. And you're right. I can't explain it either, but I know it is something special. You 'n me...we're amazing together, ya know? You're my best friend. I don't wanna lose you and I'm naht gonna give up on us. There's more to this, [y/n]; more to you an' me. You gotta know that, too."

You blinked, more than a little stunned. Well, that explains that. It wasn't necessarily jealousy of other people's time with you, it was guilt, and, okay- admit it, maybe a healthy dose of genuine care for you, that had him spilling all those saccharine sentiments in your apartment after the Switzerland trip. The question was: how much was the truth? Could you believe what he said then, let alone what he was saying now?

He wasn't wrong. You guys were amazing. You knew it. Everyone else saw it, too. Everything actually was natural and comfortable with him, a fact that regularly surprised you for all his fame. And fame was the furthest thing in your mind when it came to him. You weren't looking to trade on
his name for any extra attention or perks. If anything, you hoped to avoid it, thinking of the nightmare the press could be once they figured out Chris was dating someone, let alone someone like you.

You guys were best friends and there was humor and fun in just about everything you did. You knew all of that, remembered it clearly. It was barely a week ago that all of that changed, when it all stopped and your heart broke.

"How do I know that that was it?" you worried, out loud. "How many times did something like this happen since Rhode Island?"

"None," he promised, his brow pinching up in sincerity with a shake of his head. "I swear, that was the only time since you and me first happened. Atlanta, Germany, New England, all of it. Just that." He sighed. "Just that. I didn't sleep with anybody or do anything else."

"How?" you asked, still not completely convinced. "Hm? How could I even trust you again?"

You could see the stall happen. His mouth agape, eyes looking past you, over your head and searching. He didn't have an answer. Chris looked back at you, the crease in the middle of his brow folding even deeper in unhappiness. He wiped his hand across his bottom lip and chin with a sigh.

"I don't know," he admitted, his hands slapping on the sides of his legs from a disgruntled half-shrug. "Alright? I don't fuckin' know. But, whatever I have ta do, tell me an' I'll do it."

Oh, mann. You let out a heavy sigh, your eyes rolling over to stare at the grass in the yard beside you. You didn't fucking know either. The truth was, the last time some douche cheated on you, that was it. You essentially flipped him off and that was that. You hadn't necessarily been too attached to the guy. You'd dated almost a year, but he wasn't exactly marriage material anyway and you didn't put up with that kind of behavior. So, no big loss. Not that anyone ever talked about marriage here, but it was the idea that this was something unique and you thought there was something deeper happening. Maybe that was just you being a dumb girl.

But that dumb girl was still standing there, listening to this son of a bitch talk. And that dumb girl wanted it to be true, for him to be sorry, for it to be a one time mistake. Some kind of excusable, drunken lapse in judgement. Wanting to believe him that it couldn't happen again, that it wouldn't. Dumb as she was, that girl still got hurt. Did she have it in her to take another hit like that again? On the other hand, being without him hurt sometimes just as bad as being wronged. For all the ways it hurt, that dumb girl still loved him for everything he was and all the things before reading that damned article. Was it really that simple?

Wait. No. He doesn't get off that easy. You took in a hard breath and shook your head, your lips pulling tight as your jaw worked forward.

"No," you said.

"Why not?" he asked, the question quiet and making him seem uncharacteristically small.

Wow. Really? Like, seriously, really?! Here it comes. The heat in your eyes. The dampness gathering at your lashes. And, oh yeah, the anger.

"You ruined everything!" You spelled it out, slowly and harshly, the words rattling like a kettle about to boil. "How do you not get that?!!"

You couldn't help the shove you put into his chest with both palms. Your sudden rage surprised even you and it happened before you had the thought to stop it. But, man, it felt good. And he took it, one
foot scuffling a half step back to hold on and right himself. His face flinched into a betrayed scowl from the unexpected knock.

"I'm sorry," he insisted, his expression still a mix of offense and hurt.

"You should be!" you assured him, furious, letting it all out. Even a tear broke free. "Everything was working. We were figuring it out. And you couldn't stop and think of me for five minutes, instead of yourself, and not ruin it all!"

You put another shove into his chest, with some idiotic hope that it might actually make him feel some of the pain you did. Chris managed to grab a wrist before you finished pulling both hands away, and he kept it.

"Stop it! Just stop, okay?! ...I'm sorry," he said, again, reaching his free hand forward to wipe at the thin, wet line drawn down your cheek before you pushed it away and tugged your captured hand back.

"God!" you groaned in complaint, a frustrated claw of a hand turned up to the air. "I'm so sick of hearing that!"

You turned to leave, but only got a few steps further down the sidewalk before he grabbed your hand to stop you and plaintively said, "Don't do this. [Y/n], I don't want you to leave."

"What? You say 'sorry' and that makes it all okay?" you sarcastically asked, snapping your hand down and away from his to run the edge of your thumb under your damp eyes, blinking back the rest of the water works. "I'm just supposed to swoon and say 'I forgive you' because you're Chris fucking Ev-"

Chris cut you off mid-rant. "What else do you want me to say?!" he asked, sounding as desperate as he did angry. "That I'm an asshole? That I'm a selfish, fuckin' moron? I am! I know! But, sorry's all I can say 'cause you'll fuckin' hit me if I tell you I love you. So, just tell me! I'll say whatever you want. Tell me what to do and I'll do it."

"Go home, Chris," you softly sighed, closing your eyes in a long blink, the exertion of the argument suddenly sending you into utter resignation.

"What?" he barely managed to croak out, after a blink and your words seemed to have sunk in.

"I have to be at work in the morning," you plaintively reminded him, gesturing up at your apartment. "I have things to do and I'm not gonna stand in the middle of the god damned sidewalk arguing with you all night."

You turned to go, his footsteps falling in a few feet behind you. "Then don't argue with me on the sidewalk," he urged you. "Let me come over tomorrow when you're home. Meet me somewhere and let's talk, without trying to be mean to each other about it...Can I call you?"

Turning around, you rolled your eyes and studied his face, debating. "You can text me," you finally conceded, hoping it would get him to leave.

A hint of a hopeful smile flinched up the corners of his mouth for a moment. "Thank you," he said.

You gave him an impudent "whatever" and turned up the walkway for your building. You didn't look back or leave with an civility. You just let the door shut behind you. You sighed at yourself, disappointed you gave him the leeway to communicate with you. But at least he was hitting on all the right bad names for himself that you'd thought of him lately.
Sunday mornings used to be cool. You used to wake up, get a bowl of cereal, and sit at the dining room table in your pajamas with your brother reading the funny pages in the Sunday paper. Now, pajama time was in front of the TV watching local news or the weather channel with a cup of coffee and a quick breakfast before taking Archie for his walk and heading off to work.

This Sunday sucked. *Fuck you, Valentine's Day.* Add to that that you were working today and had no valentine to look forward to seeing later besides Archie, there definitely wasn't much to be excited about this Sunday morning. Instead, you traded messages with Karen before you had to go meet Frank, and the rest of the principle cast, at the Navy St gym set for promo pics, catching her up on Chris' antics at the bar last night and his appearance at your place. During the lulls in your texting, you leaned back into the couch, a cool washcloth draped over your eyes to combat the puffiness of crying yourself to sleep again last night.

**Kare Bear:** That is one sad love sick puppy

**You:** Where's animal control when you need them?

**Kare Bear:** Ha:) It's more than I expected out of him

**Kare Bear:** Figured he'd get busted and leave it at that

**You:** Same

**Kare Bear:** Well shit. Bad news for u. The bastard seems to actually love u

You let out a heavy sigh reading her reply.

**Kare Bear:** Doesn't sound like he'll be giving up anytime soon

**You:** Fuuuuuuuuck:( Why does he have to keep trying? Why not just crawl off and disappear like the rest of the assholes of the world?

**Kare Bear:** See message above about love sick puppy ^

**You:** Smartass

**You:** What do I do?? This is killing me. God I dont think I've ever been so whiny about anything

**Kare Bear:** You are whiny

**You:** Bitch

**Kare Bear:** ;)

**You:** :) ok, but seriously...what do I do?

**Kare Bear:** Can't tell u. Sorry sweetheart. If he didn't fuck anybody maybe he gets another chance. Idk sounds like he said his side already so ask him ?s if u have some. Kick him or keep him. It's up to u

**You:** Not exactly helpful. If it were you?
Kare Bear: It was me & he did fuck them. Women will always throw themselves at these guys. Hindsight- should've known mine couldn't say no. So obvious. Apples & oranges tho. Evans seems a far cry from that guy

You: So you're saying I should talk to him

Kare Bear: I'm saying nobody would blame u. The legit piece of shit guys who 110% fuck up are never this persistent so that's kinda telling me something about him

You: Dammit:(

Kare Bear: I know

Like his ears were burning, you no sooner had stopped messaging Karen than your phone buzzed in your pocket with a text from Chris. You checked your lock screen as you headed into the kitchen to put your coffee in a travel mug.

Flip Cup Hero: Busy?

You stared at the message preview until it disappeared and your gut stopped twisting in nervousness. No, you weren't busy. You just didn't know what to expect if you replied. Another apology? Another argument? Lord, don't let him even type 'I love you', because, honestly, keeping him from saying it was helping to keep you from cracking. You took a deep breath and opened your phone to reply.

You: No. What's up?

Flip Cup Hero: Thanks for answering

Hmm. That was kind of endearing. He was typing another message right away and you waited.

Flip Cup Hero: I dont know what hours you're working but I won't keep you. When you're off today, can I please see you? We could walk Archie or if you don't want me coming over I can meet you somewhere.

You took in another long breath and blew it out slowly, your head tipping in thought. That was a good message. Polite and mindful of you maybe being at work already. Asking to see you was flexible and not pushy. No devious play at trying to guilt you into seeing him by pointing out it's Valentine's Day. Damn him. He's always so sweet.

You: Fine. Should be home by 2:30

Flip Cup Hero: Thank you

Your thumbs hovered over your screen, debating what to reply. Stumped for whether or not saying 'you're welcome', or anything at all, was the way to go. You left it at that, locking your phone and taking up the coffee carafe from the burner. It gave you a sense of control to not reply or be too kind in return. After all, you hadn't accepted his apology or given him another chance per se and the angry, spiteful devil on your shoulder applauded your subtle snub as a way to possibly keep him as miserable as you were a little longer.

Turning out the door to pull it shut behind you to leave for work, you practically backed into a startled delivery man. You both exchanged awkwardly flustered apologies at the near collision and you nodded warily when he asked if you were [y/f&l/n]. With a smile, he handed over the leafy
A bouquet of a dozen red roses and baby's breath and wished you a happy Valentine's Day. Jerk. You watched him head down the stairs, a bit stunned for the moment and then instantly panicked by the beautiful arrangement in your hands. You backtracked into your apartment to put the vase of flowers on the table and read the printed card. *Please don't be from Chris. Please don't be from Chris.*

[Happy Valentine's Day, kid. Love, Frank & Wendy]

*Thank god, it's not from him.* And *aww!* You felt a little choked up by the gesture. You took out your phone and snapped a quick photo sending it off to Frank with a blushing smiley face for a comment. He messaged you back on your way downstairs and you laughed.

**Frank fucking Grillo:** Beautiful! Glad they made it. Now stop smelling the roses and get your ass to work!

**You:** On the way, boss man

There was a lot of love at the Kingdom photocall. You didn't know anyone with the photography team doing the shoot, but there were a few of the regular show crew members working with you. Wendy and Kiele were seriously into swaying bear hugs for everyone today and you got a couple quick pecks from the boys with their Valentine's wishes. Frank gave you a long hug and kiss on the side of your head after you nodded 'yes' to his question of if you were okay.

"Fuck Cupid, huh?" he declared as he let you go, his brow rising in question of your understanding. Arm around your shoulder and pulling you in tight to his side, Frank pointed around the set toward his fellow cast mates. "You got us. Alright? You don't need him, if you don't want him."

With the photo session finished, you stood by in your kitchen, waiting for Chris. While Archie lapped loudly at a bowl of water, you thumbed through the spam in your email on your phone and texted to let Karen know Chris was coming over to talk. He'd sent you a message saying he would be there around 3. Damn him again for being considerate. Karen wished you luck and told you to call if you needed anything. She would come over or you and Archie could stay at her place, if you needed. There was a bottle of wine waiting, just in case. You sent her back a handful of little red hearts and a smiley face.

Energetic and tail wagging, Archie was waiting for you by the door to say he was ready for a walk. On your way out, you stopped a minute for your downstairs neighbor and her little shih tzu coming in from their walk to tell you Happy Valentine's Day. People just won't stop reminding you. Poor Archie never seemed to know what to do with that tiny moving carpet, so he just sniffed and stomped occasionally beside you. With a pleasant wave goodbye, you and your dog ventured outside, Archie giving a good pull at his leash. You looked up from watching him pass under your arm as you held the door open, figuring it could mean only one thing.

**Yep.** There was Chris, a small and hesitant smile on his face as he stopped halfway up the walk to your building when he saw you. It was like he was waiting for your permission to speak, to move, or even breathe.

Archie insisted you come with him to see Chris, and the toes of your gym shoes made soft scuffing noises on the concrete as you were drug along before you were ready to actually talk to Chris. That dirty traitor of a dog of yours was up on his hind legs and leaning into Chris' gut as soon as he was close enough. You waited it out with your mouth pushed to one side in some kind of awkward apology for Archie's enthusiasm while Chris tussled Archie's head with both hands. Chris turned his soft smile up from Archie to you, giving him a gentle push to climb down.
"Going for a walk?" Chris meekly suggested.

Way to go, Captain Obvious! No. Don't be like that...yet. You didn't have to be a bitch right away. Try to keep a clear head and see what happens. Maybe you'll hear something different when you're not trying to shout over each other.


"Guess I was a little eager. ...Mind if I tag along?" he asked, sounding hopeful yet prepared for rejection.

"Sure," you shrugged.

Archie was still wiggling between you two, looking up, completely enamored by Chris. You gave his collar an easy yank for his attention and he started to prance ahead of you on your way to the street. Chris followed, catching up to walk next to you when your walkway widened enough at the sidewalk to do so. It was quiet for about a block or so, you alternating your gaze between your dog and the way ahead and Chris with his hands in his pockets occasionally shooting glances your way that you caught from the corner of your eye.

"Thanks for letting me see you," he said, breaking the silence.

"Yeah," you said, as way of giving him his welcome.

"How was work?" he asked, after a brief quiet.

"Fine," you answered.

"You're done with Kingdom, right?" he wondered aloud. "I saw some pictures from the wrap party."

"Yeah," you nodded. "It was Friday night."

"Hm," he hummed quietly, before another pause. "You got that Universal thing soon, right?"

Huh. Small talk first? A warm up and stretch before the next bout? Okay.

"Actually, I dropped the job," you told him.

"Why?" he worried a bit.

"Frank's got some work for me," you explained. "He's going to a premier on Tuesday, Wizard World on the 27th and 28th, there's gonna be some Kingdom and Purge junkets and premiers. He's got some appearances coming up and work for his other premier, later. It's just easier if I'm not tied up here." Like it was easier to gloss over the Civil War promo work simply as 'Frank's other premier' instead of acknowledging you were all a part of something together.

"What are you going to do in the in between?" Chris asked.

You shrugged. "There's hours I can make a schedule out of at the salon. Wedding season's coming up, so I can maybe do hair for some shows or book some gigs out of that. I don't know. Maybe I'll just go home."

There was a hitch in his gait that set him about a half step behind your shoulder. "You're not leaving, are you?" 

It hadn't occurred how that could sound considering the circumstances. "No," you shook your head,
as much for his assurance as for clearing your thoughtlessness. "Like, to visit."

"Jesus," he breathed out, with a small titter. "I thought you meant you- ...Never mind."

"That I'm the wimpy girl to up and move home because some guy takes a shit all over her feelings?" you quipped, with a bite in your tone.

"More like I was afraid she might and the guy wouldn't get to try to make it up to her," he admitted, apparently ignoring the snark in your comment.

You hazarded taking a look his way and saw the worried peak between his eyebrows, his eyes watching his feet, and the hint of relief in a weak smile for a split second before the sides of his mouth fell into a thin gape for a sigh. You turned your eyes front again.

Everything about him made your stomach drop for a variety of reasons. You'd never seen him so apparently broken down and, in the daylight, he looked tired. Somehow, he still managed to look handsome in his vulnerability. But then, didn't he always look good to you? That he was genuinely concerned you might flee the city was kind of adorable. The new fragility you saw in the usually confident action hero tugged at your heart strings. Any other day or person and you'd have them wrapped up in a hug promising to fight whoever made them cry. Except, you were the reason he was down and he was yours. In short, his weakness was giving you your own and you could feel your resolve to put yourself first and not put up with cheating men was slipping.

You were usually a pretty good judge of character and had a reliable bullshit detector. After almost a week to endlessly replay and mull things over, despite your attempts to shut down the voices in your head, you hadn't come up with enough to say with any real certainty that he was lying to you. Skirting or downplaying when you confronted him? Sure. But flat out denial or bold face lie? Not actually. Everything about him said he was telling the truth. At least, he seemed to be since the night after the Viper Room when he caught you outside your apartment.

Fuck. You took a deep breath.

"Hypothetically speaking," you cautiously supposed out loud, "what would the guy do to make it up to her?"

What are you even doing?! Man, this is risky. Be careful!

You glanced over to see the faint smile tick onto his lips, as he said, "Whatever it took."

"Whatever it took?" you repeated.

"Anything she wanted, for as long as she'd let him," Chris promised, lifting his eyes off the sidewalk ahead of him to catch you looking before you could turn away.

He flashed a thin smile when he saw you. You weren't quite sure how to read it. Maybe it was a little cautious optimism that you had even entertained the idea that he was worthy of redemption. Maybe he was just relieved nobody was yelling at anyone today. Whatever it was about that weak grin, it made your heart melt a little.

"It could take a while," you noted, almost as a means of warning to both of you.

"Then he better get started right away," he figured. "What would she want him to do first?"

The cuteness of the conversation about the figurative couple wasn't lost on you, and, despite your better judgement, a small, half-smile flinched back into your cheek for a moment. You shrugged.
You really didn't know what he should do and you told him as much. This was new territory for you.

"Maybe we should just start over," he offered.

"We already did that," you reminded him.

"Third time could be our thing," he posited, a coy smile coming to his lips and his eyebrows wagging up suggestively. " Took three times of being in a bed with you to get that going."

You didn't want to laugh, but his comment was unexpected and funny and he was right. After all, you'd even had the same thought when it finally happened. You shook your head, mindful to not laugh too hard. Don't encourage him too much. You hadn't exactly forgiven him anything.

"What if the third time's no good?" you wondered.

"There's always the fourth," he shrugged. "There's lots 'a numbers. We just keep going till we get it right." Chris grabbed your hand to stop you. "I'm serious, [y/n]," he told you, turning to look you in the eye. "I don't wanna lose you. You just tell me what you want. Tell me when I'm doing something wrong or when I'm not doing something enough, and I'll fix it. I won't let you down again."

You chewed on your lip for a moment, taking in the warmth and tenderness of his hand holding yours. It sounded good. The earnestness and humility in his face looked right. And, you had to admit to yourself, there was that part of your heart that, despite the hurt he caused and the blood loss, still wanted him more than it cared for self-preservation.

You caved. You dumb, dumb girl.

"I'm not going to put up with being an afterthought again," you assured him.

"You won't be," he promised, giving your hand a squeeze and a hopefulness showing in a small smile pulling at the side of his mouth.

"And I can't promise that I'm gonna get over this quickly," you went on. "I've never done this, taking back someone that chea- who hurt me so bad."

"I deserve that," he nodded. "I wouldn't expect you to. There shouldn't have been a moment where you weren't the priority and I'm sorry. It won't happen again. I promise."

You studied him for a moment. You noticed the brightness back in his eyes, something you hadn't realized had dimmed so much since you first started fighting. But, then, understandably, you were a little preoccupied with your own feelings at the time. Poor guy. He really was tore up about things, like people had said.

"Just...please, don't make me regret this," you sighed. Well, actually, practically whined is more like it.

"I don't want you to," Chris said. "I won't. I promise."

This could turn out to be a terrible idea. But, dammit, somehow, this son of a bitch was still irresistible. And charming and sweet and considerate and- God fuckin' damn it! You're so weak for this man.

"Okay," you said, softly, with a nod. "We'll see what happens."
"Okay," he smiled. It was quiet for a moment before Archie butted in, leaning into Chris' leg, eager to keep walking. Chris looked down, asking, "Did you tell him we were fighting?"

You glanced down at Archie turning in a small circle, searching for a direction to walk before looking up at you. "Didn't know how to tell him," you shrugged. "Don't go breaking Archie's heart either, okay? He's a mess, when he misses you."

"Archie is?" he asked, his brow rising and a knowing smirk pulling into his cheek.

"Yeah," you shrugged, watching the impatient critter sit down in frustration between you. "Yeah," Chris nodded, with a bashful smile. "Guess I didn't realize how much was riding on this. ...Scott'll be relieved to know you're still around for him, too," he added. "He's been just fuckin' miserable without you. He didn't eat, couldn't sleep- I mean, really, we gotta make this work for them."

"Yeah," you smiled, amused to be back at your little game of projecting your feelings onto your closest next of kins. "Guess we do."

"Those saps'd never survive if we weren't around to see them," he agreed, seeming to smile a bit wider at hearing your small laugh. Chris gave your hand a gentle tug. "Can I hold you?" he asked. "Please."

You gave him a small nod. Why the hell not? You needed it probably just as bad as he did. Chris stepped in, only letting go of your hand when he was close enough to reach around to hug you. Pulling you close as your arms folded over his shoulders, he bowed his forehead into your shoulder with a deep breath.

He squeezed you to him for a long moment before he turned his face to your neck, his breath hot on your skin, as he said, "Fuck. Five days. ...God I missed you. I thought this was gone."

So did you. You tightened your arms around his neck to tell him the same.

"I won't ever do that to you again," he promised, quietly, and pressed a kiss into your hair. "I know you said you don't want to hear it, but I love you, baby. Punch me in the throat all you want, but I do. ...I'm sorry."

You sighed, turning your face out from his shoulder. It always did have a good sound to it when he called you 'baby'.

"Maybe I'll just save up the punches for the next time you piss me off," you reluctantly suggested, as you both leaned back from each other a bit.

Your lips betrayed you, letting a quick smile pull across them when you felt the small shake in his chest against you, as he sniggered and said, "Thank you. I appreciate that."

You gave him a light smack on his impressive bicep, a punishment for making you smile as much as a cue to let you go. You started down the street again, with Archie leading the way. Beside you, Chris grabbed your hand to hold, his fingers firmly twisted with yours. It was silent for a few minutes as you rounded the next block and headed back to your apartment.

"You know," Chris piped up, "it's Valentine's Day."

You groaned with a disgusted roll of your eyes and Chris put up his free hand in surrender. You tutted anyway and gave him a tired look.
"I'm just asking if you wanna go out to dinner or something," he explained, an innocent half-smile on his face. "That's it. I'm not tryin' to spend the night or anything. Just seeing if you're hungry is all."

Your head dropped with a shake and a relenting smile. "I'm a little hungry," you conceded.

"You wanna go somewhere?" he offered.

"I'm sorry, but I can not do Valentine's Day," you said, waving your hand across the front of you in refusal. You may be giving him a second chance, but you weren't ready to go out and celebrate the quintessential holiday of love.

"That's fine," he agreed. "We're not doing it anyway. We can order in. I just wanna hang out with you."

"Fine," you shook your head.

"You wanna order some Chinese and watch a movie?" Chris suggested.

You had a defeated smirk and tried to stifle a laugh. That sounded fantastic, actually. It was pretty much your go to plan when you had no will to come up with a plan.

"So, is that a 'yes'?" he asked, looking over at you with a hopeful smile.

"Yeah," you shrugged, with a small smile of your own. "It's like you know me."

Chris laughed at your joke and squeezed your hand. "I'm trying to," he said, bumping his shoulder into yours.

You nudged him back. There was a comfortable silence on the rest of the walk back to your apartment.
Chapter 21

It was a little awkward having Chris in your apartment. Not in your usual butterfly inducing excited kind of way, though. More like where the hell did all these eggshells you were walking on come from? Both of you. Seriously. Neither of you seemed completely comfortable occupying the same space. Chris seemed to fidget with his hair or drum his fingers more than usual. You...well, you were excruciatingly aware of the length of any silences and your own compulsion to twist the ring on your hand for your own fidgety distraction.

Chris had noticed the bouquet of roses on the table when he came in, and you thought you saw him peep the card and smile with a soft snort while you unleashed Archie, but he didn't say anything about it. You phoned in your dinner order and sat with him on the couch, channel surfing with little said between you. It was a relief when the delivery guy knocked on the door and gave you something to do besides sitting slightly stiffly on the couch debating together what movie to watch. Chris held back Archie by the couch while you paid the man and followed you into the kitchen when the delivery guy was gone.

You moved around, pulling plates and glasses from the cupboards. Unpacking the boxes of food, you told Chris to help himself to a drink and he asked what he could get you. You shrugged, peeking into box tops to find your order. There seemed to be a pause behind you before the fridge door shut and Chris reached from behind you to put a bottle of water on the counter for you. He slipped his arm around your waist and rested his chin to watch over your shoulder while you unstacked one plate from another and reached into a drawer for utensils.

"Something wrong?" he asked, not sounding especially confident that he wanted to know, but asking nonetheless.

You turned your head to see him as best you could, flashing a quick smile. "No."

Chris smiled back and let you go when you held up a plate for him to spoon his dinner onto. "Okay then," he shrugged and there was a pause for a moment while he arranged his dinner. He cleared his throat quietly and moved out of your way. "So, back to business. What kind of movie do you wanna watch? Action, comedy, drama? ...Dramedy?"

He quirked an eye brow up to match the challenging curiosity in his tone of the last choice and it made you smile. "Nothing fluffy," you decided. "Action, drama. Something like that."

"Nothing fluffy," he mused, grabbing a spring roll from its wax paper bag. "Let's see what ya got."

Chris disappeared into the living room with his dinner. He made some crack about the Marvel movies you had in your DVD collection, but you didn't quite catch it and let it go. You gathered your food and the bottle of water set out for you. Going back into the living room, Chris was scanning over your movie collection. His eyes lit up.

"I can't believe this is on your shelf," he smiled, tipping a DVD out and looking it over.

"What's that?" you asked, folding a leg underneath you before you sat down on the couch.

He held up the movie case and pointed at it. "You're the first girl I've met to have The Usual Suspects in her DVD collection. This is a guy's movie."

You swallowed a drink of water and gave him an odd look. "I'm sorry?" you offered. "Orrr do I apologize? I'm not sure if I should."
"No," he laughed. "It's just- I mean, usually girls have Ryan Gosling movies and chick flics. But you..." He made a face, his head ticking back with a disbelieving shake.

"Oh, there's some of those in there somewhere, too," you assured him, waving your hand vaguely at the other movies.

"How 'bout this one?" he suggested, holding the movie up in front of his chest and tipping it side to side in advertisement of his interest. "Guns, heists, mystery."

"A Baldwin," you added.

"Very little to no fluff," he noted.

"Sold," you nodded.

Chris smiled and went to put in the movie. "I love this one," he said.

"It's one of my faves," you admitted. "I don't care how much time is left or what part it's on, whenever I find it on TV, I'll always watch."

"Me too," Chris said, looking over his shoulder with a slightly suspicious gaze. "It's fate."

You laughed around your mouthful of noodles. "It's a great movie," you corrected him.

"Whatever," he shrugged, hurrying to the couch as the DVD started.

He settled in at his usual spot on the end of your couch. You were enjoying the spacious neutrality of the middle of the cushions by yourself. The movie played, with a short pause for drink refills and second helpings. You both snickered at the jokes and smirked when the twists you liked came along in the story. When you finally put your plate aside on the coffee table and you had no other excuse, Chris put his arm up on the back of the couch and fanned his fingers to invite you over.

You didn't think he picked up on your moment of hesitation. After all, Kevin Spacey was in the middle of one of his narratives and you had noticed him watching those scenes with the same rapt attention that you always did. A bit reluctantly, you slid down the couch, finding that familiar space you fit into perfectly under his arm, your shoulder turned forward at that little angle to curl along his side and head resting on his clavicle. It was still warm and strong there, but your jealousy and anger over those pictures you saw, not even a week ago, kept a tension in you that didn't let you dissolve into his side like you used to. It didn't help that the weight of his arm seemed lighter. It was so obviously there, but it wasn't keeping you to him. Like it was somehow held back enough to keep a space, an out, if you will. Even the usually intoxicating mix of him, fresh laundry, and a splash of cologne wasn't enough to soothe you. You turned your focus to the movie, intent on ignoring the noise in your head and enjoying one of your favorite movies.

By the end of the movie, the sun was practically gone and you'd relaxed from simple muscle fatigue. The ache was still there, pulling across your shoulders and into your neck, a nagging reminder that you still harbored some resentment. The credits rolled and you moved away, sitting up to take control of the remote on the coffee table and stop the movie.

"Never gets old," Chris smiled. "It's fuckin' genius."

You nodded and smiled back, standing up from the couch and gathering up the dishes to take to the sink. In the kitchen, Archie started to wiggle and beg for dinner. You gave him an early meal just to avoid his fussiness and started to straighten up the kitchen. Chris called in from the other room.
"Hey, it's still early," he noted. "Got it in ya for another one, or you wanna do something else?"

You looked at Archie for support, but, love you as he did, he couldn't be bothered for counsel with a bowl full of kibble under his nose. *Worthless bum.* You sighed to yourself. Maybe you just needed to be around him more. *Yeah.* That'll be the trick. If you're around, you know there's no one else hanging around. You said, 'sure' and rinsed off the dishes, calling for him to pick anything. You peered around the corner of the kitchen to ask if he needed something else to drink and spied him looking over your movies again. He declined the offer and you got a Coke from the fridge to have a backup distraction on hand.

You situated yourself near Chris' end of the couch and waited, anticipating he'd expect you to be close again. He joined you with a proud grin on his face. Chris lifted his arm for you to cuddle up to him and you asked what the next movie was.

"The Goonies," he nodded, his grin becoming a confident smirk.

"Going for the classics tonight, huh?" you observed, smiling and trying to siphon some of his enthusiasm for yourself.

"Love The Goonies," he said, giving you a squeeze. "It's like you're my movie soul mate."

"Well, good taste is not exclusive," you said, dancing around all the talk of fate and souls and movies.

You were a little more relaxed for the next one. You couldn't help the small, but charmed, smile that came when Chris quietly said a line here and there throughout the movie. Not like you yourself hadn't done the same before. You piped up every now and again to say a line. You couldn't let him have all the fun. Besides it was an easy way to try to feel reconnected with some common interests and quirks.

There was a boyish smile on his face when you glanced over, reaching for the DVD player remote at the end of the movie. "That was great," he sighed, with an approving nod.

You agreed with a smile, stopping the movie and checking the time on your phone sitting on the coffee table. You noticed a checkup message from Karen you hadn't heard buzz in during the movie. *Oops.* You'd have to get back to her later. You didn't want Chris to see whatever you two might type. Not that you exactly had a bad report to give, but you certainly didn't quite know how to explain it either. This was somehow a whole new kind of awkward.

Before he could make any more suggestions on the night, you scooted to the edge of the couch, saying you should take Archie for an after dinner walk. You felt an irrational nervousness in your gut and needed to move. Chris straightened up, smiling and saying a walk sounded good. *Of course, he'd want to go.* Oh, well. What could you do?

Out in the fresh air, and with Chris holding your hand, you walked your dog together. His fingers loosely intertwined with yours, he saw or felt the slight chill go through you with a cool breeze passing. Chris suggested you should have brought a sweatshirt and you shrugged. The first one you thought of was the one he bought you for Christmas. The one sitting in the bottom of the laundry hamper where you didn't have to see it.

You kept Archie's walk short. The chilly weather helped excuse the rush. Chris followed you up the stairs to your apartment again. You dug your keys out of your pocket and were opening your door when he spoke up. You leaned a shoulder into your doorway when you turned to look at him.
"I'm gonna head out," he told you, casually jerking his thumb over his shoulder and following it up with a quiet clearing of his throat. "I have to be at work in the morning."

"Oh, right" you said, trying not to sound too relieved. "Still doing reshoots. Okay."

"You're not working tomorrow," he reminded you. "You should come by and hang out."

"Well," you shrugged, "I wouldn't want to be in the way."

"In the way?" he scoffed, with a wide smile. "People love you there." He nudged your arm and flashed an inviting smile. "Besides, maybe Joe and Anthony could get some directing tips."

"Maybe," you said, smiling back. "I'll see what's going on."

Your half ass answer didn't dull Chris' smile. "Well, I'm hoping you come by," he told you.

Chris stepped in, hooking one arm around your waist and cupping his hand to your neck. He leaned down to give you a gentle kiss and hug you close. His forehead tipped to yours, he reached his lips out again to brush over yours. *Damn, he's good.* Swoon. There was a small spark of electricity in your gut that told you you were happy to still get those kinds of sweet kisses from him.

"Do me a favor?" he asked, head to yours still and tip of his nose rubbing yours. You nodded and he went on. "I'm gonna do something again, and I'd really appreciate it if you would consider not hitting me about the face or neck and ruin any close ups for me tomorrow." A quiet titter escaped you, in spite of your best effort, and you closed your eyes to brace yourself, knowing what was coming. "I love you, [y/n]."

Chris bowed his head to your shoulder, dropping his arm from your neck and hugging it behind you. You wrapped your arms around the back of his neck with a small sigh. *Dammit. He's real good.* That was still the place to be, wrapped up with him like that. You were just starting to melt into the embrace when his kiss at your neck made you freeze. You didn't expect it to and it happened before you could stop it or understand why. The sudden rigidity in his posture told you he felt it and he carefully straightened up to look at you with a questioning look.

"What's wrong?" he asked, his eyes running between yours and over you face to find the answer.

You blinked and shook your head. Truth was, you were startled by the kiss, somehow, irrationally. In a fraction of a second, the affection you had received countless times before had turned to anxiety, as your brain reminded you that's where he kissed the other girl in the photo. Instantly your pulse was up for the wrong reasons. That one microsecond of thought had shut down all of the positive feelings and replaced them with rapid fire questions you were pretty positive you'd decided earlier to ignore.

"Something is," he said, worry underlying his grasp of the situation and his thumb coming up to soothingly caressing your cheek. "What'sa matter?"

"Nothing," you tried to assure him, with a small pinned on smile, but you were betrayed by a minute crack in that one word answer and saw the flinch in his expression when he heard it too. "It just- I wasn't expecting that, I guess."

You didn't want to explain, but he was asking for it. "Expecting what?" he encouraged gingerly.

You had to look away. You couldn't look in those concerned eyes and say it. Not that you had an eloquent way of explaining yourself in the first place. You sighed, your chin tucking to your chest to avoid his gaze.
"That's-" You paused, digging deep for the nerve to even say it. "It's how you kissed her."

You rushed the words, figuring it was best to go at it like you ripped off a band-aid and get it over with. Your head tipped away from his hand and you saw his chest drop from a sigh- or from the verbal gut punch you'd just given him. Hard to tell which. Like there was a difference anyway. He took his hands back, one stuffing into his pocket and the other balling to a fist as he raised his arm to rest against the wall and cushion the top of his down turned head there.

"Fahck me," Chris breathed out quietly, almost a whisper.

You looked up, finally. Still close enough to hear him breathe, you didn't know what to say or do. He lifted his head off his arm and wiped his hand down his face, pulling at his chin as he stared up at the ceiling before a long blink and deep breath. His head dropped and his forearm went back to the wall, like he needed it to stand.

"Baby, I'm sorry," he said, softly, with a slow shake of his head and sincere rise of his brow. He was close enough for his hand to rake through his hair from its place on the wall as he went on. "I didn't think abou- That's not what I meant to happen. I don't want you to think about tha-"

"Yeah," you interrupted, with an awkward titter and uncomfortable smile. "Yeah. Me either."

"Sweetheart, I'm tryin' here," he said earnestly. "All I wanna do is tell you 'I love you' and hold you. And, now, I- I don't even know what I'm allowed to do."

"I don't know," you shook your head, still unable to look at him directly in the eye. "I'm sorry. I don't know why I- It's just, it popped into my head and- It's me. I'm sorry. I get it now, that that's just how you kiss a girl, and I guess I was a little naive thinking that was something just for me, but-"

"It is yours," he insisted, ducking his head to try and meet your eyes. "Baby, I promise you, no matter what it looked like to you, there's nothing about that that was yours. Okay?" He took your chin in his hand to turn your face up to see him. "I swear to you, there was nothing there."

You nodded as best you could with his hand under your chin. You were going to apologize for ruining the moment when Chris pulled you in for another hug, holding you tightly to him. It was quiet for a few moments before he pressed a firm kiss to the side of your head, his fingers tangling up into your hair to cradle your head to his lips.

"I'm sorry," he said, tipping his head against yours. "I can't say it enough."

"It's okay," you decided. "I just need to get over it."

Chris sighed, his eyes closing in another long blink as his shoulders and head dropped. "You have every right to still be mad," he quietly conceded. "I couldn't tell you not to be, but just gimme a chance. Okay?"

"You have it," you assured him. "I just got some me things to work on."

Boy did you, ya psycho. The poor guy's trying. He really is. Sure, he seems a little unsteady, okay- not as much as you, but he's being as sweet as he can be. It's still him, still Chris. And you used to be crazy about that guy! You still can be. Just...take a deep breath. Ahhh. That's better. He's here. Chris is standing at your doorway. He's walking your dog with you while he holds your hand, you're watching your favorite movies together. It's just like it was before. Nobody can erase what happened, but god damn if the sad bastard hasn't been bleeding his soul the last few days to win you back and make it up to you. You just have to make the concerted effort to move forward and not stand still or go backward.
"We're gonna be okay, right?" Chris asked, sounding a little afraid of the answer, his brow pulling down in concern.

You nodded. Just a small nod at first, but it was confident by the end and punctuated with a small, yet warm, smile. "We're gonna be okay," you agreed. "Team Cap, right?"

Chris let out a relieved breath, his worried expression breaking into a little grin as he looked down for a moment and nodded to himself. "Team Cap," he seconded. He planted a kiss on your forehead. "You gonna come see me tomorrow? I'd really like it if you could."

You thought for a moment. "What time?"

"Any time," he smiled, looking a little reassured. "I'll be there at 7:00. We should be done before 8. Maybe we could grab a bite to eat?" Chris' gaze found yours and he cocked up a hopeful eyebrow. "Maybe we could get some sandwiches and find a parking lot to be awkward in?"

"Sounds good," you laughed with a nod.

Chris dipped his chin to come into your down turned face for a kiss, his hands cupping your cheeks. "Good night, [y/n]."

Well, hey there, hotness! It's a new day. You gave yourself a confident nod and smile in the slightly steamed mirror. Wet hair twisted up in a towel, your iPod played from the bedroom while you brushed your teeth. Last night, you caught Karen up on the night's developments, surprisingly won her support of attempting to reconcile with Chris, had a good night's sleep, and woke up with a new determination. Putting your feet on the floor, the first thing you did, after getting out of bed, was grab that stupid, fucking magazine off your dresser and promptly drop it into the trash can. You even flipped it off, for good measure, as the garbage can lid closed.

You fed Archie and yourself breakfast and took a run on the beach, something you hadn't gotten around to for awhile. You resolved to get back into your fitness regime, again, to keep up with your occasional visits to the boxing gym with Frank, now that your schedule had lightened up. Not to mention, Spring would be here before you knew it and bikini season would be quick to follow. Archie was a bit tuckered out by the morning's exertion, but you were feeling pretty good.

Sometime while you were in the shower, you had missed a 'Good morning beautiful' text from Chris. The tiny message painted a giddy smile over your lips and you sent a good morning back with a smiley face attached to the end. You spent the rest of the morning straightening up your apartment and hanging out with Archie. You had just finished lunch when Chris messaged to see if you were still coming to the set and you replied you would later. You didn't know what you'd do there all day without having a job to do, so you figured you'd head over sometime in the early evening.

The drive to the studio was unnecessarily long with the rush hour traffic. You should have known better in LA, but the sun shining and a little music therapy from your iPod made any commute in the standardized hell that is Los Angeles traffic more bearable. Besides, it's not like you were late for work. You were on your own time. The ease you had getting into the lot and back on set made up for your beleaguered travels. Apparently, not a lot of girls come through with hair and a smile as memorable as yours, and the security guard at the stage door spared you the majority of his no filming, etcetera speech and sent you along with a pleasant smile.

You wandered through the soundstage, on the lookout for Chris or anyone else you knew. Making your way to the hot set, you stood behind the gathering of crew for several minutes while the scene
ran a couple of uninterrupted loops. You felt a poke in your ribs and jumped, startled enough to spin around fast, but not enough to yelp. Thank god.

You smiled and whispered a semi-flustered 'hello' to Sebastian. He was out of costume and looked to be in his own clothes instead of Bucky's. Hair pulled back into a small knot under a ball cap, he smiled and jutted his chin in greeting while the filming continued. He moved up beside you, folding his arms as he craned his neck to look through the jumble of crew and equipment to see what was going on.

"Been here long?" Sebastian whispered, leaning over to your ear.

You shook your head. "Just got here," you said, voice hushed.

The director called 'cut' and there was a swell of voices and people moving to reset the scene. "I didn't know you were coming," Sebastian said, putting an arm around your shoulders to give you a welcoming half-hug.

Your arm went across his back as you tipped into the embrace on one foot. "I'm full of surprises," you quipped.

"Glad you're back," he winked, arm still around you.

Ahead of you, you both caught Chris do a double take your way as his gaze panned the activities of the crew and he made a turn toward the monitor bank. A fond smile pulled his lips, as he gave you a small wave. Sebastian gave your shoulder a squeeze and told you to 'come on'. You followed him through the maze of busy workers, light stands, and cameras to the edge of the set where Chris and Scarlett were talking with the Russo brothers. You chatted with Sebastian while you waited for a chance to say hello to everyone.

"So, you're done for the day?" you asked.

Sebastian nodded. "About a half hour ago," he said. "Just came by to watch for a bit, see if anyone wanted to grab dinner or something. What are you doing here?"

You made a small gesture and incline of your head toward Chris. "He asked me to come visit," you explained. "I've got some down time from work."

"So," he hesitantly began, "you two, uhh, you worked it out?"

"We're working on it," you nodded, with a bit of a sheepish grin.

"Good," Sebastian smiled, proudly. "He did seem like he was in a much better mood today. Work was a bitch last week with him." He held out a hand toward you and added, "But, of course, the important thing is you're sticking around."

"I'm here," you smiled.

The warm tone of Chris' voice made you and Sebastian turn. "What are you two up to?"

"You know," Sebastian shrugged, "talking about bear fights an' stuff."

You giggled and shook your head and Chris pointed a finger at Sebastian, tipping his head down to give him a stern look. "I already saw you with your arm on her," Chris said. "Don't think I'm letting you take her to a movie."
"I already did," Sebastian told him, with an arrogant once over of Chris and a knock of his finger away from his face.

"You did?" Chris questioned, his head and brow rising in surprise.

Sebastian kept his eyes on Chris', but held out his fist toward you. "Bear fight."

You gave Chris an innocent shrug when you bumped your fist to Sebastian's and admitted, "Bear fight."

"Hold on a second," Chris said, looking between the two of you and sounding a bit dejected. "When the hell did that happen?"

"What was that?" Sebastian checked with you. "Last Thursday, I think? No. Wednesday. You didn't wanna see it anyway."

"Whatever," Chris groaned, swiping a disapproving hand through the air. He turned to you eyeing you with a suspicious smile. "So, what now? You two are Team Bear Fight? Got a secret hand shake and shit?"

"It's Team Bucky," Sebastian corrected, obviously unaware, and Chris forgetful, of the declaration of 'no more teams' in New Orleans.

"Aw, Team Bucky. I'm in. I loooove Bucky in the Cap movies," you playfully teased.

"Well, who doesn't?" Chris agreed, grabbing Sebastian behind the neck and a fist full of shirt at his shoulder to pull him over, mouth exaggeratedly dropping open like Chris was going to give Sebastian the biggest kiss of his life.

Sebastian ducked away, taking a quick cheap shot at Chris' crotch. Chris managed to make a small jump back to dodge Sebastian, giving him a reaching punch in the arm for even trying the nut shot. You laughed, covering your mouth to keep the noise from being too obnoxiously loud.

"Fucker," Chris complained, with a playful smile.


"You like it," Chris insisted, pointing at Sebastian before he stepped over to give you a long hug. "Glad you came," he told you, quietly, before he let you go.

Joe called everyone back to their places and Chris touched his hand to your arm as he started backing away. He pointed to the ground as he asked, "You gonna stay here?"

You started to nod and speak up, but Sebastian cut in. "Don't you worry. We'll be around," he told Chris, putting his arm around you again.

Chris motioned that he had an eye on Sebastian, before he turned around and walked back into the scene with Scarlett. You elbowed Sebastian and shook your head with a smile. He turned you around, inclining his head for you to follow him out of the sound stage as you heard Joe call for quiet and a slate. You followed him outside and along the front edge of the building.

Sebastian climbed into a golf cart and waved you to join him. "Come on," he said.

You took the passenger seat and held your purse in your lap. "They gave you a golf cart?" you laughingly asked.
"Pfft," he scoffed, his face pinching in derision. "Fuck. I don't know whose this is."

Before you could ask any more questions or protest, Sebastian started driving. "Are you serious?" you practically yelled beside him.

Sebastian laughed. "Relax," he smiled, glancing between you and the path ahead. "It's for the production."

"Jesus," you groaned, rolling your eyes and slapping his arm. "Where are we going?"

"Commissary," he said, chuckling at the prank he had played.

You shook your head with a small laugh, a bit embarrassed he'd pulled one over on you. It was a short drive, but you understood why Sebastian stole the cart. It would have been a bit of a hike zigzagging around people, props, and equipment along the way. Inside, you and Sebastian made your way to the dessert area of the cafeteria. He served himself a rather ridiculous, and precariously high, ice cream cone from the soft serve machine. You played it safe, making a sundae in a bowl with hot fudge, sprinkles, and an impressive crown of redi-whip. Sebastian drove you both back to the sound stage, carefully licking at any stray drips from his treat as he navigated around the people and equipment in the roadway. Back inside, you both ate quietly for a few minutes while filming ran.

When the take was finished, Chris spotted you in the crowd and came over. His smile dropped at seeing you both with dessert and his brow furrowed as he practically whined, "What the hell!!"

Sebastian chuckled mischievously and held out his cone. "Wanna lick?"

Chris gave him a scowl. "I oughta knock it outta your hand," he told him. Chris looked at you, mildly offended. "And you?"

"It was her idea," Sebastian said, after a lick. He pointed at you. "She stole a golf cart and everything."

Your jaw dropped, as you slowly turned to stare at Sebastian in disbelief. "Are you kidding?" you begged. "That's your story?"

"S'the truth," Sebastian shrugged, mouth full of ice cream. He swallowed and pointed at you again. "Grand Theft Golf Cart over here."

You shook your head, fighting a smile. "You son of a-"

"Hey," Sebastian interrupted, raising his brow and a warning finger. "Language."

Chris laughed, watching you fume. "You're kind of a badass," he mused. "Stealing golf carts. Did you at least pay for the ice cream?"

"She wasn't going to," Sebastian chimed in, "but I went back and paid, to keep her out of trouble."

Sebastian tutted with a disapproving head shake your way and Chris grabbed his chest in a fit of laughter. "Fahckin' hell," he wheezed, catching his breath.

You gave up and smiled, taking up a spoonful of ice cream and offering it to Chris. "Whatever. Want some?"

"Yes," he nodded, getting control of himself slowly.

You were almost legitimately offended when Chris not only took the spoonful you offered, but took
the bowl out of your hand as well. He was taking a second, and larger, bite when you protested with a plaintive 'hey!' and tried to take your frozen treat back. Chris turned his shoulder to you, stealing a third, and obnoxiously oversized, bite before he put the spoon in the bowl and held it out of your reach over his head. Undeterred, you gave up on reaching for the bowl and reached for his sides instead. Chris squirmed as you tickled him and tried to swat you away with his free hand.

"Alright," he said, face twisting in defeat while he laughed. "Alright already!"

He handed you back your bowl and you took stock of the missing amount of ice cream with a scowl. "Dude," you complained. "Seriously?!!"

Chris laughed, with an exaggerated apology, wrapping you up in a hug that tipped you from side to side as you tried not to spill your sundae. "I'm sorryyy," he sarcastically groaned.

"No, he's not," Sebastian noted flatly.

Chris let you go and tapped his hand under Sebastian's cone as he took a bite, the ice cream pushing into his face and leaving a ring on his lips. "Mother fucker!" Sebastian griped, licking and wiping at his face.

Behind your little group, a production assistant appeared and called for Chris. "They're looking for you."

Chris turned around and gave him a small wave. "Be right there," he nodded. He turned back, looking from you to Sebastian suspiciously. "I feel like I should warn Security about you two running around the lot unsupervised together," he said, pointing between you.

"Probably," Sebastian agreed, with a shrug of indifference.

Chris smiled and shook his head. He leaned over to peck a kiss to your cheek and said, "Don't go to jail for this meatball. Just ditch 'im and run."

You laughed and Sebastian called after him, pointing out, "Studio security doesn't have a jail."

Chris turned, walking backward a few steps as he shook his head and yelled back, "I don't want to know how you know that."

You waved goodbye to Chris and Sebastian nudged your elbow with his. "Wanna watch?" he offered.

"Sure," you shrugged.

You followed Sebastian as he moved up to the edge of the set. The Brothers Russo caught sight of you and sent pleasant waves and smiles your way, which you reciprocated. Sebastian got the PA’s attention, asking for a couple of chairs. The PA passed off the request and, a few minutes later, a pair of chairs was unfolded for you both. Sitting off to the side, you finished what Chris had left you of your sundae and Sebastian ate his ice cream cone.
"So how are things going with you two?" Sebastian asked, when filming broke. He raised a cautioning hand and his brow rose in slight worry, as he added, "You don't have to tell me, if you don't want to."

You shrugged with a shy smile. "We really just kinda worked it out yesterday. But today's going pretty well," you said.

"Yeah, he said some things," Sebastian told you, jutting his chin at Chris, who was getting looked over by a makeup artist. "I figured out the rest." He turned his gaze back to you. "That musta hurt. But, if I can put in my two cents..." His brow peeked, his expression innocently asking your permission to go on and you shrugged again. "He had a moment of weakness. That's not the guy I know."

"Wasn't the guy I know, either," you said, glancing over at Chris.

"I know he's sorry," Sebastian confidently said. "God, ya shoulda seen him last week. I swear he asked for his phone after every take. Guess he was looking for a message from you. Poor guy was a disaster. Didn't look like he was sleeping, was either real quiet or real pissy. And if he was like that here-" Sebastian blew out a breath. "Man, I don't even wanna think about you cryin' or anything."

You shrugged, a pout pulling to one side of your mouth. "What can you do? I guess love hurts."

"I'm not trying to make excuses for him or anything," Sebastian said, a bit defensively. "He messed up. Big time." His brow wagged up in emphasis. "You know, he said he was in a bad place and he made some mistakes, wasn't thinking straight. But it doesn't make it okay. I just thought you should know, he wasn't enjoying anything about this whole thing. It worried him sick, the thought of you not coming back. That muscled up idiot really, truly does love you, ya know? Practically worships the ground you walk on."

"Guess I love that muscled up idiot," you smirked, a bit shy.

Sebastian smiled. "I'm glad you guys are giving it another go," he nodded, thoughtfully. "You guys are good together." He paused, his head tilting to one side as he shrugged. "Besides, if you two pull through, I don't have to be the asshole you blame for setting you up in the first place."

"I'm still glad you said something to him that night," you smiled, kindly. "Win or lose, it's definitely been a good ride."

"That's the spirit. I like that," he agreed. "You know, he's not so bad. Give him a chance and I think that big, dumb animal would do anything to make you happy."

That was sweet. Sebastian gave you some new perspective. Of course, it did make you feel better hearing about Chris' unhappiness. That doesn't make you a bad person. It just makes you human. And Chris was human, too. Albeit an exceptionally well built specimen of human, but one with feelings nonetheless. And he cared and worried and hurt last week. All for you.

You were about to thank Sebastian for sharing his insights when you heard the announcement from Joe that the shoot was wrapped for the day. The AD barked a few notes for tomorrow over the din that rose from the crew moving to tear down equipment for the day and Chris headed off set, straight for you.
"Do I even want to know what you two have been up to for the last hour?" Chris asked, face pinching in worry at anticipation of the response.

Sebastian stood up, smoothing down the front of his t-shirt. "Nothing they'll ever be able to pin on us," he said, with a small shrug, a confident pout, and cocky tilt of his head.

"Uh-huh," Chris warily agreed.

Sebastian turned to you, holding up his fist for you to hit. "I'll see you around here later," he half-asked. "We'll hang out."

"If I can," you nodded with a smile. "Sounds fun," you agreed, as Sebastian leaned in for a quick kiss at the air beside your cheek.

Sebastian gave Chris a clap on the arm and a smile as he left and Chris looked at you, a small smile tugging at the corner of his mouth. "Ready to get out of here?"

You nodded, rising from your chair. "Sure."

"I gotta change clothes real quick," he warned you, inclining his head toward the exit.

"Of course," you nodded.

It probably wouldn't matter if he left the lot in Steve's shirt and jeans. Hell, nobody would probably be able to tell the difference if he did. You followed Chris to Wardrobe, walking a step behind as his assistant caught him up on a couple of messages he'd missed during filming and passed off his phone, keys, and wallet. Chris looked back over his shoulder to check on you several times and you flashed a quick smile every time.

You hung around outside the building, while Chris went in to turn in his costume. Taking a seat on the ground with your back leaned into the wall, you read an email from Frank's assistant about traveling to Ohio for the next convention at the end of the month while you waited. You sent back a reply, answering Rick's questions, and ran through your social media notifications. Rick must have forwarded your confirmations to Frank because he interrupted your web browsing with a call.

"Hey, kid," Frank said, as way of his greeting. "All set for Cleveland?"

"Yep," you said. "Just emailed Rick."

"Yeah, I saw," he mentioned. "I know we got about a couple weeks, but I just wanted to make sure you're ready to hit the road. All that stuff with Evans, I mean. We can come up with something else, if you don't wanna-"

"No," you interrupted. "It's fine, really. I'm good to go."

"You sure?" he checked.

You smiled at his thoughtfulness. "Yeah," you nodded to yourself. "We talked. We're good."

"You did?" You noted the lightened tone in Frank's voice. "Well, hot damn. Good for you, kiddo."

You blushed, bowing your forehead into your hand with a snigger. "Thanks," you told him.

"Hey, listen," Frank began, "I'm happy for you two and all, but, you tell 'im, he fucks with my girl's heart again, I'll beat that god damn, pretty boy face 'a his in with my bare hands. Okay, sweetheart?"
"Frank," you groaned in mild protest, a bit surprised at the threat, considering how happy he seemed at hearing about your reconciliation with Chris, and simultaneously amused by its casualness.

"I'm just sayin','" he defended. "I'm sure you can kick his ass just fine, but sometimes there's an extra point to be made."

"Please, don't beat his face in," you playfully begged. "I like to look at it."

"I promise," Frank said, with a bit of a laugh, adding, "for now. But I make no guarantees about later."

"I appreciate your honesty," you graciously said.

"Anytime, doll," he chuckled. "I just wanted to see about the con. I'll let you go. Give Evans my love."

"Your love? Is that what we're calling it?" you laughed.

"Yep," Frank confirmed. "Close enough, right?"

"Close enough," you figured, with a smile.

"Hey, you wanna hit up the gym tomorrow?" he offered, like an afterthought. "We'll grab breakfast after and go over some things we got coming down the pipe."

"Sure," you agreed.

"7 o'clock," he told you. "Too early?"

"Sounds delightful," you assured him.

"Good," he confidently said. "I'll see ya tomorrow."

You were just hanging up the phone, a small smile, in adoration of Frank and his tough guy charm, on your face when Chris came back outside. He walked across the face of the building, smiling down at you as you stuck your phone back in your purse and moved to stand. Chris stopped in front of you, offering a hand to pull you up, which you accepted.

"What are you doing down there?" he asked.

You shrugged. There wasn't a particularly good reason. You had just become accustomed to finding out of the way spots to sit around studios when you weren't needed. The fifteen or so minutes you'd waited for him was occasion enough to fall into the habit.

"Nothing," you shook your head, starting to walk to the parking lot beside Chris.

Chris nodded. "Who were you on the phone with?"

"Frank," you told him.

"Oh, yeah?" he casually wondered. "What'd he want?"

"To go over some stuff for work," you said. "Gonna meet him at the gym in the morning at 7." Chris hummed his understanding with a nod. "Oh," you added, twisting at the waist as you walked to see him better. "He wants me to give you his love and tell you he'll beat your pretty boy face in with his bare hands if you break my heart."
Chris' brow rose in surprise. "Huh," he breathed out, considering the promise. "Well, if that's not motivating," he chuckled, awkwardly. "You can tell Frank, I'll be sparing him the trouble."

Chris took your hand in his, pulling you closer to his side, and you smiled when he put his arm around your shoulders. You hooked your arm around his waist. "I'll let him know," you nodded. "Well," Chris said, taking in a breath, "if you're meeting him in the morning and I've gotta work, that doesn't leave a lotta options for getting into trouble tonight."

"What'd you have in mind?" you asked.

"I don't know," he shrugged. "I'd say grab some dinner, but you had all that ice cream before soo..."

You pulled away from him, giving him a playful elbow in the side. "Who ate all the ice cream?" you challenged, with exaggerated offense.

Chris laughed, holding up his hands in innocence. "I don't know what you're talking about," he contended, "but you sound like a crazy person."

"Crazy for offering to share," you scoffed, as he grabbed your hand to hold again.

"See?" he nodded, smugly. "Learned a lesson, didn't you?"

"Ass," you grumbled, before a yelp of surprise as Chris let go of your hand to pinch your ass. "Jesus," you hissed, trying not to laugh as you complained, swatting at his hand while he cackled proudly. "You want someone to see?"

Chris threw you a sideways look, still laughing. "Nobahdy's payin' attention to us," he dismissively grumbled, as his laughter died down.

A quick, but casual, look about showed the people around were preoccupied with their jobs or conversations. Besides, with the sun set over an hour ago, you moved in and out of the glow of the building and lot lights like any other faceless couple. You came to the parking lot and stood at the edge, turning to Chris to figure out the next move.

"You want to come over to my place?" he suggested. You both paused a beat, letting what he said hang in the air before you both sputtered into awkward laughter. "That's naht what I meant," he groaned, with a self-deprecating grin and defeated tip of his head to one side. "I just meant, it's closer than your place is all."

You nodded, biting at your lip to control your amusement as you shook your head. "I know," you told him, "but it did sound like a shitty line."

Chris smiled, moving closer to put his hands on your hips. "Did it work?"

"No," you assured him. "And I'd probably only give you a C+ for effort."

He hissed in a breath. "That's brutal," he winced. Chris shook it off. "Okay," he tried again, quirking up an enticing eyebrow. "Whaaat if...I told you I had a whole fridge full of pre-made, high caloric, high protein, gluten free meals and assorted protein shakes and pressed juices?"

"Wow. Really?" you asked. You inched close enough to speak into his ear. "Then I'd say," you seductively purred, purposefully letting your breath fall on his skin, "...I'd feel really sorry for you, while you watched me eat a double bacon cheeseburger."
Chris turned his head away, bursting into laughter again. "Jesus Christ. You're cruel," he chuckled. "What if I grabbed us some burgers on the way and we agreed not to tell my trainer or the stunt guys?"

"Mmm," you hummed a debate in jest. "Deal."

You made your way back to Chris' house. You parked at the curb across the street, hoping the neighbors didn't think you were some fangirl stalker and call the police while you waited for Chris to catch up. You checked emails and your friends' posts on Instagram, trying to be low key and casual. It was about ten minutes later that a pair of headlights in your mirror caught your eye and you saw the gate at his driveway open. You turned off your car and crossed the street to meet him, walking up the driveway as he was sliding out of his car with his phone and a bag of takeout in one hand.

"Find your way back alright?" he asked.

"I'm a girl, not an idiot," you told him. "I can remember directions."

"Smartass," he grumbled, hip checking his car door closed. He tipped his head toward the house. "Come on," he said. "Dinner's getting cold."

Inside, you helped yourself to a bottle of water out of the refrigerator, noting the Tetris-like stacks of healthy prepared meals and snacks. Chris shook his head and smiled, agreeing when you joked how ridiculous it looked. You sat on a stool at the kitchen island, watching as Chris unpacked dinner onto plates. He didn't take a seat, instead, he stood opposite you on the other side of the island, leaning forward on his elbows as he ate. You smiled and hummed your approval, lifting your burger in a toast with a nod at his not forgetting to add bacon to your sandwich and he winked in reply, stealing a pinchful of your chili cheese fries.

You ate mostly in silence, trading a line or two about the reshoots. When he asked how you and Sebastian passed the time on set, you told him you mostly just watched the filming and talked about work. You didn't know how he would take you and Sebastian discussing, however briefly, your short split or how even he'd react to the topic at all. You didn't know how you would either and decided it was better to tiptoe around and let that sleeping dog lie.

"You finished?" Chris asked, holding out a hand to take your plate.

You nodded, handing him the plate and swearing off the last few fries you couldn't make room for. You sipped on your drink, watching him rinse off the plates and set them in the dishwasher. You shook your head, realizing you were zoning out as he wadded up food wrappers and napkins to put in the trash. You were keenly aware of how absurd it was to be so mesmerized by watching him clean up the kitchen and it struck you then how content and happy you were to watch him do it. Oh, you poor, sad thing. Now who's the love struck puppy? Chris turned away from the counter and caught you looking, sending you an easy smile before he checked his watch and leaned down on the island again.

"It's quarter ta 9," he pointed out. "How long can you stay?"

"I don't know," you shrugged, doing the math for how much sleep you'd get, factoring in your drive home and time to take care of Archie. "A little bit. All I have is Frank in the morning, but you need sleep. You've got a long day tomorrow, I'm sure."

"That's what they make coffee for," he winked and you tittered, feeling the hint of a stirring of butterflies in your stomach. "You wanna watch a movie or something?" he offered. "A couple 'a hours too much to spare?"
You pursed your lips, pulling them to one side, thinking for a moment. "Okay," you nodded and he pushed off the kitchen island to stand straight again. "But no tricks," you added, holding up a finger to warn him. "Don't pick some three hour documentary BS tryin' to con some Netflix and chill."

Chris looked you up and down with a look of derision. "Who's trying?" he scoffed.

You shook your head at being bested and followed him to the living room. He picked up a remote from the cushion of a chair and turned on the TV while you took a seat on the couch. Eying the remote and pressing a couple buttons, Chris turned on a surround sound system before glancing up to see what was on the television. A crooked smile came to his lips as he watched a few moments of Office Space and snickered at Jennifer Aniston's minimalist flair.

"What kind of movie do you want to watch?" he asked, turning to you.

You were leaning on an elbow to see around him. "Let's watch this," you shrugged, pointing at the TV.

"Really?" he asked, raising a curious eyebrow.

"Oh, my god, yeah," you told him, gesturing to the movie. "Are you kidding? Milton is my spirit animal."

Chris dropped into the couch beside you. "What, are you gonna set the studio on fire?"

"Milton is the Everyman personified. The downtrodden worker who's pushed to his breaking point and can stand no more," you explained. "And he has the world's coolest stapler."

"That is a pretty sweet stapler," he agreed, with a nod and thoughtful eyebrow raised.

"Damn right it is," you said, folding your arms confidently over your chest.

Beside you, Chris chuckled. He picked up his arm and laid it across the back of the couch to rest behind your neck. This felt better. The air was lighter again and you were both having fun. It was hard to believe you were just fighting on the sidewalk barely two days ago. You nestled into his side and let your head rest back on his arm as you slouched down comfortably. He folded his arm to hang down your shoulder and kissed the top of your head. Yeah. This was definitely better. You smiled, realizing how miserable you'd be without these little moments.

The movie ended and so did your cuddling on the couch. It was pretty disappointing. A little bit more than you expected it could be. That familiar spot under his arm was comfortable again and the absentminded kisses pressed into your hair during the movie, for no other motive than to give affection, were endearing. But Time was a bitch and people had places to be early in the morning. Chris walked you out to your car.

"Can you come see me tomorrow?" he asked, watching you unlock and open your driver's door.

"Can't," you said. "Frank's going to Anthony's movie premier tomorrow."

"You can catch up after you're done," he suggested.

"I'm staying for the show," you explained, as he stepped up and lazily rested his hands on your hips.

"What the hell?" he complained in jest, his arms slipping around you loosely. "You never come to my premiers."
"You haven't had any," you pointed out, layering your arms up his.

"Oh, yeah," he realized, blinking up at the sky, and you could feel his fingers lace together at the small of your back. "Never mind then."

You laughed and Chris hooked his chin over your shoulder and gave you a squeeze. "You're spending more time with my friends than I am," he noted, leaning back to see you. "How the fuck did that happen?"

"They like me better than you," you shrugged.

"That's some bullshit," he smiled before bending down and nibbling kisses along your jaw.

"Is that so hard to believe?" you scoffed, squirming away from the tickle of his exhale on your skin.

"No," he said, his lips chasing your cheek. "It's just disappointing."

At the rate this goodnight was happening, you'd still be there to watch the sun rise. You hadn't expected to be so taken with him again, so soon anyway. But, good lord. This was fun. This was better. He was irresistible.

"Aww, poor baby," you cooed, turning your chin to kiss him back, as you ran your fingers through the back of his hair.

Chris smiled, his eyes fixing down on your lips as he nudged his nose to yours. "I could come up with more things to pity me about," he offered, his hips pressing to yours.

You bit your lip, smiling shyly as the butterflies undeniably returned from their hiatus with new vigor. "I have to go," you reminded him. You spoke in broken sentences as he dotted slow kisses to your lips. "Archie's waiting...an' Frank's...gonna kick my ass...first thing...in the morning...and...And you are incorrigible," you laughed.

Chris stopped to shrug. "I missed out on some kisses," he explained. "I'm just trying to catch up."

There was a hint of a frown in his voice, despite his smile. "Come see me at the studio after you're done with Grillo in the morning. Have lunch, hang out a bit. Hell, bring Archie. You'll have time to get back to Frank. How 'bout it?"

You nodded, adding a quiet, "Yeah."

His comment on the kisses and the way he asked to see you sent a heat out from your gut. He was trying to make up for lost time and he was certainly being sweet. You didn't mind at all.

Your earlier assessment that Frank would kick your ass in the morning was surprisingly accurate. When you got home from your casual breakfast meeting and flopped down on the couch to rest, you weren't sure if you had the strength to get back up. You laid there for a while, sipping the last of your chocolate flavored protein drink and looping the blender ball in the bottom of your shaker bottle around in absentminded, rattling circles. You should not have stayed for the movie last night.

Dragging your tired ass off the couch, you showered and pulled on a pair of denim shorts and pulled your Captain America sweatshirt out of the closet to wear for the first time in a few weeks. You dried your hair a bit and twisted it up in a messy bun at the crown of your head, pushed your sleeves up to your elbows, put on just a touch of makeup, and slipped into a pair of sandals. Archie was more than willing to hop up into the Jeep after his walk. He was always a sucker for a field trip and eagerly
hung his head out the window as you headed up to Burbank.

Back on the Disney Studios lot, you sent a message to Chris' phone when you parked, letting him know you had arrived. Archie pranced along happily, taking in a sniff of anything or anyone he could almost reach from the end of his leash. You stopped outside the soundstage, finding a place along the front of the giant building to sit down with Archie and wait. He was a good dog without much to say, but you didn't have the balls to take him onto a hot set and risk him getting too excited and ruining a take by improvising some lines of his own. Instead, you rubbed and patted Archie's belly and chatted with a few random people who stopped by to meet your dog, while you waited for Chris, or anyone else you knew, to come outside.

You were only there about twenty minutes before the stage doors propped open and crew started filtering out. A quick check of your watch and you figured it was feeding time. You watched the door patiently. A few minutes later, Captain America himself walked out, talking with his assistant as he was being handed back his phone. Chris looked up, rounding out of the door to head back to his trailer, you presumed, when he caught sight of you and came over.

Archie was up and wiggling his hello, panting up at Chris, while you stood up. Chris came over and caught Archie's front paws when he jumped up at him, sparing the good Captain's costume from any possible damage. Holding hands and paws with Archie, Chris bent around your stretching dog to peck a kiss to your cheek as he said 'hi'. You smiled and fussed with tucking some stray hairs behind your ear, a bit shy of the daylight PDA, while Chris hung Archie's legs over a forearm to give him a quick hug and pat of his side before letting him go.

"You guys came," he smiled.

You shrugged and smiled back. "Well, Archie's never been to a big, fancy studio before, so when he heard he was invited I couldn't stop him."

"Nice shirt, by the way," Chris added, with a bit of a smug smile. "Haven't seen that one in a while."

"Thanks," you smiled, feeling a little heat come to your cheeks. "Yeah, laundry, ya know."

Why did that feel awkward to you? Did he know you'd sworn off the shirt after you had read the magazine? Nah. No way. Chris laughed and reached an arm around your shoulders to turn you to walk with him. He let you go, using one hand to shade his phone in the sunlight and the other to scroll through the screen. His assistant dismissed himself until later and you and Archie followed Chris back to his trailer. Inside, you warned Archie he was a guest and let go of his leash for him to acquaint himself with the new surroundings. Chris went straight to the refrigerator for a bottle of water and you accepted a soda for yourself.

Archie made a move to climb onto the leather couch and you snapped your fingers at him, making him stop halfway up and look at you. "Hey," you scolded him. "This is not your house."

Chris chuckled behind you, as Archie dropped his front paws back to the floor. "It's alright," he assured you.

You shook your head. "Give him an inch, and he'll take a mile," you told him, turning to keep an eye on Archie while he went on sniffing around.

Chris shrugged, taking a drink of his water. "He won't hurt anything," he said. "You wanna go get lunch, or did you eat?"

"What'd you have in mind?" you asked.
"Wardrobe's on the way to the commissary," he told you. "I need to make a change, and then we can go?"

"What should I do with him?" you asked, pointing at Archie who slid down to his belly on the kitchen floor.

"He can stay here," Chris shrugged. "Guard the place."

"Ohh," you chuckled. "Your faith is greatly misplaced in his badassedness."

Chris laughed. "I believe in him," he said, capping his water and crossing over to you.

You smiled up at him, as Chris wrapped you up in a hug around your shoulders. You slipped your arms around his waist, as he made a tired hum. He turned his head to yours, pressing a kiss into your hair, as you caught a whiff of manly sweat off Chris and his costume. The mix of materials of his costume was a bit rough against your cheek and you turned your chin up on his shoulder for some relief. Chris leaned back to see you and his lips captured yours for a lingering moment. When the chaste kiss ended, you were both ready for another. He tightened his hold of you, one arm hooking behind your neck to keep you close while his other hand palmed down your back. You both fell into a deep, wet kiss and, all of a sudden, you couldn't help a smile.

Chris must have felt it, because you could feel his own grin on your lips. The smile gave way to a tiny shudder of suppressed laughter in your chest and you both broke apart. There was a small snort of amusement from Chris when he asked what was so funny. You crushed your eyes closed and shook your head.

"I'm sorry," you snickered, putting your forehead to his shoulder. "It's just I -" You leaned back, looking from Chris' eyes down his chest. "I'm literally making out with Captain America and that's just-...Wow."

Chris' laughter escaped in a wheeze before it got out. His eyes crinkled and he shook his head as he let you go. "Jesus," he chuckled, looking himself over. "This is ridiculous."

Still giggling, you waved your hands in front of you to say it was fine. "I'm not gonna lie," you told him. "I'm actually fangirling pretty hard over the idea."

Chris smirked. "Oh, yeah?" he asked and you nodded over a new shake of laughter, feeling your cheeks blush again.

He pulled you back to him and crashed his lips into yours, despite your giddy smile. God, you're an idiot. But he was still laughing too, with a tightness across his lips that told you he couldn't stop smiling either. He pressed the kiss harder, dipping you back a few inches before straightening up again.

"Fucking hell," he chuckled, shaking his down turned head. "I can't believe I'm gonna say this." He sighed. "But I can't make out with you, right now."

The absurdity wasn't lost on either of you and, after a second's worth of sincerity and eye contact, you both burst out into an eye watering fit of laughter. Even Archie got up to come over and see what was so exciting. Chris skipped back a step, to dodge an attention begging paw from Archie and you pulled him away from Chris with a tug of his collar, your face drawn in a panicked 'O' before an embarrassed laugh of apology.

"Okay," you shook your head. "You have got to go change before something bad happens to that uniform."
"Good idea," he seconded, gesturing a hand for you to go ahead of him.

Climbing down the trailer steps, you turned to Chris and asked, "Any chance they let you keep one 'a those costumes?"

He chuckled at the suggestive wag of your eyebrows and shook his head. "Trust me," he insisted, pointing the direction toward the wardrobe department. "You do not want to be anywhere near this thing when it gets opened up."

"Kinda ruins the mood, huh?" you smiled. "Pretty gross?"

"You have no idea," he promised, brow rising and eyes widening to make his point.

Well, a girl can dream, right? After Chris' costume change for his scene after the break, you headed over to the commissary together. You ate lunch at a table for two, just another pair of silver screen workers in the noisy cafeteria. When lunch was finished, Chris walked you back to his trailer to check on Archie.

Opening the trailer door to look inside, you groaned out a sigh, your hand rising and falling with a slap on your leg. "See?" you begged, looking back at Chris and pointing at Archie balled up on the couch inside. "Worst guard dog ever."

Chris laughed and Archie lazily stood up on the couch to wag his tail. "I don't know," he shrugged. "Couch looks pretty safe to me."

You laughed and called Archie out to you, grabbing his leash as he came down the steps. "Don't encourage him," you said. "He's already spoiled rotten."

"That's not my fault," Chris pointed out, his brow rising and lips pushing to the side in mild judgment.

"That's cool," you said, giving him a playful push in the arm.

Chris checked the time on his phone and winced. "I gotta get back," he told you. "You gonna hang around?"

You looked at Archie and hissed in a breath in debate. "I don't think so," you decided. "He'd have to stay in your trailer or something and that's not really fair. Besides, to drop him off and meet Frank on time, I'd have to leave in like an hour anyway."

"You came out here just to have lunch then?" he scoffed, with a smile.

Well, when he said it like that, it did sound a bit ridiculous. But, screw it. It was a beautiful day, Archie loves adventure, and it was nice poking around the lot again and seeing Chris, even if it was a lot of effort to go to for just a lunch in the commissary.

"Yeah," you shrugged. "I guess so."

"Huh," Chris mused, through a faint smile that made you think he appreciated the effort to come out anyway. He reached out an arm to pull you over for a hug. "Wish you could stay."

Archie wandered off to the length of his leash, leaving you with one arm to hold onto Chris with. "I shoulda left him at home and just left from here," you shrugged.

Chris kissed down into your shoulder. "Nah. I'm glad you brought him," he assured you, with a
"I love you, [y/n]." he said, his hand stretched back in a small wave as he turned to go back to work.

You felt your cheeks warm from more than just the sunshine on your face. "I love you, too."

He waved again, with an easy smile, and was on his way. You stood there for a moment, a little awestruck by what just happened. You'd said 'I love yous' on the beach and you'd meant it then. But it was the first time you'd said it back since you two fought. And this was the first time it ever ended a conversation. And it sent the butterflies somersaulting in your belly.
Chapter 23

The premier for Mackie's new movie was a blast. Sure, you didn't walk the red carpet or anything, but you hung out with Frank for the night, spent a little time with Anthony and some of his friends and family, and saw a free movie. If you weren't already winning, you got to fangirl over a selfie with Norman Reedus at the after party where you both flipped off the camera, because Daryl Dixon. Meeting Woody Harrelson was just plain awesome. You couldn't resist sending a group message pic of you, Anthony, and Frank all flexing together for the camera to Chris and everyone's phones. Chris sent back a scowling selfie with his middle finger up and the inside of his trailer in the background, plainly still at work and jealous. He followed it up a few minutes later with congratulations for Anthony and told you all to have fun. He sent you your own message, complimenting how nice you looked, even if Frank's "ugly mug" was trying to ruin the picture.

Things were busy for Chris over the next few days. While he worked Hollywood, you took to the beach with a book and your OTP, Archie. You caught up on chores you'd been putting off, because adulting sucks, caught a dinner with a couple of friends, and filled some p.m. hours at the salon. When his week wound down, you guys got together for a Saturday matinee of Deadpool. He tried to look offended when you gushed about how much you liked the movie, but he liked it almost as much. From the couch in your living room, you laughed along with the round of tweets that came out of his message to Ryan Reynolds.

There was definitely a feel of normalcy coming back. Neither of you had mentioned your fight(s) or the resulting temporary split and you both seemed pretty okay with that. It wasn't that it didn't pop up in the back of your mind at random times when you looked at him, it's just that you took a breath and made the conscious effort to push them aside. Making the conscious effort to avoid magazine racks and Google for a while didn't hurt either. But sitting in your living room on that next Tuesday, with dinner in the oven and Chris on your couch, everything was right in the world.

"So what are you going to do about your hair?" you asked, eyes running over him while he scrolled through his phone.

"My hair?" he parroted, a bit suspicious. He palmed his hand along his hair, suddenly seeming a little self-conscious. "What about it?"

You shrugged with a contemplative pout. "Are you gonna let the color grow out, oorr..." You reached out, piecing his hair with your fingertips for a thoughtful moment. "Roots are going to start coming in soon."

"Huh," he exhaled. "Wasn't thinking about it. I should get an appointment before all the press starts. Thanks."

"No problem. Just a random thought," you smiled, getting up from the couch to go to the kitchen and check on dinner.

You were half in the fridge, getting a soda for yourself, when you heard Chris say something. Straightening up, you peeked in the oven door and said you didn't hear him. From the other room, he called a little louder and asked why you don't just do it.

"I don't do what?" you asked, cracking open the top of your drink on your way back to the couch.

"Why don't you fix my hair?" he suggested, as you sat down again.
"Really?" you checked, with a doubting smile.

"Why not?" he shrugged, locking his phone and reaching forward to drop it on the coffee table. "You're a hairstylist, aren't you?"

"Not yours," you quipped.

"That's a damn shame," he smiled. Chris gave you a playful smack on your leg when you stuck your tongue out at him. "Sassy," he smirked. "You're gonna make me go to all the trouble to call, make an appointment, drive to a salon-"

"Oh, my god. You poor baby," you gasped, playing at being appalled for how exhausting he made it all sound, laying your hand over your heart and letting your jaw hang open. "That's so much work."

"Exactly," he said, gesturing a hand out at the obvious. "So, why don't you just fix it and save me the trouble? You've done it before."

"Yeah," you scoffed. "When Marvel paid me to."

"What, you want me to pay you?" he snickered.

"Ha," you barked, throwing your head back. "You couldn't afford me."

"Well," he sighed, baiting you before he added, "if you can't do it..."

Chris shrugged and you lifted up your bare foot from the floor to push at the side of his knee. "Jerk."

"Fine," he chuckled. "Remind me to get it done by next week."

You smiled and shook your head. "I can do it," you grumbled, as if it were a great inconvenience to your life.

"Seriously?" he checked.

"Yeah," you nodded. "We'll do it after dinner."

"Seriously?" Chris doubted. "You can really do that tonight?"

"Sure," you shrugged. "I got all kinds of hair stuff in the bathroom." His brows rose, maybe a bit surprised, and you pointed to your own hair. "How do you think this happens? You think I pay out the ass for hair appointments every other week?"

"I have no idea how you keep that up," he admitted, with a smiling shake of his head and an admiring glance over your hair.

You smiled, a bit shied by the attention. "I can take the dye out tonight," you assured him. "If you want me to color over it, I'd need to run out for a minute."

"No," he answered quickly, with eyes wide and mouth in an emphatic 'O' shape. Chris waved a hand in front of him. "I am done with dying my hair."

"Aw, come on," you teased, raking your fingers through the side of his hair. "How 'bout some frosted tips? Some chunky highlights?"

"No," he said, firmly.
"Patriotic, for Cap?" you suggested. "A lil red, white, and blue?"

"No," he insisted, brushing your hand away. Chris chuckled, leaning away when you tried to touch his hair again. "I know what you're doing. You're tryin' to make me make an appointment. And that girl's gonna fuck it up like the last one did at the studio and I'm gonna have to have you fix it anyway."

You couldn't help but laugh at his whining and pointed it out. "You're so fussy," you smiled. "So high maintenance."

"And you're a smartass," he shot back, with a smirk.

"That's the rumor on the street," you laughed, hopping up from the couch when the timer for the oven went off.

Over dinner, you listened to Chris recite the extensive list of interviews and promos he had coming up. You were worn out just from listening to the schedule of photocalls and magazine spreads he had set up. He assured you, that was the light end of the schedule compared to the press tour events for the Civil War movie premiers. Everything was ramping up for an all-out media blitz come mid-April.

"That sounds insane," you told him, poking your fork around the vegetables on your plate.

"It is," Chris nodded, his brow rising in apparent exhaustion already. "What's your schedule look like with Grillo for all of this?"

"Don't know, yet," you shrugged. "But, I guarantee, it's nothing like that."

Chris snorted with a nod. "I was thinking, maybe, if you're not tied up with Frank," he shrugged, taking a little extra breath in, "maybe you come along for some of it."

"Some of what?" you asked.

He couldn't really be asking you to go on the press tour with him. Right? Well, it's not like "technically" you couldn't. Obviously, some of your work with Frank would overlap some of Chris' appearances for the film. But he couldn't really be suggesting you go on-

"Some of the press tour stops," he answered, looking a bit wary of your next response.

_Oh. Damn._ Yes, he was. He was really suggesting you join him on the tour. _Holy cow._

"Some of the press tour stops?" you repeated, stalling while your brain caught up with your mouth. "Like-"

"Yeah," he snorted softly, seeming a bit nervous. "Like, put some stamps in your passport...You do have a passport, right?"

"Well, yeah. Sure," you fumbled through a long blink. "I do."

"And Grillo's not part of as many events as I am," Chris noted, distractedly pressing his fingertip up and down on the tab of his can of soda on the table, "so I was thinking, maybe you could tag along for part of the Asian trip?" His face lit up with a new thought and he added, "Or Europe. We're going to London. That's always a cool place to go."

A small cough left you at the suggestion. _Seriously?_ London? Asia? Your choice? Who was this guy?! Oh, yeah. Chris Evans.
"You're for real?" you asked, leaning a little forward in your seat to be sure you heard him right.

"Yeah," he told you, with a bashful smile. "It's gonna be a lot of traveling. I'll be gone awhile and-" He shrugged, his eyes ticking down to his plate. "I don't know. I figured, you come along, we don't have to spend all that time apart. I thought it might be fun for you, you know, if you haven't been." Chris kind of trailed off before he looked back up at you, expectantly. You sat back in your chair. 

"Huh. Your mouth gaped a bit in thought and the corner of Chris' mouth pulled back on one side when it did. Following Chris on the press tour. You hadn't thought of it.

But the first thing that did pop into your head was whether or not he was making the offer to ward off any worries you might develop about his unsupervised globetrotting. What the fuck is wrong with you? You shook your head, irritated at yourself that that's the first place your mind went. Stop that. Maybe he really just wants you around. All of a sudden, you were trying to remember the last time you had your passport renewed and how deep you were willing to dig into your saving account for a once in a lifetime adventure.

"What'dya think?" he asked, vague smile still on his face while he waited.

"Wow," you breathed out, eyes wide at the ideas running through your head. "That, uh..." You coughed out a bit of a stunned laugh. "That sounds pretty awesome, actually."

Chris straightened up in his chair, smile beaming and seeming a little relieved. "Really?"

"Well, yeah, I mean," you shrugged, "I have a schedule to keep at the salon while one of the girls is on maternity leave. Oh, and I'd have to check with Frank first and make sure my passport's still good." You thoughtfully cocked your head at the list of things you'd have to do or work around. "Of course, I'd have to see the stops so I can see what kind of price I could get for-"

"I figured you'd just come with me," he said, casually interrupting your verbal train of thought. 

"Huh? Wait. What?"

You blinked. "Huh?"

Chris chuckled at your confused expression. "What I meant was," he began, "I figured you'd fly with me. All the flights and hotels and everything are already set. My assistant's got the flight numbers. I just have Josh book a seat next to me and-"

"Oh, no," you shook your head. Dollar signs rang up in your eyes at the thought of first class, international flight rates. "I couldn't-"

"You don't have to," he airily suggested. "Just lemme have my-"

"No. Really," you butted in again. "That's, like-"

"It's no trouble," Chris interrupted.

"Not to be rude," you began, with a shy titter, "but there's a little bit of difference between you and me hopping on a plane."

"I can cover-"


"Why not?" he asked, brow creasing down as he went back to playing with the top of his drink.
Because I don't need charity. *No. That's rude. Because I don't need a man to- Oh, God, no!*

"Because I don't want this to be weird," you said, with an awkward pull in the side of your mouth and shrug of mild embarrassment.

"It's not weird," he assured you. "It's just a plane ticket. If you wouldn't go because of the money, I want to. It's not a big deal. I just want you to come along."

"It is weird," you told him. "I mean, it's one thing to beat me to the check for a dinner or something, but-"

"But it's too much to pay for a plane ticket," he said for you, a little resigned.

"Kinda," you shrugged, feeling a bit sheepish. "Yeah. I mean, it's a nice offer, but..."

"This was gonna come up eventually, wasn't it?" he sighed, resting back into his seat and folding his hands in his lap. You nodded when he tipped his eyes back up to yours. "I don't mean to be insulting, or anything."

"No," you told him. "I know."

"But it's not a big deal," he insisted. "I just want you to come along. I don't want this to be a thing any time I offer to do something for you. Really, I'm not trying to insult you. You're doing great for yourself. I know. I see that. But if the reason you wouldn't go is that it's gonna take a bite out of your savings or something, then let me do this."

Your lips pursed into a frown before pushing to one side in a thoughtful pout. Really, how has this not come up sooner? He watches baseball games from private suites, drives luxury brand cars, and wears designer suits and watches. You've seen more games from the nosebleeds than anywhere else, still have two years of car payments left, and get excited when the seasons change on the racks at Target. You may have officially reached the part where you can't pretend you're dating a normal guy. *Dear diary, Today I made an ass out of myself...again.*

"I'm not dropping a dime for this trip," he noted. "Marvel's paying for everything. Flights, rooms, drivers. It's all taken care of already. So, I'm not exactly racking up a bill."

"Not that you couldn't afford it anyway," you said, though you didn't know why you actually did and instantly regretted it.

"That's true," he nodded, brow wagging up as his eyes went down. Chris groaned and shook his head, picking up his fork again to poke at his food distractedly. "You know, it's never been a problem before," he said, with a halfhearted snort. "Nobody ever had a thought about not taking me up on something like this."

Of course, nobody needs Chris Evans to buy them things when they're part of the Hollywood elite. Of course, a lot of people wouldn't say 'no' to a rich celebrity like him footing the bills. You hadn't considered that, and it struck you as a little funny. It seemed to strike him as unusual to hear 'no' and that was disappointing to you.

"I just," you started, then paused. "I'd rather pay for my own ticket is all."

"You don't have to," he gently reminded you.

"I know," you warmly smiled. "And I appreciate the offer. I really do."
"Fine," he conceded, after a long moment of studying your face. "We'll get ahold of the tour info and see what we can put together, see if you wanna do the whole trip or if you wanna catch up somewh'eh."

"Thanks," you smiled, meekly.

"You gonna give me a hard time about the hotel next?" he smirked.

"Mmm," you mischievously hummed, squinting an eye toward the ceiling in thought. You looked back down and broke into a smile when Chris' fork clattered down to the plate and he sat back, throwing his hands up and groaning out an exaggerated sigh.

"You're fahckin' killin' me over here!" he declared, shaking his head.

"Fine!" you gave in. "I'll stay at your crappy hotel with you. Geez."

"Crappy hotel," he muttered, picking up his fork and stabbing aggressively into a piece of chicken. Chris glared at you through his lashes as he took a bite, still muttering a complaint, around a mouth full of half-chewed food, "You'll stay at the crappy hotel with me an' like it."

"Fine," you indifferently shrugged, going back to your own food.

"Fine," he shrugged, chewing.

"Whatever," you added, taking a bite.

"Whatever," he repeated, jutting his chin at you.

You waited a moment before dropping, "Okay."

Chris' fork fell again and you sputtered out a laugh, trying to hide the food in your mouth behind your hand. "Alright, sassy," he playfully scolded, looking down his pointed finger at you. "You don't get the last word all the time. One more peep outta you and I'm gonna buy you a fahckin' plane and make you take that everywhere. Alright?" You drew your fingers over your lips, zippering your mouth shut and Chris nodded. "That's more like it."

You tried. You really did. But it was just. too. tempting. After a minute or so of quiet dinner, you set your fork aside and casually picked up your drink. After a refreshing sip, you cleared your throat quietly. Chris looked up at you from his side of the table and then back to his dinner after trading a quick smile with your innocent grin.

When he wasn't paying attention again, you put the next bite of food on your fork and, ever so softly, said, "Peeeep."

There it was. The third fork clatter of the night. Chris looked down the table at you, his head cocked to the side in a look of absolute disbelief. You smiled sweetly, pressing your lips together to keep from laughing.

"I- I swear to gahd, [y/n]." he stammered, shaking his head, unable to hold off his suppressed laughter anymore. "You're gonna be the end of me. You're lucky I love you."

Your smile beamed and you felt your cheeks betray you with a little extra warmth. Chris shook his head with a smile and went back to eating. You managed to behave yourself for the rest of dinner.
The next morning, you worked up a hell of a sweat with Frank. At the end of your session, sipping on protein shakes and sitting on the curb next to your Jeep in the parking lot, you ran Chris' offer to join him on the press tour by him. You stressed you obviously would work any travel around Frank’s schedule, by no means trying to skip out on work. You were amused when Frank chuckled and cooed at the idea of you adventuring on the Marvel press tour with Team Cap. You were worried when he wiped the smile off his face and gave you a condition for your leave.

"You gotta take your HYDRA t-shirt with you," he said, straight-faced and serious.

"Noo," you began to protest, but he cut you off.

"And," he loudly insisted, holding up a finger to shush you and add another stipulation, "I gotta see a pic 'a you wearing it with Evans."

Your jaw fell open. "How the hell am I s'pose to pull that off on the Team Cap press tour?!

"That's not my problem," he smiled, smugly, wagging up his brow and bringing his shake to his lips before he added before a drink, "It's yours."

"That's not fair," you argued, stumped for how this could possibly fly with Chris.

Frank swallowed a drink and shrugged with a cocky smirk, like the shit that he is. "That's the deal," he told you.

"I can't," you whined.

"I believe in you, kid," Frank said, gently nudging his fist into your shoulder. "You never back down from a challenge."

"This is a suicide mission," you pointed out, returning the kindness with a push in his arm.

"Hey," he shrugged, with an indifferent frown, "think of the story you'll be able to tell your grandkids."

"There's no grandkids after he murders me for wearing that shirt on his tour, Frank," you noted.

"You wanna go on the tour..." he trailed off, holding out his hands in a shrug of sorts before taking another swig of his shake.

"Ugh," you quietly groaned. "You're a terrible human being."

"I'm a villain," he proudly corrected.

You nodded. "You are definitely a villain, sir."

"C'mon," he said, jutting his chin at you. "I triple dog dare you."

"Oh, for fuck's sake," you whined. "Triple dog dare?"

He nodded, confidently. "Triple," he reiterated.

"Nooooo," you cried, pinching your face in the most pained expression.

"Yyyes," he nodded, with a smile only Satan could wear better.

There was a rule. Groundwork was laid from the first days on the Kingdom set. A code of honor.
Once someone threw out the triple dog dare, the dared had to follow through or bear the humiliation on set of being branded a coward. What was worse, the weak willed also ran the danger of possibly being victim to some prank in penalty. The last crew member who refused, a boom man who backed out of a New Jersey Turnpike shot at the wrap party for season one, woke up to two dozen chickens running lose in his back yard and randomly found a rubber chicken hanging from his mic for the first half of the second season shoot. To this day, no one claims to know or will admit how the chickens got there. After "the Turnpike turndown of 2015", needless to say, no triple dog dare went unanswered.

Shhhiiiiiiiiiiiiiiit.

"Frank, you can't," you plaintively insisted.

"Ohh ho ho, but I did," he merrily reminded you.

You winced and dropped your head to your knees. "No no no no no," you muttered, shaking your head. When you looked back up, Frank was still beaming at the spot he put you in. "God fuckin' dammit!" you yelled. You stuck out your hand for Frank to shake. "Fine," you painfully agreed.

"Excellent choice," Frank smiled, giving your hand a firm shake. "I'll say something nice about you at your funeral."

"You better," you told him, shaking your head in defeat.

God damn Frank Grillo.

Chris Evans was a popular guy. He was getting increasingly popular by the day. With that in mind, you appreciated the little text messaged good mornings and hellos as much as the phone calls to say goodnight. This morning, it was a casual call you caught while taking Archie for a few blocks worth of a walk, before you headed to the beach for the midday sun and surf with a couple friends and Chris was off to a magazine interview and photoshoot at 12:30.

"So, I'll probably be tied up 'til about 4, 4:30," Chris said. "You want to grab dinner or something after?"

"That sounds good," you agreed.

"Where you headed today?" he asked.

"Up to Venice," you told him, tugging at Archie's leash to get him to forget the telephone pole he'd been sniffing around for more than a few seconds. "Archie misses the waves."

"I think you mean yourself," he chuckled. "Archie seems like the type of guy to know it's too cold to be in the water."

"Fine," you grumbled. "It's me."

"You're crazy," Chris told you. "You know that?"

"Gee, thanks, babe," you laughed.

"It's, like, 55°," he complained. "You're nuts."

"That's what they make wetsuits for," you reminded him.
"Don't even get me started on sharks," he trailed off.

"Really?" you scoffed. "You're kidding, right?"

"I'm naht," he insisted, sounding surprisingly serious. "You and fuckin' Hemsworth and surfing."

"What?" you challenged. "What's wrong with surfing?"

"The water's fahckin' cold in February, for one," he started ticking off his points. "Uh, sharks, number two. Number three, great white sharks."

You couldn't help your boisterous laughter. "Okay, hold up," you told him. "Sharks can not be two different points."

"Uh, they can," Chris told you, matter of factly. "And they are."

"Noo," you groaned.

"Okay, listen," he begged your indulgence. "Lemme ask you, have you ever seen a shark? Like, in the water, you're out on your board, and you saw a fuckin' shark?"

You didn't want to answer and help whatever point he was trying to make, but you decided to be honest nonetheless. "Yes," you hesitantly admitted.

"More than once?" he checked.

"Yeah," you sighed, sensing something coming from the tone of his question.

"What the hell is wrong with you?!" he all but yelled in your ear. "Why would you keep going back in the water?"

"Okay," you sighed, with a heavy roll of your eyes you wished he could see. "I can think of a hundred terrible things, right now, that are more dangerous than being in the ocean. Driving your car is more-"

"No, it's not," Chris interrupted.

"I've got a better chance of-"

"No," he insisted. "Nnnope."

"Well, you don't have to go," you assured him, with a laugh.

"Good! I won't," he said, confidently. "Why- Why would you still- Ugh, never mind. You- You're crazy. That's all there is."

"Oh my god," you shook your head. "I can't believe you're lecturing me on sharks."

"Somebody's gotta talk some sense into ya," he scoffed.

"Are you done?" you asked.

"Yeah," Chris conceded. "For now."

"Did you have a point before you decided to go off on a tangent about sharks?" you wondered aloud.
Chris chuckled and it made you smile. "I was wondering if you'd be home by the time I was done. I could be there probably by 5. If that's not too soon?"

"I can be home and cleaned up by 4:30," you promised, turning Archie around to go back home. It was almost time to start out to meet your friends at the beach. "5 o'clock works."

"Perfect," Chris agreed. "Think about dinner and I'll call you when I'm finished."

"I'll be waiting...unless I get attacked by a shark," you teased.

"That's not funny," he chided you. "Roy Scheider isn't around to save you anymore."


"He got eaten," Chris pointed out, rather flatly and unamused.

"Fair enough," you said. Your breath hitched, nearly forgetting the most important thing you wanted to talk to him about. "Oh, I wanted to talk to you about the press tour," you added, cutting off the wind up of his goodbye. "Do you have a minute?"

"Yeah, I do," he said, sounding eager to hear. "You talk to Frank about your schedule?"

"I did," you told him. "It shouldn't be a problem."

"Really?" Chris asked, hopeful but cautious.

"Yeah," you smiled to yourself, thinking about the trip. "I already made some commitments for the salon and some wedding stuff, but I'm in the clear after the 18th. When do you leave?"

"On the 17th," he half-grumbled. "Can you leave on the 18th, or do you mean you can't leave until the 19th?"

"The 19th, actually," you corrected. "If there was a flight out late on the 18th, I could probably swing that."

"Well, shit," Chris muttered. You bit your lip in the short pause before he went on. "Do you want to come out that early, or do you want to wait for London? London, then New York?"

You fumbled for a second. You hadn't really thought about it. "Well, I- Does it matter?" you asked. "I mean, I know you'll be busy. I don't want to be in the-"

"No!" he assured you. "God, no. You'd be a welcome distraction. If anything, you'll be bitching about me while I got all this stuff to do."

You tittered, feeling a soft and passing heat through your cheeks at how insistent he was for you to be there. "I'm sure I can manage."

"I don't have anything in front of me," he said, sounding distracted, like he was looking around for something, "but, uhh, I'm, like, 90% sure we'll be in Beijing on the 19th...Yeah, that sounds right. But I'm flying out the morning of the 17th."

"Huh," you breathed out, thinking.

"We can make it happen, if you want to do Beijing," Chris offered.

"What's after Beijing?" you asked.
"Singapore," he said. "Then a bunch 'a press events and London...I'd like it if you came out sooner rather than later."

There's that blush again. Oo! And butterflies.

"I'll start looking around online and see what I can come up with, when I get home," you promised. "Maybe I'll have some ideas by the time we get to dinner."

"I'll dig up that schedule and send you an email or somethin'," he told you, sounding distant again. "It's around here... somewhere... Fuck. I'll just have Josh send it to me again."

You snickered at his small frustration. "I'll keep an eye out for it," you assured him. "Have fun at your interview."

"Have fun being shark bait," he quipped.
This was some bullshit. All you wanted to do was have a little fun with your friends, get Archie some fresh air and exercise, and for you to get some time in with your board. Okay. So, fair enough, you got all of that. But standing in the parking lot of Venice beach, you got a little more than you were planning.

With Archie and your surfboard tucked up in the Jeep, you were at the passenger side of your car, peeling off your wetsuit. Late February is hardly the time of year to be in the Pacific without one. You had just pulled the suit's leg off and set your bare foot down, when you felt a stabbing pain and yelled a powerful profanity, falling to lean into the side of your Jeep. Looking down, you realized late February is also apparently a good time of year for assholes to leave broken bottles in parking lots.

You hadn't seen the debris peeking out from just behind the front tire of your passenger side. Somehow, you'd managed to avoid it earlier by putting Archie in the back door. Your mistake was moving forward to use your mirror to steady yourself while you changed. Next time, just sit on the bumper, dumbass.

A quick look down at the spot of red developing on the pavement under your picked up foot said the rest of your day was shot. A better look at the underside of your upturned foot and you knew this was a job for more than a Band-Aid. Hopping around for a second, you opened the car door and perched yourself on the edge of your seat. Cursing at the pain the entire time, you grabbed your long sleeve tee you'd planned on using as a cover-up for your swimsuit top and wrapped it around your wound.

Safe from the pavement below, you finished tugging off your wetsuit and tossed it onto the floor of the backseat to pull on a pair of shorts. You clamored over the console and slid behind the wheel. You reached over to pull the door shut and started the engine. Your phone pointed you in the direction of the nearest hospital and you were on your way, swearing and wincing as you worked the clutch with the side of your injured foot.

The roof was open to accommodate your board, so you knew Archie would be comfortable to wait for a little bit. You limped and hopped into the emergency room to sign yourself in. It was about twenty minutes before they called you back. You spent the time with your left foot crossed over your knee, mourning the loss of one of your favorite t-shirts after this little fiasco and hoping you didn't bleed everywhere.

Your nurse gave you a blanket to wrap around yourself, to keep warm in the chilly hospital. You let her throw away your recently re-dyed shirt for you. Your foot was numbed and cleaned up and they took some x-rays. The doctor ended up removing a curved piece of green glass from the sole of your foot that was a little smaller than the size of a quarter. The doctor still examining the gouge under the light for further debris and the bottom half of you in your hospital bed, served as the background for the photo you snapped of the offending glass in your fingertips. It went straight to Twitter with a full 140 character rant about 'people picking up their shit' and copied to Instagram.

You made a couple calls, realizing this might take a while, looking for someone to rescue Archie from the parking lot. Not that you figured he cared much. He was probably stretched out along the backseat soaking up the sun. Your friend, Victoria, said she was relatively close by and was on her way. You sent out a couple messages to see about a way home.

You went out for another set of images of your foot. The doctor was mildly concerned with the area
of the arch of your foot the glass had entered. While you waited for the X-ray results to be read, you called home and caught your mom up on the day's misadventures. It wasn't long after that when Vick showed up. You told her where you were parked and sent her off with your house key to take Archie home, telling her to just stash the key on top of the trim of the doorframe. Unfortunately, she wasn't available to be your personal Uber home.

All there was left to do was wait for the report from the doctor. Thank god for free Wi-Fi to help pass the time. You answered a couple texts from concerned friends who saw your post and scrolled through Instagram and Twitter to amuse yourself.

[@caliStyle82 if you were a horse, we'd have to shoot you]

Thanks, Frank. What a sweetie. You snorted to yourself anyway, because he was right and that was so Frank. You shook and dropped your head back into the pillow, waiting. Your phone rang and you looked at it eagerly, hoping it was someone calling back about a ride. It wasn't, but you smiled anyway when you saw Frank's caller ID photo on your screen.

"What the hell happened to you?" he asked, apparently bypassing the formality of responding to your greeting.

"I really wish I had a good story," you sighed. "I went out to Venice with some friends for the surf and stepped on a piece of glass."

"What'd you do that for?" he practically chastised you.

"Yeah, 'cause this is how I wanted to spend my Thursday," you scoffed, with a smile. "I didn't mean to. I just didn't see it."

"That looks like it hurts," Frank noted, his tone dropping a notch with concern. "You alright, kid?"

"It's still numb from the cleaning, so it's not so bad," you told him. "Waiting for the on-call podiatrist to look at the X-rays and to get some stitches before they set me free. Hurt like a son of a bitch when it happened, though."

"I bet," he laughed. "Is Evans with you?"

"No," you said, checking the clock on the wall. "He's at an interview slash photoshoot. I'd just split from my friends when I realized I hadn't been to the hospital in awhile and I had some free time, so I figured I'd come over."

"Nice," Frank chuckled. "So much for Cleveland this weekend, huh?"

Oohh. You hadn't actually thought that far ahead. You were understandably a little fixated in the present. Shit.

"Oh," you winced, remembering. "No, I can do it."

"Like hell you can," he scoffed. "What? Are you gonna hobble around the con on crutches all weekend? And never mind getting through the damned airport. No. You sit this one out, okay?"

"I'm not gonna punk out," you assured him. "It won't be a big deal. I can ju-"

"Aht!" Grillo sharply interrupted. "I don't wanna hear it. Listen, I know you're tough, but give yourself a break. You're getting stitches, for fuck's sake. Take a day off. It's just a con. You don't want to worry about infections and shit while you're traveling."
His blessings or no, you felt like you were letting him down. You groaned your unhappiness and he scolded you for arguing. He told you he'd let Rick know you wouldn't be coming and they would take care of cancelling you reservations. Frank assured you that you'd be missed, but insisted you stay home, follow the doctor's orders, and 'take care of you'.

Getting off the phone, your nurse checked in on you and offered you something to drink or another blanket while you waited. You were fine, but thanked her anyway. You thumbed through your phone while you waited to hear back from the doctor. This was taking forever. You traded texts with your mom, telling her there was no new news when she asked. You were interrupted mid-type when Chris called.

"What the fuck happened?" he demanded after you said hello, his voice heavy with concern.

"Saw my tweet, huh?" you chuckled.

"Yeah, I saw your tweet," he agreed with the obvious. "Why didn't you call?"

*Duh.* He's in the middle of a shoot and interview. Even *if* you expected his phone to *actually* be on him, you wouldn't interrupt.

"You're working," you reminded him.

"Still," he insisted and then sighed. "Are you alright? Where are you?"

"Marina Del Ray Hospital, in the ER," you answered, a little pouty.

"What happened?" he repeated, his tone calming a bit.

You told the story. Leaving the beach and changing out of your wetsuit, about not noticing the broken bottle in your parking spot until you'd already stepped a bare foot down, ruining your t-shirt as a makeshift bandage, how you half-assed your clutch management on your manual transmission Jeep to drive yourself to the hospital, and the excruciatingly slow emergency room experience so far. He was quiet through it all, listening without interrupting. When you finished, you heard a sigh from the other end of the line.

"Are you going to be alright?" he asked. "Where's Archie?"

"I had a friend come out to take him home," you said, smiling to yourself that he cared enough to think of your dog too. "He should be there soon."

"You got somebody with you?" he went on. "How are you getting home?"

You puffed air out of your cheeks. "Hadn't really gotten that figured out yet," you admitted. "I got some messages out. There's always a cab. No biggie."

Chris groaned out a sigh. "I can't leave," he muttered, probably to himself.

"Don't worry about it," you told him. "I'll figure something out. I've got half a battery on my phone and free Wi-Fi, so I'm set."

Your positive spin on the situation got barely a small chuckle from Chris before he said, "You're in the hospital. I should be keeping you company, at least. Should be getting you home."

"It's the hospital," you reminded him, "not the morgue. I'm okay. Really." You checked your watch. "Besides, you're almost done. It'd probably be a crap shoot to see who got finished first at this point."
"I'm sending someone over," he decided. "Someone to take you home."

"I'm fine," you laughed. "I'll do a couple call backs, when I hang up with you, and."

"Let me make some calls," he interrupted. "You said, Marina Del Ray?"

"Yeah, but-"

"Dammit, [y/n]. Let me do this, okay?" Chris insisted.

You stopped and blinked, a little surprised. "Okay," you managed, with a small titter.

He asked which room you were in and you answered. Chris told you he had to get off the phone, but he'd take care of it. You couldn't help but giggle about his protective streak. Actually, you kinda liked it. You went back to messaging with your mom. Another ten minutes or so, after you got off the phone with Chris, the doctor came back to tell you the X-rays were clear and to give your foot three stitches. You kept your eyes on your phone, not necessarily interested to watch the doctor work. *Man, this sucks.*

The doctor was finally gone and the nurse had just come in to wrap your foot, when there was a knock on the wall outside the privacy curtain entrance of your room and a voice said your name. You answered and the edge of the curtain pulled back enough for Scott Evans' face to peek in.

"Hey. There you are," Scott smiled, stepping inside and looking relieved to have found you, before his brow knit in worry at seeing the nurse dressing your wound. "Damn, girl."

You chuckled with a shrug. "Yeah," you agreed.

Scott grabbed the empty chair along the wall, dragging it close to the bedside before he sat down. His gaze went from the nurse's work up to you. "You alright?"

"You should see the other guy," you joked and you both laughed. "What are you doing here? I was expecting a cab, or a car service at best."

"Please," Scott scoffed, his head ticking back with an insulted scowl at you. "You really think he'd send a stranger to take care of you?" he asked. "He was gonna walk off if I couldn't come over."

"Really?" you checked, smiling like an idiot at the idea of Chris walking off a photoshoot or out of an interview to be your knight in shining armor.

"You don't believe me?" he chuckled.

"I kinda do," you said and the notion sent those adorable, little butterflies circling in your stomach.

"He loves ya," Scott shrugged.

The nurse interrupted to say she was finished. She told you she would be back soon with your discharge paperwork and prescription and to get you set up with a pair of crutches. You begged Scott's pardon while you called to update your mom. She was as surprised as you were when you said Scott had come to take you home, when she asked about how you were getting there. She was impressed and said as much, noting her approval of the way Chris took care of her daughter. You tested, mom approved.

With your paperwork in hand and your blanket wrapped around your shoulders, your nurse wheeled you out to the door while Scott pulled his car around. He helped you out of the wheelchair and held
your arm while you literally hopped your way into the car. There was a sweatshirt in the backseat, with some other things, and he gave it to you to cover up with. He even stopped at Walgreens to get your prescription filled and pick up some extra supplies for taking care of your foot. Getting through the store was child's play compared to getting up the steps to your apartment.

You were too stubborn, or prideful, to accept Scott's offer to carry you. Instead, Scott took your crutches and you hooked an arm in his and grabbed the railing with your free hand, hopping up one step at a time. It took a while, about five times as long as it usually did, but you made it on your own power. Good job!

Scott found your key stashed on top of the trim above your door, right where your friend had left it. Inside, you slumped into the couch to catch your breath. Archie introduced himself to Scott and gingerly sniffed around your foot, after Scott put a pillow under it so you could prop it up on the coffee table. He set your things from the store on the dining room table and got you a glass of water to start taking your pills.

Scott offered to make or get you something for dinner and keep you company. You told him he'd already done enough and he could go, but he insisted. God. These Evans boys. You tried to fight him off, but chivalry is not dead in the Evans family. You settled on ordering in Chinese, something you could live off of for a meal or two, if you ordered enough, and until you had a better idea about how things were going to go with your foot. Scott sat with you on the couch, keeping his mouth shut about spoilers as you caught up on the Walking Dead on your DVR. Archie pranced to the door, a herald to the knock that came a moment later. Scott got up to answer for you, smiling and stepping aside for Chris to come in.

Chris bypassed even saying hello to his brother, giving him a clap on the arm instead and heading straight for you. Scott closed the door and snorted as he shook his head, obviously amused by his brother's concern. Chris looked over at your foot before bending a kiss down to the top of your head. "Holy shit," Chris breathed, looking down at the wrap on your foot and ankle. "You okay?"

Scott gave his brother a small shove to move him aside. Scott stepped over your legs and took his seat again. Chris reached a smack out to the back of Scott's head before he got away.

His face pinched in disbelief, he gestured to you while he chided Scott. "What'sa matter with you, huh? Walk around the fahckin' table."

"Psh," Scott scoffed, waving a dismissive hand in the air.

You laughed and finally answered Chris. "I'm fine. A few stitches and a follow-up appointment with a foot specialist on Monday." With a small frown, you added, "Not going on the trip with Frank, though."

"That's for damn sure," Chris agreed.

Chris put his hands on his hips and looked down at your foot for a moment before shaking his head. He walked around the table, stepping past Scott and waving him down the couch so he could sit next to you. Scott flipped him off as he scooted out of the way and Chris gave you another once over before he sat down.

"Whose shirt is that?" he asked, sounding a little suspicious.

"It's mine, numb nuts," Scott told him, taking a swipe at the side of his head. "Christ. Your girlfriend's on crutches and you wonder whose hoodie she's wearing?"
"Well, it ain't mine, so, yeah," Chris said, blindly elbowing backward at his brother.

"You want me to let her run around in a bikini and shorts or do you want her to borrow my sweatshirt?" Scott needled and you chuckled. "Geez, man. Priorities."

"Shad up," Chris groaned, glancing over at Scott. He turned back to you. "Does it hurt? You need anything?"

"Already taken care off," Scott said. Your raised brow with an approving pout and nod, as you pointed a finger down the couch at Scott, showed your agreement. "We got prescriptions filled, medicine taken, dinner ordered. You're way behind."

"Was I talking to you?" Chris asked, turning to see Scott, who was looking at something on his phone and, apparently, too indifferent to Chris' question or stare to bother to look up.

"I don't care if you are or not. She already said I'm her favorite Evans," Scott shrugged.

You held up your hand, like you were waiting to be called on in school. "In my defense," you began, "I'm on narcotics, so, if I did say that- And I'm not saying I did. But, if I did, I don't think I should be held accountable for it. I just wanna put that out there."

Chris sent you a quick smile before going back to his brother. "Thanks for picking her up, man," he told him.

Scott smiled, while he typed on his phone. "No problem."

Something seemed to occur to Chris, his brow furrowing as he looked around. He set his eyes on Archie lying in the kitchen doorway and pointed at him. "How are you planning on taking care of Archie while you're on crutches?" he asked.

You shrugged, with a thoughtful pout. "Carefully?" you suggested.

Scott snorted and set his phone down on the table. "She's pretty good on the crutches," he noted.

Chris looked his way. "Yeah, but it's a third floor apartment," he pointed out.

"It took a bit, but she got up the stairs pretty much by herself," Scott shrugged. "What? Is he not good on a leash? He pull or something?"

"No, he's good," Chris explained, "but still. Two flights of steps."

You put your hand up again. "Umm. I'm right here," you reminded them.

Scott leaned forward to see you around his brother, smiling and giving you a small, but enthusiastic, wave before he sat back and added, "I'm just saying, give her a little credit."

"I'm giving her credit," Chris defended himself. "I'm just sayin'."

"Laundry's probably in the basement, though," Scott imagined.

Chris nodded and corrected himself, "So three flights of stairs."

"Still here," you piped up.

Chris snickered and put an arm along the top of the couch behind you. "Sorry," he said. "I was just thinking-"
"I know," you nodded. "I got this. Might be a bit slower than usual, but it'll be fine."

Chris seemed to consider something for a moment before he suggested, "I'm free tomorrow. You want me to stay here and help out?"

Gulp. It hadn't been more than a week and a half since you guys patched things up. Between his busy schedule and your little adventures, you hadn't really seen each other for more than a handful of hours at a time. Granted, they were good hours, but you hadn't been in a position to stay or have him stay the night since before you fought. You knew he was being sincere in his offer to help, but something about it, given the recent circumstances, made it seem a little awkward. The look on Chris' face made you think he might be thinking the same things. On the other hand, although you appreciated Scott's confidence in your abilities, it would be easier with some help.

Chris seemed to pick up on the questions you had in your pause. "It's no trouble," he added. "I'd like to help."

"Mm," Scott hummed, seeming to have had an idea and hitting the back of his hand to Chris' leg. "You're not free tomorrow. Don't you have a rehearsal for the Oscars? And what about getting Carly from the airport?"

"Shit," Chris muttered, dragging his hand down his cheek, thinking for a moment. "Can you get her?"

Scott's head tipped to one side, his face scrunching and teeth bared as he hissed in a breath. "It'll be close," he worried. "Yeah. I think I can make it happen. I'll let her know."

You already felt like a burden, even though no one was actually doing anything for you. "Guys, no," you protested. "Really, it's okay. I can manage. If I really need something, I can call a friend. Don't try to rearrange-"

"It's not that much trouble," Scott assured you, already thumbing through his phone. "It'll be fine." He looked at Chris. "I got it."

Before you could try to make a better argument, the delivery guy knocked on the door. Scott popped up off the couch to answer. This time he walked around the table instead of over you, to the sarcastic thanks of Chris. Chris went into the kitchen for plates and utensils while Scott began sorting through the order on the dining table. You got up, with a little bit of discomfort and effort, to take a seat at the table.

Chris' face dropped, disapprovingly, at seeing you scoot your chair up to the table when he came back from the kitchen. "I woulda brought it to you," he said.

"Now we can eat at the table like grown-ups," you innocently smiled.

The three of you split up and ate your takeout around the table. You all read lame fortune cookie fortunes and compared lucky numbers. After the meal and some good conversation, Chris and Scott cleared the leftovers and dishes. You got back up and made your way to the kitchen to feed Archie, refusing to be completely useless despite Chris and Scott both saying they would do it. You consented to letting Chris take the dog for a walk while you went back to the couch.

A good day in the sun and surf, a long afternoon in the emergency room, and your medicine and you were feeling pretty beat after dinner. Chris coaxed you into lying down for a bit, promising you he and Scott would take care of Archie while you napped. He followed you down the hall, waiting for you while you went to the bathroom. He watched you move on to your room, offering to bring you
anything you needed and setting your crutches on the floor along the bedside for you. It didn't take long before you were knocked out.

You didn't mean to, but you slept through the night. You slept well, but could feel every ache and pain from your foot with the first move you made to stir in bed. It was then you realized it would have been handy to have had your medicine on the nightstand. Still wearing Scott's hoodie and your shorts over your bathing suit, you groaned in disapproval of yourself for not taking the initiative to clean up and change before falling asleep.

It was more than a little painful when you got out of bed. You obviously weren't walking on your foot, but every single nerve around your stitches was firing. First order of business- get your next round of medication in you. Making your way to the end of the hall, you stopped when you noticed your surfboard stood up against the wall beside the front door. You smiled at seeing Chris asleep on your couch, arm folded under a pillow and Archie wedged between the back of the couch and Chris' knees.

Archie noticed you first, climbing over Chris to get to the floor and waking him up in the process. Half-asleep, Chris picked his head up and looked down at Archie fumbling over his legs, complaining in a tired voice, "Come on, dude." He watched Archie prance over to you and, realizing you were up, Chris gave you a sleepy smile, sitting up and wiping a hand down his face. You both said your good mornings while you moved to the table to grab your pain medicine. Chris was on his feet right away, going into the kitchen to bring you a glass of water. "Here," he offered, holding the cup out to you. He watched you swallow your pill, asking how you felt and if you slept well. You nodded, taking an extra drink of water to wash everything down.

"It hurts today," you admitted, your brow pulled down in unhappiness. "Slept alright though." You took another drink, inclining your chin toward the surfboard in the corner. "How'd that get here?"

Chris looked over and tipped his head. "Oh," he began, "me and Scott went and picked up your car after you fell asleep." You gave him a look of surprise while he pointed at the board and added, "I didn't know what to do with it. I didn't remember ever seeing it in here."

"I've got a storage space in the basement I keep it in," you explained.

"Oh," he said. "Sorry. Want me to run it down?"

"No. It's fine," you shook your head, with a smile. "You didn't have to do that. Thank you."

"Don't thank us yet," Chris smirked. "It's been awhile since either of us drove a stick. Scott mighta burned out your clutch."

"Good lord," you laughed, shaking your head again.

"Why don't you sit down," Chris told you, stepping aside so you had a wide path to the couch. "You want something to eat? You should probably eat with your medicine."

"Sure," you agreed, carefully hopping to turn and sit on the couch. The pillow from under your foot the night before was still on the coffee table and Chris helped position it under your foot. "What do you want?" he asked. You hesitated a moment, mulling over what you might have in the kitchen. "Never mind," Chris smiled. "I'll come up with something."

You shrugged and he went off to the kitchen. You turned on the television. You quietly laughed to yourself at seeing SportsCenter when the screen came to life. The thought of Chris falling asleep on
your couch with your dog watching ESPN amused you to no end and you smiled again.

You settled into your seat, watching the top 10 plays while Chris made the occasional noise from the kitchen. After a little while, he came back with a cup of coffee and a spoon in one hand and the bottle of creamer in the other. You accepted both and he waited while you mixed your drink. When you finished with the cream, he disappeared back to the kitchen again. The next time he came back, it was with a plate of pancakes. He gave you the plate and left the bottle of syrup on the coffee table, explaining he saw the box of pancake mix in the cupboard and thought they sounded good.

You sat on the couch together, both of you with feet on the coffee table and eating pancakes while you watched ESPN highlights. Despite the occasional pain or ache from your bum foot, it was a good morning. When you were finished, Chris took your dishes and fed Archie his breakfast. After he took Archie for his morning walk, he came back to join you on the couch again.

"So, I was thinking," he said and you asked about what. "Scott and I were talking, and we both thought it'd make sense if maybe you stayed at the house till your foot was better."

Huh? The house? Wait. He didn't mean his house. Did he?

"Just for a few days or whatever," Chris added quickly. "You wouldn't have to go up any stairs, there's a yard for Archie. It'd be a lot easier on you. Just for a few days."

"You already said that," you pointed out.

"Yeah," he realized. You both seemed to feel a little unsure about the idea and Chris huffed out a short laugh. "Look," he began, "I know things are a little weird right now, since we..." Chris trailed off and you weren't interested in hearing him finish the sentence either. "I don't want to put you on the spot or anything. I'm just saying, we were just thinking about what would be easiest for you for a little while."

You bit your lip, considering it. It wasn't a bad idea. When no one was alluding to your argument a couple weeks ago, things were good and getting better again. You could see the caution in Chris' expression and knew he only had honorable intentions behind the idea. But still, it was kind of awkward. It's not like you hadn't spent a couple nights at his place over the last month or so, before you're falling out, but this was somehow...more. And, besides your sense of stubborn independence, you couldn't help but feel it was testing the current comfort limits of your recently strained relationship.

"Chris," you began then stopped, taking a beat and shaking your head before you went on. "I appreciate the offer, but that kinda sounds like a bit much."

He gave you an understanding nod. "I know," he said. "I figured. But it just makes sense. When I'm there, you'll have someone to help you out. When I'm not, it's easier to get around. You wouldn't have to worry about getting Archie out for walks. There's a walk-in shower in the master bathroom, so you're not climbing in and out of a tub. It just- I don't know what to do to help and it's the best I can think of to do, so I don't have to worry about you by yourself. It's just until you feel better."

You took in and let out a long breath. He had some good points. You could muddle your way through taking care of yourself, but Archie, honestly, was going to be a problem. Just the way you felt when you woke up today told you that hopping up and down two flights of steps a few times a day was going to be less than ideal, or wise.

"Okay," you tentatively nodded. "For a couple days and we'll see how I feel."
Chris' smile struck you as a bit relieved. "Okay," he agreed. "Let's pack some things for you."

You pointed around your room for Chris, telling him where to find your carry on suitcase in the closet and having him hand you a few things, instead of you going back and forth for them. He joked that you didn't have to pack both shoes in a pair and you assured him you did...so you had the spare one to throw at him when he was being a shit. You sent him off to the kitchen to pack up some dog food. Chris took your suitcase and Archie's things down to his SUV, while you packed some toiletries and odds and ends into a tote. You were just dropping your phone charger in your bag when Chris came back.

He clipped on Archie's leash and opened the door for you. He took your keys off your finger to lock the door and dropped them in your bag on your shoulder. Chris lead the way with Archie to the stairs. Stopping at the top of the staircase, Chris looked at you over his shoulder. He dropped the leash and retreated a step.

"Come on," he said, turning his back to you.

"You've got to be kidding me," you laughed, realizing what he was suggesting.

"I'm serious," he insisted. "You're either gonna take forever hopping down the stairs or you're gonna trip and fall flat on your face. Neither of which I'm interested in waiting around for. So, quit being proud and come on."

Chris held out a hand, waiting for you to hand him your crutches. You shook your head, already embarrassed at the idea of a piggy back ride down the stairs at your age. Chris gestured impatiently and you groaned, rolling your eyes and bundling your crutches together to lean on the railing. He crouched down, making your jump up easier. Chris straightened up, giving a small hop to adjust your weight before he grabbed your crutches. He hooked his free hand under your leg and you wrapped your arms across the front of his shoulders, hiding your face in his neck and whining about the shame of it all while he laughed at you.

It didn't seem like much, if any, trouble for Chris to carry you downstairs. Archie went ahead and was waiting for you by the door. Chris pulled open the door and you helped hold it open as the three of you went outside. Chris carried you to the sidewalk where he finally let you down beside his car. He put a crutch out to each of your hands as he opened the back door for Archie to hop in and the front door for you. Once you were settled in, he slid your crutches in the back seat and climbed in beside you. Chris started the engine and you were on your way to your temporary home away from home.
Chapter 25

You didn't have an explanation for it, but, for some reason, pulling into the driveway at Chris' house made you nervous. You shook it off, waiting patiently in your seat, while Chris half-jogged around the car on his toes to get your crutches and open the door for you. You complimented him on being such a gentleman and his smile beamed as he thanked you in return. Archie was out of the car as soon as Chris opened the door for your crutches. He scooted around with his nose stuck to the ground and leash dragging between his legs, as Chris grabbed your tote and followed you to the front door.

Chris left the door open behind you, figuring there was a small chance Archie might forget the yard and follow you in. He directed you to have a seat and get comfortable, as he set your bag down on a chair in the living room. He stood by, watching you hop around to sit on the couch, before he said he was going to get the rest of your things and went back outside. With the house quiet and the door open, you smiled, hearing Chris excitedly talking to Archie in the driveway for a minute. You heard a car door shut and Chris call for Archie to 'come on'.

Chris unloaded his arms by the door, shutting it behind him when Archie was in. He grabbed your suitcase and disappeared down the hall. You called Archie over, grabbing his collar to take off his leash. Before you let him go, you reminded him he was a guest and to behave himself. You took his panting and casually wagging tail as his agreement. When you let go, he hurried out of the room to look for Chris.

A moment later, Chris was back. He took up Archie's food and bowls and headed into the kitchen. You smiled, amused at seeing Archie being torn between his need to sniff his new surroundings and his need to know what Chris was doing with his stuff. From the kitchen, Chris offered you something to drink and brought you a bottle of water, like you asked, so you had something on hand for the next time you needed your medicine. Chris put it on the coffee table for you and sat down in one of the chairs across from you. He wore a goofy smile, twisting over his shoulder for a minute to watch Archie run around the corner into the dining room, continuing his survey of the new land.

"This isn't gonna be a problem, is it?" you worried and Chris looked back at you with a curious frown. You pointed after Archie, who slipped into the kitchen. "Him tearing around here?"

"No, it's fine," Chris shook his head.

"He'll settle down soon," you hoped, as Archie looped around the living room and back into the hall toward the bedroom again.

"It's fine," he dismissed your concern, scrunching up his nose and waving your fears away as he settled back into his seat. "He's just excited. It's a new place."

"I appreciate this," you told him. "Me and Archie both."

Chris sent you a warm smile. "It's the least I could do. I just want to help," he said.

You reciprocated his smile and Archie came back into the room. Chris patted his leg to bring Archie to him and you chewed on your lip to keep your smile from going too wide as Chris leaned down to wrap himself over Archie and rub his side and belly thoroughly. Maybe this wasn't the inconvenience or hardship you'd worried it could be. Archie grumbled, wiggling in Chris' arms while Chris emphatically assured him he was a good dog.
"Scott mentioned your sister's coming in today?" you piped up, when Chris let your dog go.

"Yeah. Around 4," Chris said, glancing at his watch. "I gotta head down to the Dolby at 2 o'clock for a little run through for this weekend. You gonna be okay for a couple of hours?"

"I think I'll survive," you winked.

Chris let out a small chuckle and nodded. "I know," he half-groaned. "I just want you to be comfortable and stuff."

"Well," you sighed, taking a slow look over the room, "it'll be rough, but I think I can manage."

"Smartass," he smiled and you shrugged innocently. He jerked his thumb behind him. "I got Archie set up in the kitchen, put out some water for him. Your stuff's in the bedroom." He looked at the bag in the next chair. "You want me to put this in there, too?"

You waved him off. "Nah. I'll take care of it. There's a couple things I'll want out of it."

"Well," he began, "then just let me know when your done with it and I'll put it with the rest of your stuff."

"It's not heavy," you promised. "I can-"

"I'll take care of it," he said, putting up a hand to stop you. "Seriously, you just take it easy and tell me whatever you need and I'll do it."

"Famous last words," you pointed out, with a devilish smile and quirk up of an eyebrow.

Chris laughed. "Worth the trouble," he assured you. He scratched at the side of his bearded jaw for a moment and looked back to you. "Hey, before all this-" Chris looped a hand generally in your direction. "Well, before you got hurt, I was gonna see if you wanted to join me 'n Carly an' Scott for dinner tonight. Nothin' fancy, was just gonna grill up some steaks." He shrugged. "You mind having company, tonight?"

"Oh, of course not," you assured him. "Don't let me interrupt."

"You're not interrupting," he snorted. "You're invited. I just want to be sure you're up for company, before I tell anybody to come over."

You hoped he couldn't see the signs of the soft heat you felt in your cheeks. He's too much sometimes. Asking you if it's alright to have his family over to his house? Come on!

"Sounds like fun," you smiled.

"Good," he nodded, with a grin. "I'll let them know."

After lunch, Chris stepped out just before 1:30 to go to his rehearsal for his presentation at the Oscars. Archie had calmed down quite a bit and had taken to laying outside in the grass in the sunshine. He came and went through one of the kitchen doors Chris left open for him. While Archie enjoyed having a yard, you took advantage of the walk in shower. You were mildly disgusted with yourself that you'd made it that long in the outfit you wore since the hospital. Balance was a bit awkward, but you got through like a champ. A wobbly, uncoordinated champ, but one that managed not to fall on their ass. So, self high five!
You rewrapped your foot and took your next round of medicine. You hated that it made you lethargic, but until the edge wore off from your foot, you’d still take the pills as directed. Around 3, you figured you’d take advantage of the quiet and get in a nap before company showed up for dinner.

And nap you did. When you came to, the sun was getting low. A quick check of your phone on the nightstand told you it was almost 6. You groaned at yourself for not having set an alarm. You sat up and realized the bedroom door was shut. You had left it open and figured Chris must have closed it when he came home and found you asleep. You also thought it might be a sign company was already there and you made a quick stop in the bathroom to make sure you looked presentable before you left Chris' room. First impressions, ya know. Headed down the hallway, you heard voices.

"She doesn't say it," you heard Chris say from the kitchen. Something about the heavyheartedness of his tone made you stop. "But I think she's still mad at me. Like, I got this feeling she's gonna be dangling this Geneva thing over my head for awhile."

Gulp. 'She' was you. You knew eavesdropping was wrong, but you couldn't help yourself. Something in your gut said you had to hear more of this, so you inched over to lean your shoulder into the wall and share some of the weight off of your good foot.

"Guilty conscious," Scott chimed in, sounding like he had little sympathy to give.

"Hell hath no fury..." a woman's voice trailed off. You assigned it to Carly.

"Oh, cause I need this shit from you, too?" Chris quipped, a little irritatedly.

"You're no saint. I'll give you shit till the cows come home," she promised.

"So, she's giving you shit?" Scott asked. "Maybe it's your imagination. She didn't give you any yesterday."

"No," Chris answered. "And that's part of the problem."

Ohh, myy god. Did he just say you-? To his brother and sister? You winced and the conversation paused a beat before Scott came back in with a chuckle. They must have exchanged a look or something among themselves about what you thought Chris was implying. You felt your cheeks warm when Scott confirmed your own suspicions about the remark.

"Seriously? But, make up sex is the best part," Scott complained.

"Yeah, well, I wouldn't know," Chris unhappily muttered.

You could almost see the look that went with the comment and your cheeks flushed completely now with embarrassment. Okay, yeah, you hadn't slept together since you and Chris made up. But that's totally because of mismatched schedules and people sleeping in their own beds because of early mornings and not because of the whole Geneva thing. ...Right?

"I don't know why I don't start more fights," Scott joked. "I love make up sex."

"What?" Carly questioned. "You think she's holding out on you to punish you?"

You heard Chris groan out a sigh. "Fahck. I don't know, man."

"Put some more on that one," Scott said.
"You wanna do this, Chef Boyardi?" Chris taunted.

"Hey," Scott nipped back. "Just 'cause you're not gettin' any doesn't mean you can be a dick."

"That's a big hurt you gave her," Carly noted, after the conversation paused a beat. "I know you didn't cheat cheat on her, but still. There's these pictures on the Internet, which will never go away, by the way, to remind her that something did happen. If she is holding out on you, can you blame her for still being even just a little mad?"

Chris let out an aggravated sigh. "No."

"Could you honestly say you would get over something like that, if it was pictures of her making out with some guy?" Carly went on prompting him.

"She did do that," Chris pointed out. "'Member I told you about looking for her at the bar?"

"No, she did not," Carly firmly clarified. "She let somebody buy her a drink and make her feel good about herself after she rightfully dumped your ass for kissing your way across Geneva."

There was a sharp clatter of something metal on glass and you pictured a knife or something being exasperatedly put down into the cutting board he kept on the kitchen island. After all, company was there for dinner and they were in the kitchen. You had an image of them gathered around the island while they got dinner ready.

"You're lucky she even let you talk to her," Carly added.

"You're really helping when you say it like that, you know that?" Chris sarcastically said.

"You made your bed," Scott suggested.

"Both 'a you," Chris grumbled. "I'm pourin' my he'aht out here to the two worst siblings on the planet. What happened to family? Whose side are you on?"

Scott and Carly nearly answered in unison, "[Y/n]'s."

You heard Chris snort a small laugh and you knew he wasn't being serious. You chewed on your lower lip for a moment, debating when would be a good time to go in and join them. You didn't want to give away that you'd overheard anything. You had to play it just right; be casual.

"She's also literally hurt, you know" Carly spoke up again. "She doesn't feel good, her foot probably hurts like a son of a bitch. I know I wouldn't feel like putting out if I hurt like that. I think you're probably making more out of this than it really is."

"You think so?" Chris wondered out loud, sounding genuinely curious and a little hopeful.

"I don't know," Carly said. "But which sounds better? That you're being punished or that she's just not in the mood?"

Chris chuckled. "They both pretty much suck the same. Either way, I'm not gettin' any."

"You still love her, right?" Scott checked.

"Of course!" Chris insisted, sounding quite offended by the question. "What'sa matteh with you? What kind 'a question is that, huh?"

"I'm just saying," Scott started, in his own defense, "if you do, then this is no big deal. It's a speed
bump. You guys've had those before. You'll get over it."

"There's nothing wrong with taking a little time to feel things out again," Carly assured him. "Maybe she's still trying to process things. Have you asked her about it?"

"No," Chris answered, quickly. "And I'd feel like an ass if I did."

"Have you talked about it at all, since you two got back together?" Scott pressed.

You heard the defeated sigh from Chris. "No."

"You consider maybe you don't really know what she went through then?" Scott offered.

"I know she was pissed," Chris said, confidently. "An' don't let her fool ya. She packs a punch."

You heard the trio chuckle and you smiled, a little embarrassed for your unladylike behavior when you two were fighting. But, hey, emotions were high and it obviously got your point across that you were not one to be trifled with.

"Well, you know what a fuckin' disaster you were that week," Scott reminded him. "Imagine her."

"I know," Chris sighed. "I mean, I don't. But, man, I tell ya, that night outside 'a her apartment and she cried?...Fahck. That was brutal. Tore my heart out, right the'eh."

"You invited her on the press tour, like you said you were thinking about doing, right?" Scott asked. Chris must have nodded, or something, because Scott went on. "Sooo, you have a romantic trip to Europe, or whatever, take her out for a nice dinner..."

"I'll be working," Chris pointed out, sounding a bit disappointed. "It's not like a vacation with her."

"But, still," Scott argued. "You guys'll be together. That's a start. You'll come up with something."

You heard a small, but unhappy, groan from Chris. "Hey," Scott added, brightly. "She's here, right? That's a good sign."

"Be patient," Carly soothed.

"I know," Chris agreed, a little more resigned than you'd heard him be before. "I am."

The conversation stopped for a minute. You bit your lip, straightening up from the wall. This might be the perfect time for your casual entrance. You waited out another minute or so of silence before you took a deep breath and started through the living room toward the kitchen. Coming through the doorway from the dining room, you flashed a shy smile when the first one to catch sight of you was the woman behind the voice.

"Oh! Hello," she said, with an energetic smile. She slid off her stool at the island and came over to meet you halfway, holding out a hand to you before she waved it away herself and gave you a gentle hug. "I'm Carly. You must be [y/n]."

"Lucky guess," Scott quipped, as you leaned onto one crutch and pinched the other under your arm to meet her hug as best you could.

"It's the crutches that gave it away," Chris asserted, pointing with the knife in his hand at Scott to show his agreement.

"Thanks, guys," Carly groaned.
Chris and Scott smiled their hellos and you spied a pile of steaks on a plate near Chris on his edge of the island. Carly turned to the side, opening a path for you to choose a seat at the island or on one of the couches. She urged you to come sit down and join them. Chris wore a small smile in the corner of his mouth, watching you through his lashes with quick glances up from the onion he was slicing on the counter in front of him. You sat down on one of the couches. Carly sat on the couch opposite you and Scott grabbed his glass of wine off the island before taking a seat beside you.

Carly couldn't seem to control her smile. "It's so nice to finally meet you," she gushed. "Chris has told us so much about you."

"Hopefully, just the good stuff," you quipped, proud of yourself, like you were somehow throwing them off the scent of your eavesdropping.

"Is there any bad?" Scott lead you on.

"I plead the fifth," you winked and everyone laughed.

"Can we get you anything?" Carly asked, looking at your foot. "You poor thing," she tutted and then pointed toward the kitchen. "Do you want something to drink? Glass of wine?"

"No," Chris quickly answered for you, pointing with the knife again. This time at you, with a cautioning look. "You're not supposed to drink with that medicine."

"Fun killer," Scott mumbled into his sip of wine.

Chris shook his head at his brother, while you and Carly snickered. "How are we supposed to get her to spill the beans on herself, if we can't get her drunk?" Carly asked.

"Give her five minutes," Chris promised, scooping up the onion slices into a bowl. "Something she didn't mean to say will fall out of her mouth on its own."

"Christopher," Carly playfully scolded.

"That's probably true," you admitted and Chris held out his hand toward you, raising his brow smugly at his sister, as if to say he told her so.

"You guys want to wait, or are you ready to eat?" Chris asked, washing his hands at the sink.

"Eat! Yes!" Scott agreed.

"Starved," Carly seconded.

Chris took a survey of how everyone liked their steak cooked and fired up the burners. Scott stayed with you on the couch, asking how you were feeling today, while Carly went back to the kitchen. Chris sautéed the onions and minded the steaks, while Carly oversaw the steaming of some broccoli. A timer went off and Carly pulled a tray of foil wrapped potatoes out of the oven.

It was fun sharing a meal at the table with the little slice of the Evans family. Carly told you about her trip into town and her job and her own family back in Boston. She asked you about your family in Ohio, your work and about your career goal for your own business, and just about anything else. Chris really had told her a lot about you. You were surprised by how interested she was in you. You reeeeaally hoped you came off as actually interesting, because it was entirely possible she was just a really polite person.

With the empty plates pushed aside, Carly propped her chin up in her palm. "So, tell me about when
"We met in Atlanta," Chris grimaced, waving a hand at his sister. "You know that."

"I mean, when you two first got together," she said, shooting him a brief scowl.

"You already heard that," he told her.

"From you," Carly pointed out. She inclined her head your way. "Now I wanna hear her version."

Chris let out a sigh, his brow rising as he did from the table. "I'm gonna need another drink for this," he declared, grabbing the empty wine bottle and his glass in one hand and his plate in the other. Chris held up and swung the bottle in his hand. "Anyone else?"

Scott held up his hand and Carly nodded. Being a good helper, Scott piled up your and Carly's dishes with his own and followed Chris into the kitchen. Carly moved over into Scott's recently vacated chair beside you at the table. She elbowed your arm on the table with an expectant smile.

"Okay," she began, "your first date wasn't really playing flip cup in a bar, was it?"

You had to laugh. "Is that what he said?"

"That's not what I said," Chris called, from the kitchen. "I said that's when I found out she had a crush on me."

"Nobody's asking you," Carly said, loudly, over her shoulder.

"Well, get it right," he told her. "You're making me look bad."

From the other side of the wall, you heard Scott add, "You do that just fine by yourself."

"Exactly," Chris agreed. "So, I don't need anymore help from you two."

"Ignore him," Carly insisted, waving a hand blindly behind her and toward the guys in the kitchen.

"The bar was where someone ratted me out about liking him," you agreed. "But that didn't happen until the very end of the night. And yeah, I got roped into being his partner for flip cup."

"Sebastian Stan," Chris announced, with a sinister tone and crooked smile, coming back to the room.

Chris set down a freshly opened bottle of red wine on the table near Carly for her to refill her glass and he took his seat again. Scott frowned at the side of his sister's head when he saw his seat had been taken. He took her former chair and waited for his turn with the wine. You sipped your ice water. "Stupid medicine."

"Did you have a crush on him before Atlanta?" Carly asked, with a sly smile.

The room was suddenly warm and you noted as much, shifting in your seat. "Is anyone else in here warm?" you asked, fanning at your face when everyone chuckled with you. You cleared your throat and shook your head. "Well," you shrugged, "I'm not gonna lie, I'd seen some of his movies and I'm a Marvel fan, so I...had an impression before."

"Because he's got such an impressive filmography," Scott said, under his breath before a fake cough.

"I think we might be talking about different versions of his body of work," you coyly suggested.
Chris smiled proudly and held his chin a little higher. Scott groaned and rolled his eyes at his brother, throwing a napkin at him. Carly glanced over at her siblings and shook her head. "Was he a flirt on set?" she asked.

"No," you shook your head. "Not with me, anyway, if he was."

"I didn't flirt with anybody," Chris said, somewhat defensively, when Carly raised an eyebrow at him. "Really?" she doubted.

"Who had time?" Chris complained, gesturing your way. "I barely had time to talk to her outside 'a work."

"How did you two ever even happen?" Scott wondered out loud.

"Sebastian Stan," Chris repeated, with a shrug. "If he figured it out, how'd you miss it?" Scott asked.

Chris shrugged again, with a sip of his glass. "I don't know. Guess I wasn't looking. I was working, after all."

"So, he caught you looking," Carly suggested to you. "How'd he know?"

"Sebastian's very shrewd," Chris noted, with a discerning squint and wag of his finger. "He comes off as quiet, but he's got his eye on everyone. He musta heard you say something, maybe."

"I never said a word," you promised. "We crew-folk know better than to talk about the talent when they're even remotely close. I admired from afar, like everyone else."

"He musta seen you admiring, then," Scott winked.

"Maybe," you admitted, feeling a quick flash of heat in your cheeks. "So, then what are we calling the first date?" Carly asked, looking between you and Chris for an answer.

"I don't know," Chris deferred to you, with an open handed gesture. "Do we go with the sandwiches in the parking lot?" you wondered, looking back at him. "Or was it the dinner after the Purge wrap party?"

"How do you not know?" Carly laughed.

"We kinda...drifted apart for a while, I guess," Chris explained, averting his eyes from his sister's gaze to the glass in his hand. "Technically, we did a mulligan, so, ya know." He shrugged.

Scott pointed a finger back and forth between you and Chris. "You two are terrible at this," he noted.

Chris threw the napkin back at his brother. "Hey, fahck you," he playfully scowled.

"I vote for the night at the bar," Scott decided, putting the napkin aside.
"You can't call that a first date," Carly argued. "They didn't even know they liked each other then."

"It's a fun story," Scott defended, holding up his palms. "He coulda liked her before then. It could count."

"Did you?" Carly asked, raising a daring eyebrow at Chris.

Chris shrank in his seat a little, throwing a scowl at Carly for putting him on the spot. "I maybe thought she was kinda hot, when we all showed up in Atlanta," he quietly offered, a shy smile ticking into the corner of his mouth and a new heat in your cheeks. "I might 'a had a look."

"Then why the hell didn't you ask her out?" Carly asked, her mouth gaping in disappointment.

"You can't just do that," Chris argued, sitting up and reaching out a hand to make his point. "It's not like you ask out the girl in the next cubicle for lunch. There's this taboo. Besides, I thought she had a thing for this PA down there."

"What PA?" Carly turned back to you.

"It was a misunderstanding," you shook your head. "He was just a coworker; a friend I made with the carpool for work."

"Well, they were always coming and goin' together," Chris said, apparently feeling the need to give some kind of half-assed explanation, "and he asked her a few times about dinner and stuff."

Chris trailed off, shaking his head at his feeble defense and you smiled. "It might've looked like something, if someone didn't know," you admitted.

"Sebastian Stan knew," Scott softly muttered into his drink.

Chris flipped him off. "The point is," Chris continued, sounding a little bit aggravated, "I was wrong and now we're together. And, yes, thank you, Sebastian Stan. You done bustin' my balls now?"

"Probably not," Scott told him.

"I think it's sweet," Carly chimed in. "You two thinking the other is cute, but neither of you knowing it."

Chris sent you a fond smile, before he said, "I probably wouldn't 'a ever known, if Stan didn't stop me that night."

"You played it that cool?" Scott asked you.

You shrugged. "Well, I mean, he was nice to me," you said. "But after awhile, everybody on set kinda warms up to each other, so you can never take someone being polite to you as anything more than that and you just try to be a professional. He's a friendly guy. Everyone liked Chris, for one reason or another. I'll admit, there were a couple times I was a little star struck and can't believe I didn't say something stupid."

"Like what?" Carly leaned in.

"I don't know," you laughed. "I am so not cool. I'm the type of idiot who'd see a hot guy and blurt out 'You're so pretty!' if he just said hello, before I even knew what happened. It really is a wonder I managed to avoid that. If he had ever flirted with me, I probably would have dropped dead on the spot. I'm honestly not sure how I survived the end of that night at the bar."
Everyone laughed and you hung and shook your head. You had no idea why you actually admitted that. Carly patted her hand over yours and sympathized that she knew what that was like. You joined in the laughter with that.

"The end of that bar story sounds awkward as fuck," Scott said, taking another drink.

Chris hissed in a breath, with a small nod and raised brow. "Atlanta was definitely not my smoothest moment," he admitted. Hand resting on the table, he twisted the stem of his wine glass between his fingertips. "I was definitely off my game," Chris sheepishly smiled.

"What game?" you teased.

Scott and Carly burst into laughter. Chris' mouth fell open, exaggeratedly offended, his eyes running disbelievingly up and down you. His jaw snapped shut and he jutted a confident chin your way, arrogantly pointing out, "It worked on you."

"Yeah," you agreed, "but I lowered my standards for you."

Chris shook his head at you, his brow pulling down in feigned hurt. "God, you're cruel," he said, quietly.

Carly put her hand over yours again and squeezed. "Chris, I love her," she sighed, trying to control her laughter. She looked at you, with a wide smile. "You're gonna fit in perfectly."
Chapter 26

The conversation moved out to the fire pit in the backyard, for a couple of hours. Scott and Carly left just before 11. You found out that she changed her plans to staying with Scott when she heard you were going to be at Chris' house for the weekend. You felt terrible, not realizing she was originally going to stay in Chris' guesthouse, and apologized profusely. She, and Scott, assured you it was no problem. Carly insisted she didn't want to intrude and that it was better to rest and heal in a quiet house. The Evans kids were known to be a bit boisterous when they got together, she had told you with a wink.

After company left, the quiet of Chris' place struck you. The view over the valley twinkled with streetlights below and a sprinkling of stars above. The loudest noise was an occasional pop from the fire. If you strained your ears, you might have heard some cars pass on the road, but it might have just been the wind in the trees. It was relaxing, and, lying on the bench along the fire pit, with your head on Chris' leg and his fingertips twisted with yours resting on your belly, it was perfect.

"This is a great backyard," you admired, ticking your eyes up and tilting your head back to see him.

He smiled down at you. "Thanks."

"It's so peaceful," you noted, settling your head down again. "I think this is the first night in LA that I haven't been able to hear LA."

"It's nice, isn't it?" he nodded.

You hummed your agreement. "You're sister's nice, too," you told him. "She's sweet. She's so much fun to talk to."

"Yeah," he agreed. "She's something alright."

You both chuckled and you gave him a small shake of your head. "Terrible," you tutted.

"Hey," Chris said, "you think I'm terrible, you shoulda seen her growing up. Hand to gahd, she was a bully."

"I don't buy that for one second," you smirked.

"Ha," he scoffed, head ticking back in a subtle nod. "An' I bet your brother was an angel."

"We had some scrapes," you admitted, your tone and smile dancing shyly away from the topic. "But he was my partner in crime, too."

"Oh, yeah?" Chris mused, one corner of his mouth curled up in curiousity. "What's your favorite memory growing up with him?"

You considered it for a long moment. There were plenty of stories to choose from. You hummed thoughtfully before you answered and Chris waited patiently, his thumb sweeping absentmindedly along yours.

"You know," you began, "it's pretty simple, actually. ...Saturday mornings."

"Oh, yeah," he seconded, face scrunching as if there weren't any doubt to your answer. "Saturday mornings were the best."
"Cartoons," you nodded. "Real, honest to god, good cartoons. In pajamas, eating cereal, first thing in
the morning, sitting on the floor, right in front of the TV."

"Of course. Was there any other way?" Chris agreed.

"Well, you had to," you pointed out, "because-

"-you had to turn the knob on the TV to change the channel," Chris chimed in with you.

"No remotes. Exactly!" you laughed, putting up your free hand for Chris to high five with his.
"Man," you sighed, "kids these days don't know the struggle."

Chris laughed. "It builds character," he nodded, firmly.

"What's your's?" you asked, tilting your chin up to see him again. "Best childhood memory?"

"Ah, geez," he said, hissing in a deep breath and holding it a few seconds. "Christmas? Yeah,
Christmas were always good. You got the tree and the decorations. Especially when we were little,
you know?"

"Christmas is the best," you agreed, with a fond smile for your own Christmases when you were a
kid.

You shared another quiet pause. Chris' fingertips ticked underneath yours, a halfhearted underhand
drumming for a few moments, until his fingers twisted around yours to rest with your hand on your
stomach again. You heard him make a long slow exhale and felt the muscles in his leg rise and fall as
he stretched out to cross his ankles in front of him. This was nice. This was the most comfortable
you'd been alone together since you fought and it put a faint smile on your lips. It was sweet, the two
of you talking about family and happy memories. This kind of conversation hadn't happened in
awhile and it was always endearing anytime you heard a tidbit about the real Chris Evans.

"You know," Chris piped up, "I didn't know you sang in high school, till I heard you tell Carly."

"Really?" you wondered aloud. "Huh. Guess it never came up." You shrugged to yourself. "Well,
when would it have, really."

"Well, it certainly explains the car karaoke," he smiled, with a tilt and nod back of his head.

"It just might," you agreed, slightly embarrassed, though you didn't know why.

"Guess there's plenty of stuff I don't know," he suggested, tone a fraction lower and a contemplative
purse coming to his lips.

Your heart jumped into your throat, beating a mile a minute. Where was this going? Oh, God. Was
he going to bring up the fight like Scott and Carly had mentioned? Shit. What do you say if he does?
Nooo. Don't ruin a good night by bringing up bad times!

"Well, we all can't have a Wikipedia page," you joked, hoping to take some of the edge off for
yourself.

"We don't do anything the way we're supposed to, do we?" he chuckled, his gaze wandering over to
yours before moving around the view. "People are supposed to go out on dates and talk for hours,"
he said, with a crooked half-smile and a rolling wave of his hand in the air. "Get to know each other
'n have long goodbyes on the porch. They go to a barbecue or somethin', an' meet each other's
families and freak out over if they're gonna like you or not. And what do we do? We text and
FaceTime if we're lucky, grab a dinner at a drive-thru on the way home in the middle of the night, go
days or weeks without seeing each other."

The surprising accuracy of what he said was striking. You hadn't really thought about it like that
before. After all, dating a celebrity was atypical in itself. Had you really expected it to fit a mold? His
thumb smoothed along yours once and tapped a couple soft times on the tip of your thumb. You
heard him breath out slowly, not quite a sigh, but the air definitely seemed heavier to move. It was
quiet for a moment. Maybe he was trying to figure out what to say next, too.

"You know," you started before you knew where to go. Chris turned his head to see you, with his
brow peaking in patient curiosity, and you tipped your eyes back up to the trees, finding your
direction in the way the leaves were pushed by the breeze. "My favorite color is blue," you offered.
"Not like a pastel or navy. It's like a cobalt blue or sapphire." You smiled shyly when you glanced
back up at him and saw his charmed grin and crinkled eyes above you. "And I hate peanuts, but I'll
eat them on a Drumstick cone. Weird, right?"

Chris snorted softly, with a small nod. "It's a little weird," he winked.

"For the most part, I hate adulting and I have no sense of time passing," you admitted. "I still think
1997 was 10 years ago." Chris chuckled quietly. Maybe he had the same problem. "Some of the best
quotes about life I know come from movies and I cry like a baby over that sad sock monkey reaching
out for a hug in Mr. Magorium's Wonder Emporium, every. damn. time I see it. Honestly, that movie
will make me cry at least three times."

There was a small pause before Chris said, "Sushi. Not a fan." You tipped your head back on his leg
to see the face that went with the disapproving tone, snickering at the unhappy furrow in his brow as
he remembered why and went on. "I tried eel one time, at this sushi bar. I thought it was chicken. It
looked like chicken. It looked brown and delicious, and I thought, 'That looks safe'. ...It wasn't."

"I won't be dragging you out to any sushi places," you promised him, your tongue falling out of your
mouth to mime a gag in disgust.

"Thank god," Chris smiled, looking relieved.

"Okay. I've got a very important question for you," you warned him.

His brow wagged up at the possibility and he nodded once, saying, "Fire away."

"Mayonnaise or Miracle Whip?" you asked.

Chris wrinkled his nose. "Oh. Mayonnaise, all the way. Seriously?"

"Right answer," you said, giving a thumbs up and he laughed. You decided to take the conversation
for a spin and see where it went. "Stuck on a desert island," you posited. "You can have one thing to
eat, garaunteed you'll never run out of it. What is it?"

"Italian food," he nodded, confidently. "Specifically, my ma's ravioli."

"Nice," you thoughtfully pouted. "I'd go with Italian food. ...Oo! Or Starburst jelly beans."

"Are you kidding me, right now?" Chris laughingly doubted.

"Looove them," you practically drooled. "I load up every Easter because you can't find them any
other time."
"Oh, they're the best," he happily agreed, with a wide smile and a low chuckle.

"One of those two, or double- No! Mega-Stuf Oreos," you mused.

"Live off Mega-Stuf Oreos?" Chris challenged. "Nobody even knows what the Stuf is made of. You'd die."

"Uh, yeah. Die happy," you arrogantly corrected.

"Fair enough," he laughed. Chris’ eyes watched the fire for a moment, before he threw out, "If you could have dinner with anyone, living or dead, who would it be?"

"Wow," you wondered aloud. "Damn. Umm...Dave Grohl. Yeah, Dave Grohl. ...If I get a dinner party? Dave Grohl, Sinatra, Stephen Colbert, Chris Hardwick, Bill Murray, Patrick Stewart, and Emma Stone."

"That's a party," Chris noted, his brow rising in surprise at what you figured sounded like pretty random choices.

You shrugged with a smile, standing by your decision. "Finish the sentence," you instructed. "People would be surprised to know..."

Chris hummed, his brow creased down, thinking for a moment, before finishing, "that I hate spiders."

"Seriously?" you giggled.

"Oh, yeah," Chris affirmed, his face pinching in repulsion. "Fuckin' hate 'em. You just don't know where they are. I don't like spiders. Ugh. I don't want anything to do with 'em."

"You're the guy," you reminded him. "You're supposed to get the bugs. Like, I say 'there's a spider' and you go kill it." Looking up, you saw Chris was shaking his head with a confident pout that said he was not the one getting the imaginary spider. "Who's supposed to kill the spiders now?" you whined. "What would you do if there was one here, right now?"

Chris continued shaking his head, with a tight frown on his lips. "It wouldn't be cool," he unashamedly admitted. "It wouldn't be tough. It wouldn't be manly."

"So much for my own personal superhero," you scoffed.

Chris bumped his leg up under your head. "Be nice," he playfully scolded you. "That goes to the grave with you, by the way." You laughed and he took the next turn. "Okay. I got one. If you could have three wishes, like, find a magic lamp and a genie will give you anything in the world, what do you wish for?" He held up a finger. "But no wishing for more wishes," he warned. "That's cheating. There's rules. You only get three."

“Huh,” you breathed out, stumped for a moment, eyes leveling in thought and teeth holding your bottom lip. "I mean, I could go with eat all the candy and desserts I want without getting fat, buuut... Okay. Number one, I get my own business, with my name on the lease and doing whatever I want.” You looked to Chris who nodded his approval for you to go on. “Number two? Uhh, a house with a big yard for Archie, but still close enough to the beach for both of us. That way I can get him a friend to play with while I’m running my wildly successful business.”

“That sounds like an Archie wish,” he challenged.
"I said for me too," you reminded him.

"Alright," he conceded. "I'll give you that one. Last wish. What is it?"

"How 'bout a million bucks?" you suggested.

"Just one million?" he laughed. "It's a magic lamp. You could have 10 or even a billion dollars."

You laughed at yourself and shrugged. "I don't need much," you figured. "I could take a million dollars and do a lot of things with that. I just want to have enough, you know? Pay off the bills. Be able to take a week off and go travel somewhere and not worry about running up the credit card. I wanna buy the candy bar at the checkout and not regret it because there's more responsible things I should've spent that dollar on."

"Do you regret it now?" he asked.

"No. Never regret chocolate," you joked, figuring what he meant by asking and choosing the lighthearted dodge.

"Well, no," he agreed. "Of course. Never. ...I just meant-

"I know," you gingerly interrupted. "No, I don't really. Sometimes it gets a little tight between jobs, but it makes you learn how to use a budget real quick. I've actually been okay for the last year and a half or so." Chris nodded and you weren't exactly into discussing finances with a multimillionaire. Keep it moving. "How about you? Three wishes. Go."

Chris inhaled deeply, his eyes widening as he puffed out the air through his cheeks. "Three wishes. Okay. Um, first, I wanna have that career where I can pick and choose my projects. Like with directing, there's dues you have to pay to get the good scripts first. I want my chance at the good stuff."

"You wanna skip to the good parts," you summated, with a smile.

"No? I mean, I don't really think so," he reconsidered, his eyebrows knitting with mild concentration. "It's all experience. It'll all pay off in the end, make me better. So, no, I don't wanna skip. I just want to get there; know I'll get there."

"No shortcuts. That's very grown up of you," you approved.

"Thanks," he snorted, looking down at you and drawing his finger across your forehead to move away some stray hairs.

You held up a pair of fingers on your free hand. "Still got two more."

"Yeesh," he hissed in, his thumb tapping over yours as he contemplated the question again. "This is tough," he noted, his head tipping down to his shoulder, thinking. "I like yours- to just have enough. Enough money to take care of my family and myself, enough success to make that happen. I really don't need much."

"You're already spoiled," you smirked. "It's hard to come up with wishes when you already got just about everything, huh?"

Chris smoothed his thumb over yours and nodded to himself, with a small smile. "I guess so," he shyly agreed. "I just want to be content, find that balance with life and work, you know? Things get so crazy sometimes, having everybody watching you, having to be careful what you say. You have
"Hm," you hummed your understanding. "Do you regret your success?"

"No," he said, confidently. "It's given me a lot of opportunities and I appreciate that. It just...makes it hard sometimes. You don't get to spend as much time with the people you care about as much as you'd like to. There's so many obligations to meet and expectations. It's a little overwhelming sometimes. But just to be happy, to find that balance."

"Sounds like a good plan," you nodded, giving his hand a small, but reassuring, squeeze.

There was another lull. You tried to think of more lighthearted questions to help steer the conversation back to something a little more fun and energetic. You distractedly moved your thumb to press over his and, when he noticed, he topped his over yours again. It happened two more times and you giggled at your little thumb war. Above you, you heard him quietly snort his amusement.

"Hey, listen," Chris began, his voice taking a lower, more mature tone. "About the other night."

Oh! No no no no!

You felt the instant lump in your throat and the sudden knot in your stomach. You stilled, with bated breath, waiting. You hummed a soft and inquisitive acknowledgement of his lead in.

"Outside your apartment," he elaborated and your pulse was up again, prepping your fight or flight. "When we- You know what I mean." You gave a small nod, eyes flicking nervously down to stare at your hand in his as his thumb swept yours again. "I want to apologize."

"You already did," you reminded him, with an awkward smile to match the airiness you tried to put in your voice, trying to keep the atmosphere light.


"It's okay," you said, trying to come off as confident, but afraid it came out too soft to be convincing.

"It's not," he told you, confident and firm. "At first, I was sorry because I got caught. Then," he sighed. "Then I was sorry for what I did, but I didn't ever really apologize for putting you through that."

"You don't hav-"

"Yeah, I do," he insisted, moving his thumb again. "I know you were mad at me. You probably still are. And I want you to know that I truly am sorry for everything it- that I did to you." He went on, not seeming to notice how dumbfounded you were. "I'm sorry for arguing with you about it. I shouldn't 'a yelled, shouldn't have took a swing at you about the guys at the bar that night." His tone rose with the realization, "Shouldn't have actually taken a swing on that first guy either. I had no right to be jealous, but I- I just got mad, seein' somebody else where I wanted to be. I'm not proud 'a that and I'm sorry if I embarrassed you that night."

"A little bit," you confessed.

"I'm sorry," he offered again, giving your hand a squeeze. "I'm sorry for arguing with you. I shoulda just listened and took whatever you wanted to say. It was a low blow, yelling back like that."

"We're good," you nodded, squeezing him back.

You hoped it was true. The conversation stirred up your nerves. You appreciated what he was...
saying and that it seemed like something he had to say, but still. In the back of your head, you knew
you should have expected it, what with the conversation you overheard earlier. And yet, somehow,
you were still caught off guard and didn't quite know how else to respond. You were afraid of saying
something stupid, as usual, and ripping the scab off the wound. On the other hand...

"I, uhh," you started, then cleared your throat. "I'm sorry, too." You took a quick glance up and
cought him turning back to look down at you, before you snapped your eyes away. "I was pretty
mean; bratty. I- Well, I know I said some things just to get a rise out of you. I was trying to be mean,
to make sure you were unhappy, too. I guess, I wanted to make you feel as bad as I did. That wasn't
very mature of me."

You heard him inhale deeply through his nose. "Neither of us was on our best behavior," he noted.
"I don't think you owe me an apology. I think I earned all that. But, thank you, anyway."

"Thank you, for your apology," you accepted, quietly.

"An' if we're still being honest," he added, "I'm a little pissed off about those flowers."

Confused, you searched his face with a knit in your brow and small shake of your head. "Flowers?"

He snorted with a nod, and you knew you didn't have to worry about him meaning whatever he said
next. "Those roses from fuckin' Grillo for Valentine's Day."

"Ahh," you breathed out in understanding.

"It shoulda been me," he noted.

"Well," you shrugged, with a tiny smirk, "if you had sent flowers, it may not have helped your cause
at that particular point in the day."

There was a soft laugh from Chris, and he figured, "Man, it's gonna be a knock down, bloody fight
whenever we argue, isn't it?" You looked back, seeing the awkward and sheepish curl at the side of
his mouth, as he went on. "We're both pretty stubborn. Two type-A's." He shook his head, with
another snort and the rise in his mouth spread to a knowing grin over his lips. "What could possibly
go wrong?"

You chuckled. He was right. Granted, this was a big thing for you, or any other couple in the world,
to have fought over, but you weren't in the habit of relinquishing ground in a fight, regardless of the
importance of the topic. You didn't think it was all that undeserved, sometimes, when someone called
you a bitch in an argument. In fact, it was kind of a badge of honor, being tough and being able to
dish it out as well as you took it.

"We keep it interesting," you rephrased.

"That we do," he chuckled. "But, maybe from now on, we try and think before we say something
one of us is gonna regret."

You nodded. "That's probably a good idea."

He broke the quiet pause that followed with a tight squeeze of your hand, gently, but somehow
firmly, reminding you, "I love you, [y/n]. You're my best friend."

"Mine, too," you smiled. "I love you, too."
You damn near fell asleep for the night on the bench by the fire last night. Everything was so peaceful, when the conversation fell away after you and Chris apologized to each other for your less than exemplary behavior while you had been fighting. It was almost one in the morning, when Chris raised his leg gently under your head and gave your hand a squeeze to pull you back from the edge of sleep.

Chris offered you a steady arm to pull yourself up to your good foot with. He shuffled behind you as you made your way back inside to the bedroom, watching carefully and ready to reach out a hand to help. Scott was right, you were pretty good on the crutches. But it put a thin grin on your face at the concern Chris still had about the matter. You fell asleep listening to the distant sounds of him rattling around in the kitchen, running water and moving dishes.

In the morning, you struggled to pull yourself out of the bed. You were super comfy under the covers and your foot was feeling a little more cramped than outright hurting and that was somehow an improvement. Chris was MIA. You recalled kind of waking up when you felt the mattress rise without him and seeing him go into the bathroom in your semi-conscious state, but that was it. The sun was up, through the tall windows at the end of the room, and it was time for your medicine.

You felt a slight chill without the snuggliness of the covers over you, so you pulled on your Cap hoodie before venturing out from the bedroom. Archie came to meet you in the hall and wagged his tail as he happily escorted you to the kitchen. Chris was there, sitting on a stool at the island and smiling at you from over a bowl of cereal. You said good morning and told you there was fresh coffee, pointing with his spoon at the machine on the counter by the sink. He added that Archie was already fed, as the dog slid to the floor along the island.

Dipping his spoon back into his breakfast, Chris asked, "Are you hungry? Want me to make something for breakfast?"

"Looks like you already ate," you pointed out, inclining your head toward his bowl.

Chris shrugged. "I meant, do you want me to make you some breakfast."

"No, thanks," you smiled, reaching for a cupboard door to look for a mug and glancing back at Chris to check your guess.

He tapped the end of his spoon in the air to guide you to the next cupboard over, smiling as he chewed, and winking you had the right door when your hand moved left. You took down a mug and poured yourself some coffee. You asked if he had any creamer and he told you it was in the refrigerator door. You mixed your coffee and carefully turned yourself around to set it on the island behind you. He directed you with points and waves of his spoon, apparently entertained by seeing you follow his silent navigation to getting to a bowl of cereal prepared.

Crutches were a bit of a hinderance to maneuvering while you made your breakfast. You set them aside on the edge of the island counter, opting to hop and scoot on your good foot as you went through the steps of assembling your bowl of cereal. To keep from making the mistake of putting your injured foot down, you found that resting the top of your bum foot on the back of your calf kept you out of trouble. Behind you, Chris snickered. He set his spoon down in his empty bowl and sat up straight again.

"You look like a flamingo," he decided, nodding at your foot held up behind you and with an amused smile.

You shrugged, with the tiniest passing of a heat in your cheeks, as you pirouetted with your breakfast to set on the island. His smile was fixed on his face for a long minute while he watched you start on
your meal. You assured him you didn't want to sit down and eat. That's all you seemed to do the last couple of days and you were already getting tired of being on your ass.

He let you eat, undisturbed, for a couple of minutes, before he rose from the counter and took his dishes to the sink. "I have to go back to the Dolby today," he mentioned. "Another run through at 2 o'clock."

"Sounds exciting," you quipped.

"Very," he nodded, his eyebrows rising up his face without any real enthusiasm. "I'm headed out to the gym here, in a little bit. Not for long," he promised. "But I was thinking, about you being here while I'm gone and-"

"Poor me," you mockingly whined, throwing the back of your wrist to your forehead in dramatic fashion. "All alone, with nothing but a dog and wifi to see me through while my man is away."

Chris barked out a laugh, putting his hand to his chest as his head fell forward with his shoulders. He shook his head, as his laughter died down and he kissed your cheek before he went on. "No. I was gonna say, if you wanted some company, Carly messaged me this morning asking if we had any plans for the day. When I told her about rehearsal, she wanted to know if you would want to go to lunch or something with her. I told her I'd ask and let her know."

You held down a small laugh. Chris' sister wants to hang out with you? For real? Maybe you really had gotten along as well as you'd hoped you had last night. Hooray! New friend!

"Seriously?" you checked.

Chris went back to his seat across the island from you, with a fresh cup of coffee. "Yeah," he scoffed. "Of course. Why not?"

"I don't know," you shrugged, with a giddy grin. "We just met and I wasn't sure what her first impression really was..."

He crushed his eyes closed with a knowing nod. "She likes you," he assured you. "You're in." You giggled and, with his mug paused at his lips, he added, "She's probably hoping to needle you some more without me around."

"Yeah," you agreed, still a bit surprised. "I'll hang out. Sounds like fun."

Chris leaned to one side, pulling his phone out of the pocket of his basketball shorts. He held down his thumb to unlock the device and slid it over to you, with a directing nod. "She's the last call."

"You want me to call her?" you skeptically inferred.

He made a face and nodded, giving a short gesture of his hand at the phone in front of you. "She said for you to call her, if you were interested. So..." he trailed off, as if it were nothing.

You blanked for a moment, taking up Chris' phone. Couple thoughts: 1) Chris, Mr. Privacy, had never handed you his unlocked phone before, and 2) you felt like a nervous 10 year old trying to make new friends as you wondered what you say or what to suggest to do when Carly answered.

Luckily for you, Carly had an idea. She was pampering herself this weekend. Taking advantage of a weekend away from being a mom, she planned on hitting up a spa for a little R&R. She figured, after the last couple of days you were having, you might want to join her. She was going to steal Scott's car and would be over soon to grab you before her appointment.
You did your best to hurry through a shower. You could use a spa day. By the time Carly was pulling up to the house, Chris was following you out the front door to go to the gym. Your fee for the chauffeured ride was to navigate for Carly, who wasn't in LA enough to know where she was going short of between the boys' places.

The two of you enjoyed the little bit of luxury. The spa was more than accommodating to squeeze you in with Carly. You soaked up some serenity with an hour long hot stone massage and treated yourself to a manicure. Unable to soak your foot or have it rubbed, you did pout a little bit at not being able to get a pedicure. But nobody pouts for long while their sipping mimosas in LA. You two giggled and guffawed over stories about Chris. You listened to more about her family and the Evans clan in Boston. She insisted you had to come up for a visit sometime.

When your morning at the spa was over, you headed back to Scott's place. He took over the wheel and the three of you enjoyed a chatty and fun lunch at an outside table at a little bistro. Chris was already out to run some errands before making his way to his rehearsal, so you weren't being missed. The three of you decided to hit up the store for some ingredients for dinner. The sun was warm and beckoning you to the grill.

Back at Chris' house, you all sat out in the backyard, enjoying the shade of his overlook of the hills. Archie laid between your chair and the table you propped your foot up on. On your right, Carly had her feet tucked up on the couch beside Scott and was giggling her way through a story about her kids, when Archie sprang up to meet Chris at the back door. The conversation paused, as everyone turned their attention to Chris and Archie crossing the yard to join you. He waved and smiled his hellos to you all, standing by your chair to kiss the top of your head and rest his hand on your shoulder.

"Ladies," he smiled, "how was your day at the spa?"

"Lovely," Carly declared. "Definitely needed it after the plane ride yesterday."

Chris looked down at you and you smiled up, his mouth opening and then shutting as he pointed to the cocktail in your hand. "Is tha-" he started, then stopped. "Are you drinking?"

You glanced down at your drink and nodded. "Oh, yeah. You'd kind of forgotten. "We got some stuff for dinner and thought we needed a signature cocktail."

Chris frowned at you. "You're not suppo-"

"Oh, don't be a stick in the mud," Carly gripped, waving a hand at her brother. "She already has a mother, she doesn't need you hen pecking after her."

He opened his mouth to argue, but you cut in. "It's okay," you promised, putting up a hand. "I haven't taken anything since lunch. I'm actually feeling pretty good this afternoon, so I just took some aspirin."

"I'm just trying to-"

"Oh, stop," Carly frowned at Chris and gestured to the cocktail shaker sweating on the table. "Have some. Maybe you'll lighten up."

Chris pulled the glass out of your hand and took a sip, while Scott said to Carly, "It really is adorable, the way he fusses over her."

Jutting his chin as he swallowed his taste test, Chris scowled at his brother. "Shaddup," he groaned.
"It is," Carly agreed.

Chris rolled his eyes and gave you back your drink, asking what it was as he kicked a foot up to rest his toe into the ground and lean into the side of your chair. You rattled off the ingredients in your tropical dragon cocktail and he nodded his approval with a pout.

"So, what's for dinner then?" Chris asked.

"Some barbecued chicken and veggie kabobs," Carly informed him.

Chris cocked up an eyebrow and pointed between his siblings. "Sounds good, but somebody else is doing the dishes tonight."
Chapter 27

Dinner with your little part of the Evans family was just as much fun as it had been the night before. Your day's adventuring had started to catch up with you, though, putting the start of a powerful ache in your poor injured foot. Before dinner, you cut yourself off before you'd even really got started. You wanted to be able to sleep comfortably, so you took some aspirin to hold you over until you took your pain pill before bed.

When morning rolled around, the effects from your overnight medicine were gone with a vengeance. There was no doubt, today you would be taking it easy. Waking alone, again, you took your medicine from the nightstand and hobbled your way into a shower. You were becoming unfortunately good with life on crutches and negotiating everyday hygiene needs and such. Proud as you were, you couldn't wait for your Monday morning appointment with the podiatrist, hoping for some good news about when you might be able to ditch the crutches.

You caught up to Chris in the living room. He was slouched into the couch, resting a cup of coffee in one hand on his leg and the other hand petting Archie's head on his other leg. The rest of that spoiled rotten dog was stretched out along the couch beside Chris. You stopped and your head fell to one side in disapproval.

"Did you do that or did he?" you questioned, pointing a finger off the handle of your crutch at your dog.

Chris looked down at Archie for a moment and then back to you with a shrug. "Mutual. I don't think either of us really tried to stop it."

"White couch, black dog," you half-reminded, half-warned him.

"It's okay," he chuckled.

Headed on your way to the kitchen again, you nodded. "Uh-huh. Just wait till that couch changes color."

"You want me to make you breakfast?" Chris called to you from the living room.

You were just getting a mug down from the cupboard for some coffee, when you declined. "No, I can manage."

And you did. You hopped and inched your way around the kitchen, making yourself some cereal and treating yourself to a sliced banana on top. You enjoyed breakfast at the kitchen island again, scrolling through your phone to get caught up on your social media updates. Halfway through your cereal, your phone rang with an unknown number. You sheepishly smiled when you heard the voice on the other end of the phone.

"Good morning," Sebastian said. "Nice of you to say 'hello' and not chew me out for a change."

"Okay," you chuckled. "That was one time and I said I was sorry."

_Dammit._ You have got to save this guy's phone number.

"Yeah yeah," he grumbled. "Hey, anyway, I saw your post on Instagram. What the hell happened to your foot?"
"Oh, yeah," you frowned. "Pretty much what ya see is what ya get. I had to get a few stitches and they put me on crutches until I see a foot specialist tomorrow."

"That sucks," Sebastian noted.

"You have no idea," you promised, rolling your eyes as you chased some cornflakes around in your bowl with your spoon.

"Aw, well, I'm sorry I didn't call sooner," he apologized. "I just saw it this morning. Does it hurt? You getting by alright?"

"Yes, to both," you nodded to yourself. "Hurts like a mother today. Kinda overdid it yesterday, I think, but I'm doing alright. I've had some good helpers."

"Did Chris step up or does he need a talking to?" Sebastian warily asked.

You laughed, almost losing the small bite of cereal in your mouth to a spit take. "No," you said, looking to make sure no milk had dribbled down the front of you. "No, I'm actually crashing over at his place. His sister's in town for the Oscars, so I've actually been kinda hanging out with her and his brother."

"No shit," he mused, and you smiled at Chris when he came into the room for some more coffee.

Chris whispered to ask who you were on the phone with and you excused yourself from the call. "Hold on a sec," you told Sebastian, before turning the phone down from your mouth to tell Chris, "Sebastian."

"Stan?" Chris checked, setting his empty mug on the counter and stepping over to the island. You nodded and he walked around to your side, taking the phone out of your hand, and telling Sebastian, "You got some balls callin' my girl first thing on a Sunday morning."

"Hey!" you complained for having been robbed.

Chris walked away with your phone, pinching it between his shoulder and ear as he poured his next coffee. You were left with a helpless pout on your face, staring at the back of Chris' tilted head and your phone until he turned around to face you and leaned back into the counter behind him. He chuckled at whatever he heard on the other end of the line.

"Whatever, man," Chris said. "You get one free pass because you were nice enough to call and ask how she was. Next time, I'ma kick your ass." Chris smiled and sent you a wink, still leaving you to hear only his half of the conversation. "No, yeah. It's good. Real good." Chris sipped his coffee. "Uh-huh. Yeah, I gotta try and be outta here by 3. ...Carly came out for the weekend. She's going with me. ...You're an asshole." Chris shook his head and pointed at the phone with his mug to say he didn't mean you were an asshole. "I guess she will."

He eyed his coffee, seeming to rethink his use of cream and sugar. Chris turned back to the counter to set down his mug. He shifted the phone to his other ear, as he added another splash of cream to his coffee and gave the drink a couple of swirls with a spoon. You sipped some of the milk in your bowl and drummed your fingers obnoxiously on the counter while you waited for your phone.

"Actually, that's not a bad idea," Chris said, his brow rising at a thought. "What time were you thinking? ...That would work." He tried his coffee again and was pleased, nodding to himself as he settled back against the counter again. "Yeah, I'll text it over in a minute. ...Okay. Great. ...Yeah, I'll see ya later, man."
Stepping off the counter toward the island, Chris ended the call and slid your phone across the marble countertop to you. The phone stopped in front of your bowl and you looked at it for a moment before turning your eyes up to his. You gestured at your disconnected phone.

"Excuse me?" you sarcastically begged. "You hung up on my call."

"He had to go," Chris shrugged.

"Okay, yeah," you scoffed. "But you took...my phone. You took my phone and hijacked my call. And then you hung up?"

Chris swallowed his drink of coffee as he nodded. He waved his mug toward your phone, saying, "You can call 'im back, if you want. Or you can just wait till later."

"What's later?" you asked, going back to fishing for cereal in your bowl.

"Sebastian's gonna drop by," he explained, "keep you company."

You laughed, letting your spoon fall into the bowl. "Are you kidding? I don't need a babysitter."

"I said, keep you company," he pointed out, "not babysit you." Chris shrugged. "It was his idea. Didn't think you'd mind."

"He's not going to the show?" you asked and Chris shook his head behind his mug, before his next drink. "Well, okay," you conceded. "As long as it was his idea and you're not slipping him twenty bucks at the end of the night for watching me on a school night."

"Twenty bucks?" Chris asked, furrowing his brow. "That's all it takes?"

You picked up your spoon again, jabbing it his way. "Now, who's the asshole?" you smirked.

You had to admit, having Sebastian Stan come over to keep you company wasn't the worst thing that could happen to you. You finished breakfast and cuddled up next to Chris on the couch afterward. Archie wondered in and out of the house through the kitchen door and seemed otherwise unaffected by his current circumstances. This arrangement really was working out well.

Chris made lunch and you ate outside, warmed by the sun. You listened to him talk about rehearsals for his presentation for the last couple of days. You hadn't really spent any time with Chadwick Boseman when he was on set in Atlanta, so you didn't know much about him. But Chris liked him, and the little you had been around him gave you a good impression. It was funny to think how you spent months working on a project so closely, and for such long hours, with so many players that your responsibilities had actually pigeon holed you from truly meeting and knowing them all.

Stretched out in a lounging chair, soaking up the sunshine, you tugged the hem of your shorts up and rolled back your t-shirt sleeves to avoid any new tan lines if you were out long enough. Chris joined you after taking in the dishes for lunch. He sat down on the side of the chaise beside yours to face you. Archie brought him his beloved tennis ball and Chris started a game of fetch. Waiting for Archie to return his latest throw, he clasped his hands in front of him as he rested his elbows on his knees.

"I have a feeling this is gonna come up sooner or later," he began, head turned to track Archie's return.

"What's that?" you asked, inching up a little straighter in your chair and turning to rest your cheek on your arm raised up the back of the chair.
"About why Carly is going with me to the Oscars and you're not," he said, rather flatly, as he tugged the ball from Archie's jaws and threw it into the far end of the yard.

"Mm," you hummed, pulling your bottom lip into your mouth at what might be the start of an awkward conversation.

He shifted his gaze back to you from behind his sunglasses. "Do you mind?"

"That Carly is going to the Oscars with you?" you clarified.

"Yeah," Chris nodded, his fingers still laced, but his index finger pulled back to fidget with the nail bed of his thumb. "Instead of you?"

You shrugged and shook your head, trying to come off as indifferent. Because you were. Weren't you? Well, technically, you weren't. You hadn't expected to go and weren't surprised weeks ago when he'd mentioned she was going with him. And, actually, the thought of going frankly made you a bit sick to your stomach. Being photographed with him, all the questions about who you were, the scrutiny and judgment. Yeah, that was a little scary. You were happy, in a way, not to go. You were also just a tiny bit envious, though. After all, getting to see him up close and personal in a tux would be, sigh, amazing. And the girly girl inside you would have fun with the dress up part of the night.

"It's not that I don't want you to go," he explained, pausing to gesture a hand toward you before refolding them. "I mean, not that you'd be at all interested in going like this, with crutches."

You smiled and shook your head. "Definitely not."

"But, still," Chris continued, "it's just that, it's a big stage, so to speak. There's a lot of press there and-"

"And you'd be embarrassed to be seen with a commoner like me," you quipped and smirked.

"No," he sneered, shaking his head at you. Chris laughed it off, tossing the ball again. "No, it's just that I'm happy nobody's in our business. Nobody's hounding anybody or stalking us when we go out. You know that'd all change if you walked a red carpet with me, right?"

You nodded. Boy, did you ever know it. In fact, you were surprised you've gotten away without being noticed this long and you told him that. Chris nodded his agreement.

"I don't know how much longer we'll get away with it," he reluctantly admitted, his head tipping ever so slightly to the side, conveying a bit of worry at the idea. "You never had to put up with that before."

"No," you shook your head.

"It's pretty intimidating," he confessed, covering Archie's eyes with one hand while he shook the ball from Archie's slobbering mouth.

"Yeah," you breathed out, looking shyly down at your toes. "It's not something I'm looking forward to."

Chris nodded, sending Archie away after his toy. "It might not happen like that though," he suggested. "The longer I'm in LA, the more likely someone's gonna snap pics when we're out. Maybe not the paps, but a fan or someone who notices."

You're not an idiot. You've seen the Twitter and Instagram tags from people who caught up or
"accidentally" followed him somewhere just to meet him and get a photograph with him.

"You saying you want to get out of town for a bit?" you offered. "Do you think you should go spend some time in Boston for a break?"

"No," he thoughtfully shook his head. "Not if you're not going." You couldn't help the tiny smile that fought back against your tight lips. "I just." He sighed. "It's just something I've been thinking about lately. I keep planning these appearances like you're not here. It's not that I don't want to do these things with you, but I don't want to because I'm afraid of things changing if I do. Does that make sense?"

"Completely," you agreed.

There was a small silence while Chris and Archie wrestled and you chewed on your lip. When he launched the ball into the yard again, he spoke up. "When you go on this press tour," he started, going back to the pensive hand fold and lean, "there's going to be cameras everywhere."

"So, no making out with you on street corners," you winked, behind your shades and pointed a finger gun at him. "Got it."

Chris burst into laughter, grabbing his chest and he shook his head. "Yeah," he nodded, sighing out the disappearing laughter. "That's probably best left on the 'do not do' list. But what I mean is, people will notice everything. They look for it. They're almost desperate to see something. They'll measure how close you let someone get to you, how long you look or don't look at someone, how you look at them. They analyze everything. It's pretty crazy."

"I know." You shrugged. "Well, I mean, I've seen the red carpet from behind the scenes. I've seen the way some fans react and seen plenty of gossipy Facebook and Twitter posts."

Chris nodded again, still playing Archie's game. "People will probably notice a new face in the entourage," he warned you. "They already pick out my publicist and assistant and stuff in photos."

He looked away from Archie and over to you. "They'll notice you."

"I'll just walk around with a comb in my hand and tell them I'm your hairstylist," you smiled.

Chris snorted. "That's a good plan," he nodded. And then he sighed again, dropping his head a bit. "I don't know if they'd buy it, though." His eyes tilted back up and you could see them set on you over the top of his sunglasses. "This press tour might be it for us."

Your lips pushed forward a bit, into an involuntary and worried pout, as you swallowed. You nodded, turning your eyes down to your lap where you picked at you fingernail for a distraction. Damn. You didn't want things to change either. You had Chris all to yourself and no one to bother you. That's how you liked it.

You looked up when Chris put his hand over your arm and swept his thumb over your skin, sending you a warm smile. He was sitting on the edge of his chair to reach you and seemed just as conflicted as you were about the topic. You smiled back, but didn't quite feel like it was as inspiring as you meant it to be.

"Maybe it's selfish," he told you, "but I like the way things are now." You nodded that you did, too. "It's just been in the back of my head since I asked you to go. I didn't know if you'd thought about it and I didn't want you to be blindsided by anything."

"I guess I've probably always thought about it," you confessed. "What happens after."
"And what do you think?" he wondered. "Is it going to be too much?"

The worry in the question and subtle wrinkle in his brow made your gut clench. "I'm not exactly excited about the idea," you admitted, "but, like you said, it's pretty much inevitable, right? It'd be great if nothing ever changed."

"Yeah," he sighed, taking back his hand to fuss with Archie and scoot back from his precarious perch on the lounger. "I'm sorry."

"About what?" you nearly laughed. "About being successful?"

Your levity put a bashful smile in the corner of his mouth as his head ticked back in a small nod. "I guess so," he shrugged. "No, about putting you in this spot."

"I'm not in a spot," you assured him. "I'm in a relationship." You paused, with a thoughtful pout and nod, deciding to try and be brave about it all. "But it might not be so bad. Team Cap, right?"

His smile broadened and his shoulders seemed to rise a bit, as he nodded. "Team Cap."

Around 2:30, there was a chime in the house. Chris got up from the couch to go to a security intercom panel by the front door. He pressed a button and looked over his shoulder to tell you Sebastian was here. You smiled at the thought, straightening up a bit in your seat. Chris opened the front door and stood there to wait for his friend. Archie shot up to run to the door. Chris stuck out a leg to hold Archie back, bending down to hook a finger under his collar. Sebastian appeared at the door a few seconds later, reaching out his hand for Archie's inspection.

"Hey, you got a dog?" Sebastian asked, looking up at Chris as he leaned down to pet Archie's head.

"No, it's [y/n]'s," Chris corrected him, inclining his head back toward you in the living room. "This is Archie."

"Hi, Archie," Sebastian smiled and Archie wiggled and panted his approval of the new visitor. Sebastian looked up, carefully stepping around Archie to come inside. "Hey, [y/n]," he smiled, seeing you on the couch. "How's it going?"

"Not bad," you said, giving a thumbs up.

Sebastian came over to sit on the couch with you. He looked at your wrapped up foot and grimaced. "That sucks," he shook his head. "Nice place to recover though."

"The accommodations are adequate," you quipped and Chris flipped you off with a smile.

"You want something to drink, or anything?" Chris asked, pointing to Sebastian.

"No, I'm good, man," Sebastian waved him off. "Thanks."

Chris shifted his gaze and point over to you. "Need anything?" he checked. "I gotta start getting ready."

You shook your head with a smile and Chris excused himself to his room. Without Chris to follow, Archie took to pestering Sebastian for affection. Sebastian humored him as he settled back into the couch. The two of you caught up about what he'd been doing the last couple weeks and you mentioned being invited on the press tour. Sebastian seemed excited by the idea and confessed his
disappointment when you asked if his girlfriend was going with him. Unfortunately, she was going to be busy working.

Archie eventually calmed down, lying along the front of the couch with his head over your foot on the floor and beneath your leg propped up on the coffee table. You talked with Sebastian about neither of you going to the Oscars. He agreed that having a red carpet date is stressful and not for the timid. But he also suggested you might have fun, if you ever decided you wanted to go. In the meantime, he suggested you figure out how you two would be spending the evening.

You decided food must be involved and searched through Google results on Sebastian's phone for local delivery places. Sided up to his shoulder, you guys read reviews for a few options, since neither of you were from the neighborhood to know any better. You settled on a highly rated pizza parlor and looked over the menu. You agreed on pizza toppings and a couple side items.

Plugging info into the order screen on his phone, Sebastian called out to ask Chris' street address. You told him, with a slight waver of doubt. Since Chris had first given you directions to his place from the Disney studios lot and you had gotten there easily enough without GPS-ing it on your phone. But you were kind of a landmark driver and didn't really need the exact house number anyway.

"What's the address here?" Sebastian yelled, the end of his question turning up as his brow folded down, wanting to double check your answer.

"You don't believe me?" you asked.

Sebastian put his finger to his lips, shushing you while he listened for the answer.

Chris yelled back the same info from the bedroom that you'd provided and you elbowed Sebastian. "See?"

"Yeah yeah," Sebastian grumbled, with a smile.

"Told ya so," you added, quiet but smug.

"Yes," Sebastian rolled his eyes. "We get it, okay? You're a good guesser. I'm here all night. Let it go."

You snickered to yourself, unlocking your phone to pass the time. Absentmindedly, you started humming the chorus of 'Let It Go'. Sebastian looked over at you, shifting one shoulder forward and the other back to face you better. You stopped, seeing him move from the side of your eye, and looked up, feeling him staring at you.

"What?" you defensively whined, shrinking into your shoulders.

"You're not another Disney nut like him, are you?" he asked, eyeing you suspiciously.

You laughed. "No," you promised. "Not exactly. I mean, I love Disney movies as much as the next guy, but not obsessively or anything. Just don't get me started on when they stopped hand drawing their animation, though."

"What about Pixar?" Sebastian asked, settling back into the couch to keep ordering dinner.

You exaggeratedly sighed, reaching a hand to grab his bicep. "I loooove Pixar," you practically swooned. "Oh, my god. The Toy Stories. Toy Story 3?"
Sebastian twisted in his seat, tucking an ankle under his leg and leaning sideways into the couch. "At the end, in the incinerator?"

You grabbed his hand, wincing. "And they're holding hands?" you went on. "I cried like a baby."

You both laughed, Sebastian folding over and shaking his head. "I know!"

Laughter subsiding, you let go of Sebastian. "But I draw the line at Frozen," you shook your head.

"No good?" Sebastian checked. "You didn't like it?"

"Meh," you shrugged. "Not for me, I guess. But, God, that damned song."

Sebastian chuckled, tapping away on his phone. "It does get stuck sometimes," he nodded.

"Seriously," you groaned. "But I cheat though. I always think of this joke about Steve and Bucky to forget it."

Finishing your online order, Sebastian dropped his phone beside him and looked over. "Dinner will be here at 6. What joke?"

You smiled wide, just thinking about it. "Okay, so when Anna and Elsa are on different sides of the door," you began, "and she asks 'Do you wanna build a snowman'?"

Sebastian stoically nodded. "I am familiar. Go on," he told you, sweeping his hand across the front of him for you to continue.

"So, it's this cartoon of that part," you went on, "but instead of Anna and Elsa, it's Steve knocking on the door and the Winter Soldier's sitting on the floor with his back to the door, looking all sad and murder." Sebastian smiled, eager for the punch line it seemed. "And little Steve is on his toes asking Bucky, 'Do you wanna kill some Nazis? It kinda has to be some Nazis'. And I fuckin' die every time I see it."

Sebastian laughed out loud. "I've gotta see that," he insisted.

You made a quick search on your phone, biting your lip in excited amusement and proudly showing him the drawing. Sebastian shook his head, smiling at your phone. "That's hilarious!" he declared.

"Do you wanna kill some Nazis?" you sang, putting a hand back on his arm and smiling wide, watching Sebastian as he tried to stifle his laugh, nearly coming to tears in the process. "It kinda has to be some Nazis."

"What the hell?" Chris breathed out, brow wrinkled in confusion as he rounded out of the hallway into the room and Sebastian lost it. "Did you ju-" His thought broke as he scrunched his face in disbelief and his head cocked to the side. "Did you just sing 'Let It Go' about Nazis?"

You shrugged, tipping your head innocently into your shoulder and holding up your hands. "It was Steve and Bucky as Anna and Elsa," you harmlessly explained.

Beside you, Sebastian waved his hand to beg you to stop as he dropped his head, still laughing. In front of you, Chris straightened up, quiet for a moment as he processed what you just did. He just slowly shook his head and walked through the room toward the kitchen. Sebastian recovered and
held up a hand for you to high five.

From the kitchen, Chris called out, "Ya know, I'm beginning to have second thoughts about this."

"About what?" Sebastian asked, finally sobering up.

Chris came back into the living room, twisting open a bottle of some kind of green juice drink. "About leaving you two without adult supervision," he explained, pointing a finger back and forth between you and Sebastian.

"Oh, yeah," Sebastian agreed, scrunching his face and nodding. "That's probably a bad idea."

Chris snorted and shook his head. "Well," he said, admitting defeat and gesturing toward you, "at least you can't get into too much trouble with you on crutches."

"Challenge accepted," Sebastian declared, holding up a hand for you to fist bump.

"Sweet Jesus," Chris muttered, turning his eyes up to the ceiling for strength and shaking his head again. He headed back to the bedroom, adding, "This was a terrible idea."

You looked at Sebastian, the two of you trying to hold your laughter in behind mischievous smirks. "This was a good idea," you decided.

Sebastian nodded, with a confident pout, parroting, "This was a good idea."

A few minutes later, Chris returned, a black garment bag hanging on the side of his hand. He pulled open a closet door near the front foyer to hand the bag on the rack inside. Sebastian nudged your arm, jutting his head toward the closet and craning his neck to see inside. You sat up to see what the fuss was for. And then you saw it. You looked over at Sebastian and he winked at you, subtly tipping up a finger from his lap to signal you to act cool. Propped up against the wall of the closet was one of Steve Rogers' shields.

"Just wait," Sebastian whispered, turning his attention casually back to his phone. "I've got an idea."

Chris turned back to the living room from the closet. His phone chimed in his pocket and he took it out to read a text as he came over to you. Pressing a kiss down to the top of your head, he told you he had to go.

"You need anything?" Chris offered.

"Nope," you smiled up at him.

Beside you, Sebastian huffed unhappily as Chris made his way back to the closet. "Heyyy. Where's my kiss goodbye?" he demanded.

Chris grabbed his garment bag and looked at Sebastian, with a quirked up eyebrow. "Call your girlfriend," he told him, as he opened the door. "In fact," he added, stopping and turning back to point at you both, "you go sit in the chair over there. You two probably don't need to be any closer."

Sebastian laid his arm along the back of the couch behind you, arrogantly jutting his chin at Chris. "You're going to miss your ride," he pointed out.

"Don't think I won't drop this tux and kick your ass," Chris warned him, tipping his chin down to level a hard gaze at Sebastian. "Hands off."

Sebastian cracked. "Whatever, man," he laughed, taking his arm back down. "She's in good hands."
"I know," Chris winked at you. He waved to you both. "I'll see you later tonight."
Dinner was a couple minutes off schedule, showing up just after 6 o'clock. Sebastian met the
delivery guy at the door while you kept hold of Archie. Sebastian shut the door behind him and
carried dinner into the kitchen. You got up to follow. On the television, you two had put on the red
carpet show and Sebastian and you were trading thoughts on the show and people's outfits before the
had door rang.

In the kitchen, Sebastian was checking cupboards until he found the one with the plates. You leaned
into the counter and Sebastian handed you a plate. "I coulda brought it out for you, you know?" he
frowned.

"Tired of sitting," you groaned.

"You're not a good patient, are you?" he chuckled, opening up the lid to the box of pizza.

"Not really," you admitted. "I'm kinda stubborn."

"Probably driving Chris nuts," he suggested, with a smile.

You considered it and shrugged. "I might be," you laughed along.

You consented to Sebastian carrying your plate back to the living room for you. He handed it off,
with your drink, as you got comfortable again, asking, "Can you stand without those?" and nodding
at your crutches.

"I have a good sense of balance," you shrugged. "But I'm technically not allowed to stand on my
foot."

"That's okay," he told you. "You won't really have to."

"Won't have to what?" you wondered, as he went back to the kitchen for his dinner.

"Just wait," he insisted, with a smile. "After dinner, I have an idea."

You eyed him suspiciously as he walked around to join you on the couch again. He promised, it
would be funny and started on his dinner. Mouth half-full of food, he pointed to the TV with his
elbow to tell you he knew someone that you just missed seeing on the screen, you started in on your
own meal and you two were back to watching the pre-show.

With the awards underway, the two of you were trying to figure out when Chris would be
presenting. He had told you the names of the awards he and Chadwick were giving out, but they
could pop up just about anywhere. You had seen Chris and Carly on the red carpet interviews and
you gushed with a heartfelt 'aww' at the two of them being so cute and looking so good all dolled up
together. Chris looked incredible in his tuxedo and Carly's excitement to be there put a smile on your
face.

In between commercial breaks, you and Sebastian trolled the Internet, checking out tags for the
Oscars and other ways to waste time before Chris' appearance and the really interesting awards came
up. On Instagram, you happened across a post about Sebastian, wondering what
he was up to on Oscar night. You laughed when he read you the reply he posted. [Not at the Oscars...but I will watch it with a giant pizza!]

Sebastian cleared your dishes from dinner for you. When he came back from the kitchen, he checked the TV to see the awards show going to commercial. He smiled, mischievously, as he went to the hall closet by the front door. You watched as he dipped inside and took out Chris' Captain America shield. You were shaking your head, before you even knew what was going to happen, and Sebastian was fitting the shield onto his arm on his way back into the room.

"Forgot how heavy this thing is," he mused, making a few short flexes of his arm at the elbow to get the feel of the prop again. Sebastian looked up at you and inclined his head to the backyard.

"Come on," he said, coming over to hand you a crutch while you stood up with the other.

Archie followed you two out the door. Outside, Sebastian surveyed the yard. He seemed to come to some kind of decision as he motioned for you to wait and he went to the table. He set up his cellphone carefully on its side and made a few taps on the screen, framing the trees and view of the hills as the backdrop. He came back to you, eyeing your crutches carefully, before he asked if you can stand up without them. You nodded, bundling your crutches together and using them as a kind of kickstand while you found your balance on one foot. Sebastian carefully took the crutches from you, when you were ready, dropping them in the grass and hurrying back to you.

"Okay," he nodded. "Timer's set up on the phone so we get a few shots at this."

"What are we doing?" you asked, holding onto his shoulder.

"I don't know," he laughingly shrugged.

"Come on," you groaned, playfully thumping the back of your free hand into his chest. "How many photo ops have you been a part of, and you don't have a plan?"

Sebastian thought a quick moment before his eyes lit up with an idea. "Jump up," he told you and you tittered.

"What?"

He can't possibly be serious, right?

"Come on. It'll be okay," he promised, with a sure nod, lowering himself and holding out an arm.

You don't know why you laughed. It was an odd reaction to the fear in your gut as you slipped your hand from his shoulder to behind his neck and put your other hand on his opposite shoulder to leap into his arms. You were incredibly relieved when it worked and you didn't fall and land on your bad foot. Sebastian gave you a small toss, adjusting you in his arms and the shield on his left arm in front of you.

"Now what?" you laughed.

"Umm," he thought. "Oh! Sexy stare."

You don't know how you managed to sober you expression up, as Sebastian wiped the smile off his face to stare seductively in your eyes just in time for the camera to snap a pic. When it was over, you both laughed out loud. Sebastian carefully set you down again, keeping his arm, and
the shield, protectively behind your waist. Next, you did a vengeful hero pose. You laid back into Sebastian's shielded arm, throwing your wrist to your forehead in dramatic fashion as he raised an angry fist and made a face that yelled his defiance at the sky. He pulled you back up and held your hand while you hopped once for your balance again. He told you 'romance novel cover' next and he dipped you back, slipping his free hand to cradle your neck while your arm went around his neck and you fisted a handful of his shirt at his shoulder and the two of you made a convincing play at almost kissing when the camera shutter clicked.

With the two of you laughing, damn near uncontrollably, Sebastian straightened up with you again. He held up his hands, as if he could will you into not falling over, while you stood on one foot and he picked up your crutches for you. Sebastian grabbed his phone and you guys headed back inside, hoping you didn't miss Chris' presentation.

Situated on the couch again, and the shield stashed away safely, you and Sebastian laughed again, looking over the photos in his phone. You decided the hero pose was your mutual favorite. Sebastian did a little cropping and sent the pic off to Chris. You didn't know if he'd have his phone on, or even on him, but he'd see it eventually. Sebastian also sent you the photos for posterity. You'd have to decide later which was your absolute fav to save as his caller ID pic in your phone.

A few minutes later, Chris and Chadwick were on stage and you did your best not to salivate at the sight of him in all his full body shot, tuxedoed glory.

Beside you, Sebastian complained, "What about me? Don't I look pretty?"

With your eyes glued on your boyfriend on screen, you reached and patted a blind hand on his knee. "Apples and oranges, handsome," you soothingly told him. "Apples and oranges."

It was about a half hour after the show ended that Sebastian's phone finally chimed with a reply from Chris. Sebastian burst into laughter, laying a hand over his stomach and kicking a foot up. He handed you the phone when he couldn't reign himself in enough to read the message to you.

Chris Evans: Put the shield back in the closet. And stop touching [y/n]. I told you No before I left.

"Oh, my god," you laughed, handing Sebastian his phone back.

"Holy shit," he wheezed, wiping at a tearing eye. "He said stop touching you." He held up a hand for you to high five. "That's hilarious."

Sebastian Stan was good company. The two of you crushed dinner, had fun on the Internet, weren't too disappointed in winners at the Oscars, and had a photo shoot worthy of its own award. Sebastian and Archie also got along famously. Archie always liked whoever feeds him dinner. It was a good night.

Sebastian took his leave just after 12:30. You let Archie out for one last venture through the yard and turned off a few lights on your way to bed. You hadn't heard from Chris since his reply to Sebastian's text. But, hey, who could blame him? He was with family and friends and colleagues, no doubt making the rounds of extravagant parties. And you...well, you changed into your pajamas and climbed into bed by 1. You wanted to wait up, but you had your doctor's appointment in the morning and, honestly, who knew when to expect him.
It was weird, being in Chris' house...at night...alone. It wasn't your place, but you'd gone around and locked doors like you would at home. You figured you didn't need to leave too many lights on. After all, it was Chris' house and he could no doubt navigate it just fine and knew where all the light switches were. And now, lying in his bed, in his quiet house, looking at his view out the windows at the end of his room, you were overcome by this odd feeling, like you were trespassing. Archie snuffling as he settled into a spot on the floor snapped you out of it, reminding you you weren't completely alone and that made you feel a little more comfortable.

You had no idea what time it was, but you opened your eyes at the sound of a door closing. You saw a sliver of light stretching out from under the edge of the bathroom door and noticed Archie up and standing by the door, wagging his tail lazily as he waited. If it was an ax murderer breaking in to kill you, at least your dog liked him. You snuggled your face into your pillow and started to drift off to sleep again.

It couldn't have been long after, you were roused again by Chris' whispered shooing of Archie to get off the bed. Chris himself was just climbing under the covers beside you. You heard the jingle of the tags on Archie's collar as he hopped down to the floor again and felt the mattress dip behind you as Chris shifted. A warm arm slipped carefully under your elbow resting on your side and wrapped around your belly. Chris spooned up behind you, lining himself into the curve of your legs and nuzzling his nose at the nape of your neck. He didn't say anything. Maybe he thought you were still sleeping. Chris simply brushed a kiss onto your shoulder and hugged you a little closer.

The alarm on your phone woke you and you grabbed it off the nightstand with a stretch. You looked over at Chris, still asleep beside you in the bed. He was out cold. Sliding out of bed, you took a change of clothes with you to the bathroom to start your day. When you reemerged, looking presentable, you made a kissy noise to get Archie to follow you out of the room. You weren't really surprised when your comings and goings didn't rouse Chris. It still made you smile though.

You opened a door to the yard for Archie and scooped out breakfast for him when he came back in. Turning back to the kitchen to make some coffee, you stopped and smiled. Sitting on the island counter was a box of Thin Mints from the Girl Scouts. Cookies and coffee sounded like a nutritious breakfast. Hey! You're an adult. That can be a thing, if you want it to be.

You stifled your laugh with your hand when you picked up the box of cookies. Written on the one side, in blue pen, was- Save For [Y/n]. Maybe you didn't do the red carpet with him, but he remembered you while he was gone. And apparently needed to remind himself not to eat the other sleeve of cookies. What a dork.

You felt bad about trying to wake up the dead Chris, not knowing exactly when he got in last night, but you needed a ride and he had to get up soon if you were going to be on time. You tried to wake him gently, with a few kind pushes of his arm and a couple gentle calls of his name, but got no response.

You gave up with a snort of amusement and went back to the kitchen. You took out your phone and set up an Uber to meet you several houses down. Honestly, if you had your car, you'd just drive yourself. But since that wasn't an option, you figured a hired ride would work just as well. You pocketed a few essentials from your purse and wallet and headed out the door. You felt a little like a bargain basement priced hooker, standing alone in the street on crutches, but you definitely weren't going to have a driver pull up to Chris' front door for you either.
Your appointment was great. The podiatrist liked what he saw in X-rays and when he examined your foot. He gave you some stretches to do to help relieve any cramping or tension in your foot. You made an appointment to get the stitches out in a week and got the go ahead to start walking on your foot after that. On your way back to Chris' house, your phone rang. No surprise, it was Chris.

"Where are you?" he asked, sounding mildly concerned.

"It's Monday. I had my appointment for my foot today," you told him. "Remember? I'm on my way back."

"Yeah, I remember," he answered. "How'd you get there?"

"Courtesy of Uber and this cool dude named Jesse," you said, giving a thumbs up to your driver when he peaked back in the mirror at you.

"Jesse? The fuck you takin' an U-" Chris stopped and let out a disgruntled breath. "Why didn't you wake me up? You shouldn't be taking an Uber."

"Sweetie, a marching band couldn't have woke you up," you assured him.

"What?" he questioned.

"I tried," you explained. "You didn't budge. When did you get in, anyway?"

"Hell," he muttered. "I don't know. 3:30? 4?"

"Well, that explains that," you smirked. You tapped your driver on the shoulder, telling him in a hush, as you tipped your phone away from your ear, "Here's good. Pull over here."

"What was that?" Chris asked.

"Not you," you said. "I was telling the driver where to stop. I'm gonna hang up. I'll see you in a minute, okay?"

"Yeah," he agreed and hung up.

Off the phone, you paid Jesse and told him to have a good day. You made your way up the street, making a mental note to give your driver a great review, because his iPod was on point and his car smelled like Yankee Candles' Christmas Cookie candles. Getting close to Chris' house, you looked up, hearing a jingling coming toward you. Archie was hurrying down the street to see you. Coming out from the gate, Chris stopped. Looking down the street at you, he pocketed his hands in his jeans and shook his head. He started down to meet you, giving a sharp whistle when Archie got distracted and stopped following you to sniff at the neighbor's fence across the street instead.

"Ay," he called to Archie, patting the side of his leg. "C'mere, bud."

Archie hesitated for one more sniff, but got around to obeying Chris calling his name. By the time you and Chris ran into each other, it was at the end of the wall of his yard. He frowned, shaking his head at you again, as he looked you over.
"What?" you pouted, feeling a little scolded by his expression.

"What are you doin', takin' a fuckin' Uber?" he complained.

"What?" you laughed. "You were sleeping. I improvised." He made a disapproving click of his tongue, cocking his head to the side, and you scooted up to stand toe to toe with him and dot a kiss to his chin and pout, "I'm sorry. But thank you for the cookies."

He reluctantly cracked a smile, dropping and shaking his head. "You're killing me," he grumbled. Chris tilted his head back toward the gate. "Come on. Let's go."

Before you knew it, Chris dipped and wrapped his arm under your ass, picking you up when he straightened up. You let out a yelp, almost losing your crutches. Chris took the crutch from your right hand, holding it with his left as he told you to "gimme that". You put your forearm down on his shoulder to steady yourself as you twisted to see where you were going. Archie followed, excitedly hopping up every few steps to try and nose you. Inside the gate, Chris crouched down again, while you laughed, to put you back down on you feet. He handed you back your crutch and shut the gate behind you.

"Better than an Uber," you joked and he threw you a tired side eye as he headed up the walk. "What?" you whined, with a smile. "Too soon? That was funny."

"Ha ha," he dryly said, opening the front door for you and Archie to pass. "That's the last time I bring you home cookies from the Oscars."

"Aww," you pouted, sticking out your lower lip with your best puppy dog eyes.

Chris shut the door and your sad face stopped Chris dead in his tracks. His head fell to one side and his shoulders dropped. He let out a groan of a sigh and winced. "Why ya gotta do that?" he complained, throwing a limp hand out your way. "Baby, I'm sorry."

And that's when you discovered Captain America's kryptonite. Chris stepped over, wrapping you up in a tight hug. You couldn't help but giggle. He held on to you for a long moment, before his cellphone rang. Chris dropped a hand to fish his phone out of his pocket and check the screen. Deciding to take the call, he let you go, holding up a finger to say he wouldn't be long, and wondering off to the kitchen as he spoke.

You took a seat on the couch. Taking your paperwork out of your back pocket from your visit to the podiatrist's office, you read over the directions and studied little diagrams of the stretches for your foot he'd recommended. You had time to group message your parents and brother to catch them up on your prognosis, while Chris walked around in the kitchen on his phone. When he came back, after his call, he dropped into the couch beside you, leaning over to take a look at the papers in your lap.

Picking up the stapled together pages with your exercises on them, Chris held them up for inspection. "What's all this?"

"Homework," you smiled and he snorted. You took back the papers, when he held them out, and explained, "The doctor gave me some stretches to do to help with the muscle cramps and work out any tightness."

"Sounds fun," he smirked. "What'd he say about the stitches?"
"I get my stitches out next Monday," you said. "And then I can start walking again."

"Monday?" he repeated. "Got an Uber all set up, or do you need a ride?"

You tapped the side of your good foot into his calf. "Smart ass," you grumbled.

"Seriously, though," Chris began, "what are you gonna do till Monday?"

"Oo! I've gotta call work and have somebody cover my hours this week," you realized, pulling out your phone to message your manager.

"I meant, are you going to be staying here?" he clarified.

Thumbs typing out a message, you shrugged. "I should probably head home," you reasoned. "This really isn't as bad as it could have been. I think I can manage."

"Why don't you just stay?" he offered, slouching down in his seat to kick a foot up on the coffee table.

"For a whole other week?" you doubted, hitting send on your message.

"Why not?" Chris shrugged. His head was dropped back on the top of the couch and lolled over to look at you as he absentmindedly poked his fingertips softly on top of your leg. "It worked out for the weekend."

"Well, yeah," you admitted. "But I don't want to wear out our welcome." You nodded toward Archie laying along the window in the sunshine. "Besides, he's going to run ruts into your yard chasing squirrels."

"Bullshit," Chris grimaced, flipping his hand dismissively toward your sun worshiping dog. "Even if he could, it's grass, it'll grow back." He flicked a finger down into your leg. "You trying to escape?"

"Escape?" you laughed. "From what, the lap of luxury?"

"Seems like you've got more than a few excuses to go home," he noted, his hand resting on your leg.

"Well, it's home," you explained. "I mean, there'll already be three days worth of mail crammed into the mailbox by this afternoon, I only packed for a weekend away, and Archie's food-"

"We can go by your place and pick up some things," Chris interjected. "Clean out the mailbox, get Archie some food."

"Yeah, but-"

"Buuuut..." he mocked, shaking his head, with an expectant raise of his brow. "What? You didn't have a good weekend?"

"No," you scoffed. "It was great. It's been fun, but you can't wait on me hand and foot for another week."

"What else is there to do?" he smiled, with a shrug.
"That's not fair to you," you noted.

"Me?" Chris chuckled. "Are you kidding? I've been pawning you off all weekend. Between Carly, Scott, and Stan, I've barely lifted a finger." He swept his hand out. "Believe me, sweetheart, you've been anything but a hardship to me."

That was actually pretty accurate. Come to think of it, he has had surprisingly little to do with your care and convalescing over the weekend, comparatively speaking.

"God," you realized, giving him a judgmental side eye. "You really have managed to shirk responsibility, haven't you?"

"Delegated," he smugly corrected, holding up a finger to make his point. "I delegated."

"Now who's got excuses?" you smirked, nudging your elbow into his arm.

Chris snapped his finger into your leg again. "Stay," he insisted. "You're already here with Archie. I'm gonna take Carly to the airport in a little bit. Come with me and we can slide by your place on the way back. Besides," he added, scratching his fingers lightly on your leg, "flamingos live near water and your place doesn't have a pool."

You had to smile at that one, but you still had to shake your head. It hadn't been a bad weekend. Not by any means. But you were feeling pretty good about yourself after your doctor's visit and, no matter hat he told you, you still worried about being an imposition.

"How 'bout it?" Chris gently pressed. "Stay."

You bit you lower lip, in a moment of contemplation. "I just don't want to be-"

"You're naht," he insisted, splaying his fingers over your thigh for a reassuring rub and squeeze. "It's nice having you guys around. It's no trouble."

"Are you sure?" you worried.

"Of course," he smiled. "Everything's easier here for you, you almost know where to find shit in the kitchen, and Archie's living it up in the yard." Chris gave your leg another squeeze. "Come on."

You nodded, with a shrug. "Okay."

"Okay," Chris agreed, with a wide smile.

You settled into the couch, leaning over to rest your head on his shoulder. "By the way," you said, while his fingers twisted with yours to rest on your leg. "You guys looked so good last night."

"Oh, yeah?" he wondered and pressed a lingering kiss into your hair.

"Yeah," you smiled. "Carly looked so excited. Did you have fun?"

"Yes," Chris nodded, emphatically.

"Still can't believe you brought me cookies," you chuckled. "You and Henry eating cookies was
"Of course, I'd bring you cookies," he scoffed, turning up his free hand in his lap as if he were mildly offended.

"Thanks," you told him, giving his hand a quick squeeze.

"Anytime," he promised. It was quiet for a few moments, until Chris spoke up again, saying, "By the way, I showed Chadwick that pic last night."

"Oh, my god," you breathed, sitting up to twist to see him. "You didn't?"

"I did," he confirmed, with a nod. "I got it when we were backstage together waiting to go on. He asked what was so funny, so I showed him. I didn't have time to reply then. Carly got a kick out of it, too."

You felt your cheeks warm with a touch of embarrassment. You hadn't considered the photo would make any rounds, but at least it was well received. You shook your head and laughed. What else could you do?

"Oh, and no more Seb keeping an eye on you, okay?" he added.

"Why not?" you pouted, before easing back into his side.

"Are you kidding?" he chuckled. "Taking my shield and the two of you, running around to take that photo. A guy's gotta draw a line somewhere."

"You should see the other pics," you muttered quietly, with a smirk.

"What?" Chris asked, dropping his arm around your shoulders again.

"Nothing," you innocently shrugged.
Chapter 29

After the two of you dropped Chris' sister off at the airport, you stopped by your apartment. With another week to go on your crutches, you would need more supplies for your extended stay at the House That Cap Built. You emptied out your mailbox in the foyer and dropped the bills and magazines in your tote you'd brought back with you. This time, when Chris tipped his head for you to come closer so he could carry you up the stairs, you sighed and surrendered. Okay, it was a little embarrassing to not be able to negotiate the stairs the way you used to, but how many more times in your life were you eligible for a piggy back ride from Captain America? Forgetting what little dignity you were trying to preserve, you bundled your crutches in one hand and jumped up.

Chris set you down at the top of the stairs and took your keys to open the door. While he went to the kitchen to get some more chow for Archie, you went to your room to get some more clothes. You stocked up on underwear and t-shirts, grabbed a couple pairs of shorts and a comfy pair of yoga pants, and packed it all into the tote. You stuffed in a few odds and ends from the bathroom and were all set. You waited in the hall while Chris took your things down to the car. He frowned at you when he met you halfway down the flight of stairs between your floor and the next one down. He called you stubborn and reluctantly cracked a smile and shook his head, when you batted your eyelashes at him and shrugged innocently. You got another free ride down to the front door of your building and you guys were on your way back to Chris' house.

Chris carried your bag back to the bedroom, while you tussled Archie's ears when he came up to nudge and lean on you as you sat down on the couch. After Archie was thoroughly loved, you grabbed your tablet off the coffee table and opened your email. Chris had had his assistant resend the travel itinerary for the press tour, like he said he would, and had forwarded you a copy the other day. It was time to start looking for flights.

Let's see. Nonstop to Beijing, round trip, $3019?! Holy sh- For economy?! Better consider one of the one or two stop flights. Let's try this again. Alright. P.M. departure, $1500. Hm. Okay. One stop, often delayed 30+ minutes, overnight layover? Nope. P.M. departure, one stop, 2 hour 20 minute layover. Better. Often delayed, economy, $1850? Yeesh. -select- Next. Return flight...afternoon departure, one stop, 2 hour 35 minute layover. Meh. Economy, delayed. Does anything every happen on time to or from China? Sheesh. Just for shits and giggles, let's see what's the price tag on first class, nonsto- 15,504 dollars?! Jesus fu- Nope! -previous page-

Damn. This was going to be a bigger financial fiasco than you'd thought. Already about two grand just to get to China. Plus the hop to Singapore and then on to- Double damn. Well, at least you're not paying for hotel rooms. That helps...sorta.

Okay, to be honest, you didn't think it'd be a cheap trip. But this was going to add up fast, if you were going to tag along through to London and New York. And that was just the airfare. At this point, you'd have to take up a collection to enjoy any tourist traps, or anything else, or take a decent chunk of change out of your savings.

Chris came in, dropping into the couch beside you. Folding an arm back behind his head and kicking a foot up on the coffee table, he asked, "Whatcha doin'?"

Your eyes bulged as you groaned, "Ugh, looking for flights for the press tour."

Internal face palm. Maybe there was a more subtle way to play that.

"What'dya come up with so far?" Chris wondered, putting a hand up in front of Archie's nose when
he tried to sneak a paw, and the rest of him, up onto the couch.

"That flights to China never seem to be on time?" you suggested, with an awkward smile.

Chris chuckled, watching Archie bury his nose under his bent knee as he scratched his head. "But you're finding times that work for you, right?" he checked. "Or do you think you'll miss Beijing?"

"Um, Beijing might be iffy," you admitted.

You wondered to yourself if a flight into Singapore would be any cheaper. At least it'd cut out one leg of travel. You went to start a new search, changing your destination and departure dates. You pulled up the new results. Well, it was a little less expensive, but still as tedious as the other flights that warned of frequent delays and such. *Bah humbug.* Chris craned his head to see.

"Economy?" Chris noted. "Have you ever done a transpacific flight in economy before?"

You shook your head. "First time crossing an ocean."

"You know you're gonna be stuck there for, like, 13 hours, right?" he checked, giving Archie a hair-messing noogie and smiling at his own work before smoothing your dog's fur back again.

13? Ha! "More like 19 or 20," you corrected.

"Layover?" Chris questioned. "The nonstops booked already?"

You shrugged. "Saves a couple bucks," you explained, scrolling down the list of flights.

Beside you, Chris hummed and nodded for a moment. He stopped playing with Archie and lolled his head over on the back of the couch, looking up at you through his brow and asking, "Is that why you're looking at flights to Singapore and not Beijing?"

What? Is he psychic, or something? You glanced over at him, giving him your best 'as if' face. "Pfft. No," you lied. "It's just, you know, I can't leave as early as you, so I thought, maybe I wouldn't feel so rushed if I just met you in Singapore."

Your eyes skimmed down the price column of the next page of results and, in your periphery, you realized Chris was still staring at you. You looked back, giving him a suspicious look. "What?"

"You're lying," he decided.

You snorted at the idea. "I'm lying?" you stalled. "About what?"

"When are you done for the day on the 18th?" Chris asked, clearly making the wind up for some kind of point to come later.

"Maybe 2 or 3-ish," you considered, looking up to the ceiling as you calculated.

"You could make Beijing, easy," Chris told you. "There's gotta be more than a few p.m. overnight flights out of L.A."

"Well, yeah," you halfheartedly agreed, because you'd already seen an afternoon nonstop somewhere on the page for about seven grand. "But-"

You stopped, interrupted by Chris pulling the iPad off your lap to have a look at it for himself. You opened your mouth to go back to setting up your defense, but he held up a finger on his left hand while the index on his right scrolled through your flight search. All you could do was wait...and fold
your arms to let him know you didn't approve of his taking your stuff. After a couple of minutes of silent poking around on the Internet, he handed you back your iPad, with an audible deep breath in and out.

"You know what I'm going to say, right?" Chris led you on. You rolled your eyes in reply and he straightened up in his seat, putting his foot back down on the floor and folding his hands in front of him as he leaned onto his knees. "Why don't you just let-"

"Again?" you plaintively whined, wrinkling up your brow in a pained expression and dropping your head back into the couch.

"Yeah, again," he nodded, with a small curl of amusement in the corner of his mouth at your reaction. "[Y/n], sweetheart...it is naht a big deal."

"It is," you insisted.

"Because you're making it one," he pointed out, with a soft laugh behind it.

"Chris," you began to argue, "I can-"

The turned up corner of his mouth dropped, as he shook his head. "What'd I say before?"

"Which part?" you smirked.

"I said, if money meant you wouldn't go-"

"I'm going," you assured him, gesturing toward the travel options on the screen in your lap. "See? I'm working on it right now."

He tipped his head and gave you a knowing side eye. "You're thinking about cutting down the trip to save money," he said.

Yes, you are. "No, I'm not. I'm jus-"

"What's the next part of the trip to get dropped?" Chris asked, opening his hands for a moment before lacing them together again. "Hm?"

"That's not fair," you chided him.

"But it's true, isn't it?" he suggested.

The screen on your iPad timed out and blacked, as you sighed. Seriously, is this man consulting a magic eight ball or ouija board you can't see? If this acting thing doesn't pan out, maybe he could be a detective.

"Okay," you admitted, with a small wince. "So I'd save a few bucks skipping Beijing. Sue me."

"[Y/n]," he sighed, with a sweep of his head. "I want you to go. I want you there, for all of it. Don't go, if you don't want to. That's fine. But not because money's the issue, when I can-"

"It's just a little sticker shock," you explained, trying to smile convincingly. "That's all. I just started looking. I'll come up with something."

"You're going to be miserable sitting for 20 hours in economy," Chris assured you.

"I can get up and stretch," you said, unlocking your iPad again, so you could look at the screen
instead of Chris' semi-pitying eyes. "I've done long flights before. Well, long-ish ones."

"What are you going to do when you get to China with me?" he asked, his elbows still pensively set on his knees.

"What do you mean?" you shook your head.

"Well, like when we leave China for England," he elaborated. "Am I gonna be sitting in one end of the plane and you in the other?"

"I thought I'd take a tennis ball and rubber band," you innocently smiled. "That way we can tie on notes for each other and throw it up and down the aisle."

You could see he didn't want to, but Chris chuckled anyway, dropping and shaking his head. "That's-" he nodded. "That's cute, but no."

"It was worth a shot," you muttered, with a shrug.

Chris put a hand on your knee. "Just let me have Josh get you a seat with me," he tried again. "Buy the first leg to Beijing and let me pay the difference to, at least, get you into business class so you can sleep comfortably. Call it a late Christmas present...Or maybe it's an early or late birthday present. I, honestly, don't think you've ever told me when your birthday is." He snorted and shook his head, with a grin. "Come on. Don't make me beg."

You snickered at the last bit. The thought of him begging for anything was absurd, but that he was essentially begging for you to not miss any more of the trip than you might have to already because of work; to go with him, like, actually literally go with him- sigh. Your pride and the "he loves you" butterflies in your stomach duked it out for a long moment.

"August," you sighed and his brow creased in confusion. "My birthday's August 15th." Chris smiled wide, straightening up from his lean, and you held up a finger. "But don't buy me anything else for my birthday," you insisted. "I mean it."

Chris laughed, giving your knee a squeeze. "We'll see."

Later that afternoon, Chris was on the phone with his assistant, Josh. He told him to look into making arrangements to get you a seat with him, starting with the flight out of Beijing. You also heard him tell him to make whatever adjustments to his own ticketing that Josh needed to make so the two of you would be traveling together. Chris seemed a little pleased that you'd let him win this one. You still felt a little awkward about taking the offer, but it was a once in a lifetime trip. Wasn't it? Well, it is if you look at the short play. ...But what about the long game? Where was this whole thing going? Chris is spending a surprising amount of time in Los Angeles lately. Of course, that's as much a business decision as a personal one. After all, he did have a shit ton of promotional work coming up for Cap's latest movie. He'll probably start skipping over to Boston again come summer. Surely, he'll want to unwind before the next leg of Marvel filming starts, because that's going to be a lot of work. And you've got work with Frank and your other little jobs to keep you busy. So, undoubtedly, you'll see him less, right?

Oh, who the hell knows? Just enjoy the ride. This is probably best if you don't have any expectations. It's not like anybody's getting married and having kids. For now, you've got this sweet and wonderful Adonis all to yourself. What's the sense in fretting about the future, when you can just enjoy the now? Savor this. Like Chris said, everything could change if the press/public found out he
wasn't single. The short view looks just fine from here.

After dinner, you and Chris cuddled up on the couch to watch a movie. Neither of you had seen Scarlett's 'Lucy' and were both unopposed when it came up in the list of action movie recommendations on the screen. You both liked it, a lot. That girl can kick ass and carry a film. Afterward, he mentioned he hadn't seen Scarlett since before Christmas, as he scrolled through his email on his phone. Chris was looking forward to seeing her when the promo work started and for the Los Angeles movie premier. Beyond that, he figured you two probably wouldn't catch up with her on the tour again until London. You sat under his arm, watching ESPN for awhile before it was late enough to call it a day.

Chris let Archie out one last time and you made your way to the bedroom. God, it really was handy having Chris around. You changed into your pajamas, before heading into the bathroom to brush your teeth. When you were finished, you hobbled back to the bedroom, just as Chris and Archie came in. You sat down on the end of the bed to have a look at the bandage on your foot. Without an invitation, Archie leapt up to lay behind you. You turned around, mouth agape and a scandalized look on your face.

"Get. down," you scolded.

"He was up there last night," Chris noted, on his way into the bathroom, while you directed Archie off the bed with a sternly pointed finger.

"This is because you let him on the couch with you," you told him.

"Me?" he challenged, from the bathroom. "Who taught him to do that in the first place? That's not a trick he learned when he got here."

You opened your mouth, but then shut it with a heavy exhale, tilting your head as you looked down at Archie looking up at you from the floor. "Well, he was very skittish when I adopted him," you explained. "I don't think whoever had him before was very nice to him. He needed snuggles. He doesn't do it all the time."

"Uh-huh," Chris sarcastically agreed, with a disingenuous nod of his head as he shut the door.

"Yeah, well" you argued, to the door. "...who let him on the couch in your trailer? And the couch here?" There was no answer. "That's right," you nodded, declaring yourself the victor. "That's why he thinks it's okay to do that here."

"He was up there when I woke up Saturday, too," he added, from the other side of the door, after the toilet finished flushing.

"Were you?" you questioned Archie. He rolled over to his back, waiting for you to rub his belly. "You're terrible."

Chris opened the bathroom door, while he did whatever it was he was doing in there. "Anyway," he said and you got up to get a bit of lotion from your things on the dresser. "I got a text from Josh a few minutes ago. He'll come by in the morning and go over some things about your trip. The New York stop's gonna be pretty busy."

Leaning back against the dresser, wringing your hands to rub in the lotion evenly, you nodded along as he rattled off the itinerary from the bathroom. Chris came back to the bedroom, snapping off the bathroom light behind him as he wrapped up the list of details.

"So, I don't know if you want to stay the whole time in New York," he shrugged, stopping beside
you to take off his watch, "or if you want to come back before then..."

You hummed for a moment in thought, eyes following his hands as he laid his watch into a sophisticated velvet lined box with several other expensive models. "I don't know," you shrugged, as he closed the lid on the watch box and slid it to the back of the dresser top. "I'd be pretty close to Ohio. If I don't stay, maybe I'll stop there for a couple days on the way home, while you're doing your thing."

Chris gave the side of your leg a tap with the back of his fingers to direct you to scoot over a couple of inches. He pulled open a drawer, taking out a fresh t-shirt, and flashed you a small smile as thanks for moving.

"That's not a bad idea," he said, with a thoughtful tip of his head. He traded his old tee for the new one, asking, "You haven't been home since Christmas, right?" You hummed your reply, shaking your head. "I don't know how you do it. I'd go nuts if I didn't go home as often as I do."

"It sucks," you shrugged, pirouetting on your uninjured foot to face the dresser, using the mirror as you rested your thigh against the dresser front to stand and twisted up your hair into a messy bun. "I do what I can. My parents came out once. My brother and his wife made a trip, too. So...ya know."

Chris chuckled, his eyes turned down to your bad foot hooked behind your calf again. "Little flamingo," he mused, shaking his head.

You gave him a grin in the mirror, turning your head side to side to check your hair, and shrugged, figuring your bun looked alright for sleeping on. "I do look good in pink, though" you noted.

There was a snort of amusement from Chris and you put a hand down to steady yourself to turn again. You stilled, putting your other hand down to balance yourself at the small start Chris' breath on your neck gave you. You looked up in the mirror to see him stopping to stand behind you, his hands coming to rest lightly on your hips.

The warm air you felt at the nape of your neck became a soft, open mouthed kiss. Your eyes involuntarily closed as your own breath left you and your stomach did an excited flip. His fingers flexed to a firmer grip, the tip of his nose drawing an almost imperceptible path down your spine before his trail of kisses on your skin diverted to your shoulder. The last kiss in the line lingered a fraction of a second as your eyes met in the mirror. The heat in your cheeks put a bashful smile on your face and the crinkle of his reflected eyes told you he had noticed and was smiling behind your shoulder, too.

His hands slipped around, belting your waist. The lines at the corners of Chris' eyes softened as he seemed to consider something and pressed another kiss to your shoulder. You heard his long inhale as he dragged his lips to the curve of your neck. Chris' forehead rested into your hair and his eyes closed.

"You know I love you, right?" he wondered, the words hushed so close to your ear.

You gave him a small nod, laying an arm along his. "Of course," you smiled. "I love you, too."

Your hips gave way a bit to his subtle pull of you back to him. Chris' lips had found your skin again, as soon as you answered him. Your head tilted, subconsciously baring your neck at the cue from the kiss pressed behind your ear. You savored your reward for your reply, with a thin grin.

Your smile fell when he kissed down your neck. It was somehow a surprise. He'd avoided that spot for weeks, ever since- well, you know. The renewed attention got a minuscule flinch from you. And
he knew it.

Chris insisted. He paused for less than a fraction of a second, just long enough to let out part of his breath and tighten his arms around you a little more. His head tilted to yours, his lips touching your skin a little softer now, kissing and nibbling like they used to. It only took a couple of beats from your racing heart for you to understand—those were yours, just like he had said. Those kisses came with a love and tenderness that wasn't in the photos of him and the girl in Geneva. Maybe there were other girlfriends he kissed like that before, but you were here now and these were just for you. Each little kiss felt like its own apology and simultaneous promise. Your thumb smoothed over his arm, accepting both.

Chris seemed to recognize the change. His nose nuzzled up behind your ear and his hands parted, one arm staying beneath yours while the other wrapped around you a little higher and tighter. Your hand on the dresser had become steepled fingers, a CYA to steady yourself, despite leaning back into his embrace.

The damp heat of his exhales warmed the excited chill his kisses gave you. The hairs of his well-trimmed beard tickled your skin and put a smile on your lips. By no means were you complaining, but you wanted his lips on yours and not just on your neck. Gingerly spinning on your foot, and using the dresser as your railing, you came around to meet him, his arms loosening only enough to let you turn but tight enough that you didn't worry that you could stumble with him there.

He seemed to pause a moment to be sure you had settled your balance again. Apparently judging you safe, his lips found yours like you'd wanted. His kisses gently pulled at your lower lip, endearing and affectionate. It was his M.O. for a long minute before his hands smoothed back to him over the snug cotton of your camisole. When his fingertips dared to curl under the hem of your top, his tongue glided across your lips. Your arms snaked their way behind his neck as his tongue took the invitation of your parted mouth.

Foreplay or making out, whatever you wanted to call it, it was wonderful. Do people still make out after they've been dating awhile or do they skip the appetizer for the entreé? If they skip it, they're missing out.

Chris' hands smoothed up under your camisole, apparently content to rest there and feel your skin under his palms. Your fingers played through his hair, your fingertips scratching softly at his scalp. The bottles of cologne and small pile of loose change rattled gently on the dresser at the bump you made leaning back into the dresser edge. The unexpected noise in the quiet made you giggle and Chris smiled into his kiss.

"Sorry," you sheepishly apologized, when he tipped his forehead to yours and snorted his amusement at the break in the moment.

"It's okay," he smiled. Chris put a hand down on the edge of the dresser and gave it a little push. "See? Nice and sturdy."

Your brief shyness passed, giving way to a mischievous lip bite. "How sturdy?"

The corner of Chris' mouth turned up. "Pretty sturdy, I'd bet."

"How much you wanna bet?" you asked, before capturing his lips with yours and taking a nip at his chin when you were done.

A playful smile took over his face and he dropped his head to snuffle a laugh and shake his head. He looked back up at you, his shoulders and chest shaking with the laugh he was trying to hold back.
"We're not fucking on the dresser," he chuckled, losing at keeping his cool.

"Really?" you checked, your nose wrinkling up and expression asking if he was sure that was the answer he wanted to go with.

Chris nodded. "Yeah," he smiled.

Well, that was surprising. Wasn't it just the other day he was complaining to Carly and Scott about not getting laid and now, here you were, more than obviously interested in remedying the problem and he...said 'no'? That wasn't at all what you were expecting. But then, you weren't expecting him to scoop you up and carry you over to the bed, either. So, when he did, you let out half a startled shriek that made him laugh at you when you clutched your hands behind his neck.

You might as well have been made of glass the way he carefully maneuvered, setting you on the mattress. Scooting a few inches back to settle yourself up on your elbows, Chris stepped back, pulling his t-shirt off overhead and essentially negating the effort he'd gone to to change in the first place. He came back to you, leaning down onto his arms straightened into the bed on either side of you. Caged in, you smiled and dropped back to the mattress when he kissed you again. The way his hands roamed over you, familiarizing and mapping every inch of you, the man could be preparing for a role as the world's foremost cartographer. Lewis and/or Clark had nothing on the way his fingertips traced the curvature of every angle. Thighs, hips, waist, breasts, neck, cheek, lips- Chris didn't miss an inch.

The way his lips and hands wandered over and worshipped you, you wouldn't have minded if you spent all night just making out like a couple of teenagers who had the house to themselves. On the other hand, you didn't exactly mind, when he stripped off the rest of his clothes and helped you out of yours. When Chris came back down to you, it was with a long, wet kiss that was almost as deep as how he pushed himself inside of you. And that set the tone. An even rhythm, attentive and earnest in a way it hadn't been before.

There was something different, something distinctly personal about this. This was better. This was somehow closer than it'd seemed before. This was adoring and intimate and- Oh. This wasn't sex. This was making love.

It was a caressing hand on the thigh of the leg bent up to wrap behind his, passionate kisses that nibbled tenderly at your lips and throat, and deep thrusts that didn't leave a fraction of space between your two warm bodies. It was his fingers combing back into your hair and your hands curled over the back of his neck, breaths panting and gasping in ears, and playful bites at shoulders. His tongue traced and flicked your nipples ahead of wet kisses, as he lavished attention on each breast cupped in his warm hands. Every thrust of his hips seemed to be about you. The buck and tilt of your hips in reply was as much for his pleasure as it was for the delicious friction of him on your clit, as you clenched and released around him. More was said with silent lips ghosting over skin and hungry mouths than had been said in nearly two weeks. This was two people connected and in sync in every way. And it was the best sex you'd had...well, to date anyway.

When he sent you over the edge and that wave of bliss washed over you, his name whimpered on your breath seemed to be the thing that brought him along right behind you. You smiled, dotting a few tiny kisses on his temple when he buried his face in the curve of your neck, his warm breath coming in short puffs across your flushed chest.

He licked and sucked a kiss to your shoulder and his fingertips drew a soft line up your side from your hip to your ribs. You squirmed at the delicate touch, letting out a startled squeak as you flinched. His amused laugh was muffled by his mouth pressing a kiss into your throat, as he shifted his shoulders over yours. And that bastard tickled your side again. You yelped, slapping his arm to
scold him when you realized that little adjustment of his shoulders and his weight over you left you at his mercy. You dug your fingers in under his arms, but he just laughed and pulled his elbows in tight to his sides, trapping your hands. Your scream of a laugh, telling him to stop, went ignored for a few long moments. He let up on his own accord and, when he relaxed and your hands were free, you smacked his arm again.

"Jerk!" you complained, but all he did was drop his forehead to your shoulder and keep right on laughing.

You pinched his arm and he picked his head up to give you a wounded look. "Be nice," he scolded.

"I was being nice," you argued. "We were having a moment and then you-"

"I didn't mean to," Chris said, through a boyish grin.

"Ha," you scoffed. "The first time, maybe."

"Okay," he conceded, his innocent grin turning to unapologetic smirk. "The first time, I swear, was an accident."

"Uh-huh," you pouted, fighting hard to keep a smile from pulling up the corner of your mouth when he pecked a kiss to the tip of your nose.

Chris' eyes ran over you face, admiringly, for a moment, before a thoughtful grin tugged back the corner of his mouth. "I love you," he said, tucking some stray hairs behind your ear.

"Oh, yeah?" you wondered, biting at your lip when you smiled.

He nodded. "Yeah."

"Nice," you winked, with a smug nod. Chris snorted and shook his head. "I love you, too," you assured him, stretching up to capture his lips with yours for an affectionate kiss.

A kiss that turned into another few minutes of lingering lip locks. When you finally pulled yourselves off of each other, it was with you both wearing contented smiles and a gentle swipe of Chris' thumb down your cheek. Make up sex really is the best.
Chapter 30

In the morning, you woke up slowly. Stretching under the sheets and twisting your wrists in the air, you were roused by the quiet sounds of Chris running water in the bathroom. A minute later, as you tiredly rubbed the sleep from your eyes, Chris opened the bathroom door and came back into the bedroom. You jumped, when the t-shirt in his hand whipped you in the ass.

"Son. of a. bitch!" you complained, covering a hand over your butt to protect yourself from any other further attacks.

You didn't have to worry though, because that laughing bastard was already pulling his shirt overhead and tugging it down to the waist of his jeans. Chris came over, bending down to kiss an insincere apology on your temple. "Mornin', babe," he smiled.

You smacked the back of your hand into his gut, as you rolled off your side, scowling at him. Chris let out an exaggerated 'oof' and clutched his stomach, as you said, "Ya bastard."

Chris put a knee down into the side of the bed, lowering himself to sprawl over you with a heavy sigh. "Grumpy," he called you, nestling his head to hang off your shoulder.

You managed to wiggle an arm free from underneath him and wrapped it around him to lay over his back. "You'd be grumpy too, if someone snapped you in the ass with a shirt first thing in the morning," you assured him. "What time is it, anyway?"

"A little bit before 8," he answered, turning his head to plant a lingering kiss on your lips. When he pulled back, he told you, "Josh'll be here in a little while to do some work. So, you should probably put some clothes on." His brow wagged up, a little playful but a tad stern, as he added, "No free shows."

You laughed, palming your hand over your eyes in embarrassment. "Like I run around here naked all the time," you scoffed.

"I wouldn't be complaining if you did," he mentioned, his teeth lightly scraping and nipping at your jaw before he pecked a kiss to replace the bite.

"With these ginormous windows everywhere?" you quipped, waving your hand toward the wall of glass at the end of the room. "Fat chance."

"Nobody sees in the back of the house," he promised, trailing kisses into the crook of your neck, while his hand fumbled blindly at the edge of the mattress, looking for a way under the covers.

Well, at least you hoped nobody saw into the back of the house. Because, after he said that, it occurred to you that the curtains had never once been drawn whenever you two had fooled around at his place. And the lights weren't always off at night when you did either. And don't forget the times you've changed clothes in there.

"I thought you said, Josh will be here soon," you reminded him, wiggling underneath him and yelping at his cool hand on your covers-warmed skin, when his fingers found their way to your waist.

Chris snickered at your reaction, indifferent to the small swat you gave his arm as punishment. "He will," he agreed, sucking a kiss onto your shoulder.
His hand slipped behind you to arch you away from the mattress when his arm rested under the small of your back. You pulled your other arm free and wrapped both around his shoulders, hugging him close to playfully lick and bite at his earlobe, while he kissed and nibbled at your neck. Chris let out a small, exhaling groan as your teeth dragged softly to tug on his ear and your fingernails scratched through the back of his hair. You tittered, pleased with the reaction you’d gotten from him. Chris leaned up, shifting his weight over to his elbow, smiling a kiss to your lips.

The intercom on the wall chimed and Chris snapped his head away to glare at it, complaining, "Ah, fahckin' hell. He's early."

Disappointed as you were, you couldn't help but snicker. Chris pushed himself up, climbing back off the bed. He half jogged over to the security panel on the wall and pressed the button to unlock the gate. He looked back over to you, shrugging, with a smile that begged your understanding and forgiveness.

Chris pointed at you, stopping with one foot out the bedroom door. "Breakfast?"

"Breakfast," you concurred, with a firm nod.

"Ten minutes," he offered, quirking up a questioning eyebrow.

You slid your feet out from under the covers, crossing your injured left over your right and pointing it out. "Twenty," you countered. "I need a quick shower."

"Fine. Twenty," he agreed. He headed down the hall, with Archie in tow. Chris called back to you. "Don't forget to put some clothes on."

"No free shows," you hollered back, laughing to yourself as you pushed yourself up out of bed to start your day.

As quick a shower as you could take later, and tastefully covered by a long sleeved tee and cutoffs, you were making your way down the hall. You followed the sound of voices around and into the kitchen. Chris was standing by the edge of the island, with his back to you, next to his assistant, Josh, perched on a stool.

"Good morning," Josh smiled, noticing you from the side of his eye and turning to see you.

Chris looked over his shoulder. "Ready for breakfast?"

"What's on the menu?" you asked, nodding you were hungry.

"Whatever the chef makes," Chris snorted, grabbing a tall cup of Starbucks off the island to take with him to the refrigerator.

"Sorry," Josh offered. "I'd have brought you something, if I knew-"

"That's okay," you casually waved him off. You were already smirking, waiting for Chris to turn back from the fridge, when you added, "Chris'll make me some coffee."

"He will?" Chris paused, slowly setting a carton of eggs on the counter as he looked at you, his expression asking if you really thought so.

You tucked your chin, to look up at him through your lashes. You gave him a small pout and shifted on your crutches, adding a soft and plaintive, "But...my foot."
Chris laughed at you, shaking his head as he went back to unpacking ingredients from the fridge. He pointed at you, with a half-gone loaf of bread in his hand and a warning finger your way. "You think that Danny Kaye shit's gonna work more than once," he said, "you're wrong."

You chuckled to yourself, heading for the kitchen door when you saw Archie wagging his tail patiently outside, hoping to come in, and Josh asked, "Danny Kaye?"

"From White Christmas," Chris explained. "Him and Bing Crosby are war buddies and fucking Kaye gets whatever he wants outta Bing by playing up some war injury he got saving his life." He pointed at you with a spatula, as he moved to the range top. "She thinks she's gonna guilt me into whatever she wants 'cause of her foot. But I'm on to you, sweetheart."

You stuck out your tongue, opening the door to let Archie in, who made a beeline to Josh, apparently startling him in the process. "Shi-" Josh caught himself, flinching when Archie's nose found his bare ankle. "A dog?"

Chris tipped to look around the side of the island at Archie. "Yes, Josh," he nodded, more than a bit condescendingly. "That is a dog. Good job."

"I'm sorry," you snickered, despite sending Chris a scolding smirk. "He's a sweetie, I promise."

"No problem," Josh said, lowering his hand for Archie to approve of. "Just didn't know he was here. Yours?"

"Mine," you told him. "I can put him back out, if you-"

"No," he assured you, turning to Chris. "I was just wondering if you got a new dog that we needed to worry about for the press tour."

"I don't know," Chris considered, scrunching up his nose and cocking his head as he looked to you. "What's he going to do while you're gone?"

You had Josh's interest, as well, as you carefully climbed up onto a stool at the island. "He's got a sitter I use when I'm doing location work," you said, smiling your thanks to Josh who reached out, without request, to help balance your crutches on the counter edge as you got comfortable. "So, I'll take him over there."

"I have a few different travel itineraries for you to look at, after breakfast," Josh mentioned to you, putting a hand down on a short stack of folders and mail beside him.

"Already?" you wondered, glancing at the papers under his palm.

"Told ya to just let me have him look at it," Chris smirked.

"Wow," you marveled. "Thanks."

"No trouble," Josh humbly accepted.

Chris scrambled up a large skillet of eggs, dropping in some peppers and onion he'd chopped, while a small pot of coffee brewed just for you. He added some toast to a plate for you and Josh declined anything, saying he'd eaten at home. While you and Chris ate, Josh went over some emailed business items for Chris and highlighted a couple of upcoming media obligations. You watched the meeting happen, sipping on your coffee and taking in another side of Chris you hadn't actually seen yet—responsible career man.
While Chris gathered up the breakfast dishes, Josh excused himself to get something from his car. You looked into your mug, debating when Chris held up the carafe of coffee your way in a silent offer for more. Holding out your cup, you smiled your thanks while he topped off your drink.

While Chris rinsed out the coffee pot, you noted, "I gotta admit, I'm impressed. Look at you. Acting like a grownup with a real job and shit."

"A real job?" Chris snorted, shaking his head.

"Yeah," you nodded. "Talking schedules, deciding which meetings to take. All you're missing is an office with your name on a fancy plaque on the door."

Chris chuckled. "It's over there," he pointed out, gesturing while he wiped his hands off on the dish towel from the oven door. "I skipped the nameplate, though. Figured with it being my house, people would know whose office it was."

"That's kinda hot," you winked.

Josh came back in, setting a box down on the coffee table behind you, as Chris came around the island with his Starbucks to sit on one of the couches. "What's this?" he asked, tapping the rising toe of his shoe on the box as he sat and crossed an ankle over his knee.

"Some sample stuff for you to look at for endorsement solicitations," Josh said, thumbing through the papers he brought and handing you a few pages. "Here's a few different flight options for you. If there's one you think will work, we can get it booked this morning."

"Sweet," you smiled, skimming over the pages.

You slid off your barstool, carefully scooting over to the couch, with your coffee and paperwork in one hand. While you settled in to the small couch beside Chris, Josh took a seat across from you to sort through his papers for a moment. Chris put down his coffee and pushed aside a flap on the top of the box to peer inside. His curiosity seemed to pique and he put his foot down to lean forward. Chris moved the box to the floor between his feet and started to rummage around. He picked up a jar of pomade and you plucked it out of his hand.

"Gimme that," you said, unscrewing the lid of the jar to take a sniff before inspecting the label. You lightly swept a fingertip over the wax and tested it between your finger and thumb. Wrinkling up your nose, recognizing the product now, you put the lid back on and handed it back. "Don't use that."

Chris looked between you and the jar, his brow wrinkling up in question. "Why not?"

"It's got good hold and photographs well," you explained, as Chris opened the jar to sniff for himself, "but it'll dry the shit out of your hair, if you don't wash it out completely. I could give you a list of a half-dozen better waxes and pomades that are twice as good for half the price. 42 bucks for that," you pointed at the jar Chris was eyeballing, "is not worth it."

"$42?" Chris frowned, turning the small jar to see around the labeling.

"Yeah," you confirmed, ticking your head back and your lips pulled disapprovingly to one side. "Besides, you wear that all day and start to sweat-" You paused, trying to think of a polite way to say it smells like ass to you and realizing you had Josh and Chris' undivided attention. "It, uh...Trust me, it does not smell good, after a long day in the sun."

Chris looked at the jar and then back to you. "How do you know that?"
"Worked on a Warner Brothers show that didn't make it," you shrugged. "One of the actors loved it and insisted I use it, probably because he thought being more expensive made it better. He didn't seem to notice or care what it did. It was not my favorite part of the job."

The guys snickered and Chris held out the jar to let it drop into the box with a loud thud. "Won't be wasting time with that," he decided.

"Huh. You really know your shit," Josh marveled.

You shrugged, a little self-conscious and humble. "Maybe a thing or two."

"From now on," Chris decided, his gaze fixed back on the items in the box again, "just send stuff like this to [y/n] first." He looked up and smiled at you. "Save me the trouble."

You went over your options for your trip to Asia and Europe, later that morning with Josh. You were still a bit reluctant about taking Chris' offer to pay for part of the trip, but you resolved to get over it. After all, it was a gift, right? Not charity or a handout. You couldn't help but snicker when you followed Josh into Chris' office to oversee the process while Josh worked the phone and computer to book your travel plans with you. Chris really did have an office in the house.

When it was all said and done, you felt a sense of satisfaction that it was all squared away- finally. You talked your way out of Chris buying your ticket to New York after the quick break you had in LA after the London stop. You would be with Frank in New York, so that trip was covered. You also felt a bit of nervousness, because, wow. This is happening. This is on credit cards and in confirmation emails and all over printed itineraries and- Holy shit. You're going on the Civil War press tour with Chris. Eep.

It's okay. It's weeks away. You have plenty of time to worry about what to wear, about being near such a large event, and freak out about all the eyes on Chris and everything he does- everything you'll be semi-near him doing. Plenty of time to flip the fuck out about sharing a hotel room with him and someone noticing and- God dammit. Calm the fuck down! Get ahold of yourself, woman. Weeks away! Weeks! Plenty of time.

Josh was gone before lunch, off to do some errands. He mentioned he'd have hard copies of your tickets and all of the information on the tour dates and events for you in the next couple of days and you marveled at his thoroughness. You didn't interact with him much when you were on set in Atlanta last year, aside from him appearing here and there to corral Chris or catch him up on some "business" related items. You couldn't remember if you actually had ever been introduced. It was a distinct possibility that you both only knew each other's names because Chris had said them at some point. But still, Josh was nice and clearly good at his job. You liked him.

A week at Chris' was... Well, it was kind of weird. Chris gave you a head's up for when to expect Josh. You were incredibly appreciative when he brought you a manilla envelope packed with all of your travel information by late Wednesday morning, as promised. But when you woke up to a small team of landscapers in the backyard? Yeah, that was a little surprising. Thank goodness this was a morning you had found your way back into your pajamas from the night before. The mattress beside you was still just barely warm, so you knew Chris hadn't been gone long.

Making your way through the house, your attention was drawn out the large windows to the man mowing the lawn, which led your eyes to Chris waiting outside the kitchen door for Archie. Archie
noticed you first, prancing in the open door to wag his tail and walk circles around you, apparently excited by the activities happening outside. Chris was a close second through the door, shutting it behind him and noticeably cutting the noise in the house. You had to smile at his mussed hair and wrinkled t-shirt over a pair of low-slung gym shorts.

"They wake you up?" Chris asked, pecking a kiss to your cheek as he went around the island to scoop out breakfast for Archie.

You shrugged. "Had to get up eventually anyway."

"Sorry about that," Chris chuckled, patting Archie on the side of his belly when your dog dove into his bowl of chow. "They're usually here Thursdays but..." He shrugged. "Forgot about the change this week."

"At least I had clothes on," you noted, cocking your head and raising a thoughtful brow. He laughed, getting to work on a pot of coffee, and you added, "No free shows."

"No free shows," he nodded, measuring out the grounds. "Hey, speaking of shows..."

"We're not segueing into strip clubs this early in the morning are we?" you teased.

Chris let out a full laugh and almost spilled a scoop of coffee, plainly caught off guard. "No," he shook his head, smiling. Chris turned on the coffee maker, looking over his shoulder at you with his brow knit down in curiosity. "Wait. Is that even on the table?"

You gave him a brief sideways look, before shaking your head. "Not this early in the morning."

"Damn," he swept his head once, with a disappointed click of his tongue. Chris turned around to lean against the counter and fold his arms. "No, I was going to say, next weekend, I've got an appearance to make at the Kid's Choice Awards"

"Oo, are you going to get slimed?" you wondered, with an eager smile as you perched yourself on a barstool.

"You seem a little too hopeful about that," he squinted an eye at you.

"Green could be a good color on you," you suggested, in your defense, waving out a hand toward him.

Chris shook his head at you, and went on. "No slime for me. I'm presenting the next trailer from Civil War."

"That's cool," you smiled, fangirling a little at the prospect of being teased a little more by Marvel. "What's in this trailer?"

He shrugged, with a slightly indifferent frown. "I don't know. They haven't told me." Chris straightened up of the counter to take a pair of mugs out of the cupboard. "But the night before, Scott and I are meeting some friends over at The Nice Guy for some drinks. Might do something after the show, too." He gestured your way as he opened the refrigerator for the bottle of creamer. "If you're feeling up to it, you wanna come?"

"You mean to The Nice Guy, right?" you double checked.

"Yeah," he shrugged, his brow pinching for a moment as if he had actually been clear with the invitation.
You thought it over for a moment and tipped your head. "Sure."

"You didn't want to come to the Awards, did you?" Chris asked.

"Noo," you said, confidently.

"It's just an appearance," he mentioned, almost sounding like a soft sell on the event. "I'm not there for the whole thing."

"Noo," you assured him, waving the idea away with a move of your hand in front of you.

"Well," he considered, "there's the party going on after the show, you'd already be there. Maybe find somewhere to go after that. A Marvel rep and my publicist will be at the show, so it wouldn't be weird to have another person there."

"Like a hairstylist?" you smirked, resting your chin in your upturned palm.

"Maybe someone like a hairstylist," he suggested, with a wink.

"Yeah," you half-winked. "Or, I could just meet you somewhere and avoid that whole thing with the cameras and the people."

"True," Chris nodded, pouring the freshly brewed coffee. "Just puttin' it out there."

"Ew. Here's a weird thought," you began. "Soo, Josh saw me here, with you, first thing in the morning..."

"Yeah," he followed along, turning to hand you a cup of coffee.

"So, your publicist," you went on.

"Megan," he chimed in, with a single nod, going back to the counter to pour himself a cup of Joe.

"Does she-"

"Know I have a girlfriend?" he interjected, before sweetening his coffee and nodding the answer to the question. "Yes, she knows."

"So," you continued, "if you had to make a guess of how many people know, how many would you say actually-"

"Everyone who needs to."

"That's vague," you muttered into your mug, finally beginning to realize the scope of people aware of your relationship with Chris was possibly larger than you had been thinking.

"Well," he said, wagging up his brow in thought, "Josh and Megan, the guys on the movie, my family and some friends..." He tipped his cup to the lawnmower going by outside. "The landscapers."

Trying to do the math in your head didn't leave room to be amused by his little joke, because, let's see- the Russos, Sebastian, Mackie, Frank and his wife. Don't forget Jeremy and Scarlett, and- shit, Hayley Atwell. Josh and Megan and maybe more of his "people"? Scott, Carly, probably the rest of the Evans family. Oh god- his mother? His friends? Who? How many? And, oh my god, yes, a group of random landscapers. That's at least...holy shit.
Apparently, your face had some shades of worry showing, because Chris sent you a warm, reassuring smile. "Only the people who need to know," he told you.

"You realize there's actually a lot of people who-"

"Nobody who'd sell us out or anything," he shook his head, confidently. "Honestly, if somebody were gonna say something, they'd have done it by now."

Your thumb jerked over your shoulder to the workers outside. "What about them?"

"It's not some kid from down the street with a mower," he chuckled. "They get paid a lot to take care of the yard. And they'd like to keep getting paid a lot. It's been the same company since I bought the place and nothing's ever hit a paper. I wouldn't worry about them."

"I'm being ridiculous, aren't I?" you asked, with a self-deprecating smile as you rested your temple against your upturned fist.

"Not at all," Chris disagreed. "I get it." He put down his mug and crossed his arms as he leaned forward onto the island across from you. "Look, Megan and a couple other people needed to know in case something came up with the press. Then there's some of my friends you already met, Seb and Mackie and the rest of the cast who saw us in Atlanta or at the comic con, my family. But they're all people who I'd trust not to say anything." He paused for a moment, before looking you in the eye. "Honestly, I don't worry about anybody that I know or that I've told."

"It's my friends you don't trust," you summarized, with an accepting nod.

Chris' head cocked, with a small shrug. "I don't know them like you do," he admitted.

"I really haven't told that many people," you confessed. "I mean, Karen and her husband know, but they'd never say anything. Some of the girls you met the night you and Scott came to The Viper Room. That's about it."

"It's because you're ashamed of me, isn't it?" he quipped, his mouth tugging to one side in a mischievous grin.

"Ashamed?" you parroted, with a smirk. "Honey, I bagged Captain America. I am anything but ashamed."

"Well, that's a relief," he exaggeratedly sighed, wagging up his brow.

"Don't worry," you winked. "You're pretty enough to be seen with me."

Chris barked out a laugh, dropping his head as he slid back from the counter to stand up straight again. "I don't think I've ever heard anyone say I was 'pretty'."

"Well, they should, because it's true," you insisted, trying to sound sincere, but losing out to your own laughter.

He nodded his acceptance of your assessment. "Thanks, babe." Chris took a drink of coffee, before turning for the fridge to scout for breakfast. "I don't mean to be insulting about your friends," he added. "I know nobody's said anything. I'm just saying, I want you to be comfortable about me talking to people about you. It's kind of a necessity, but I've got a real good group of people around me. I want you to be comfortable around them, too."

"I mean," you shrugged, "I like everybody I've met so far." Chris nodded as you continued. "I don't
think I'd say I'm really worried about anybody you or I know saying something. There's a couple people I could think of who'd probably be a little excited about it, so I haven't told them yet. I mean, we're friends but not BFFs that I feel like I'm hiding something from them."

"Hiding your boyfriend," Chris ominously whispered. "Your secret shame."


"I will, if you stop calling me 'pretty','" his face pinched unhappily, as he said the word and went back into the fridge.

"To your face," you muttered, ahead of a sip of coffee.

"I heard that," he warned, over his shoulder.
Chapter 31

The days with Chris flew by faster than you expected. It was kinda funny to you to be used to Josh coming and going. He stopped by almost every morning that week. Always with a pile of mail, some dry cleaning, or something else for Chris. He was predictable too; usually around 8, but never later than 9 if he had something to pick up first, usually with a Starbucks for Chris. On Friday he brought you a venti iced caramel macchiato. You felt more than a little awkward about the tiny gesture and thanked him profusely to compensate. After all, he's Chris' assistant and not yours. When Josh wasn't paying attention, you gave Chris a kiss on the cheek for obviously telling Josh about one of your favorite treats from the coffee shop.

Josh would stay for however long he needed to for business. You and Archie would hang out in the living room, while the men talked shop in the kitchen or his office, before Chris disappeared to the gym for an hour or so, longer if he picked up your mail. Occasionally, you'd hear a snippet of the schedule Chris had coming up. Between magazine photo shoots and interviews, promo filming, show appearances, and all kinds of other media items, you tried to mentally prepare yourself for less Chris in your future. With multiple events in the same day and travel for television appearances, you figured this week was the most you'd see of each other for awhile.

And that was okay. You'd been enjoying 24/7 Chris for about a week and a half. That should be enough to hold you over. You'll catch up again on the international press tour and then things should settle down after that. You knew this was coming. You can do this.

Saturday afternoon, Scott came over and you tolerated watching the Celtics game with them that night. You don't necessarily have anything against the NBA, or basketball in general, for that matter, but damn. When Boston falls by 17, after trailing in points for 3 out of 4 quarters, expect some manly heartache and more than a few disappointed outbursts about fouls and other "bullshit". Mental note: saying 'What do you expect? They're playing the Cavs.' will not make their hurt go away.

By Monday morning, you were itching to get to the doctor's office to have your stitches removed. Okay, it was a little weird to be that excited, but haven't you suffered enough? Seriously, no ocean, no baths, no swimming- which is especially disappointing when you're sitting there, staring at that gorgeous pool in Chris' backyard every god damned day. And all the sitting on your ass was enough to make you crazy. No work, no gym with Frank, no jogs with Archie, no beach.

This time, Chris drove you to your appointment. A feat you didn't let him be too proud of. After all, the appointment was at 11 o'clock. He had no excuse to not be able to make that one. It's not like there was some nationally broadcast, Hollywood hullabaloo to get all fancied up for and party about the night before. No, just some Sunday night Netflix and chill.

Unfortunately, you left the doctor's office still on your crutches. Sure, the stitches were removed, but, for god's sake, you'd been off of it for over a week and just had stitches taken out. And you found out that the sole of your foot was pretty tender from the whole of the ordeal. You gave walking a shot in front of the doctor and were less than thrilled with how that went. Yeah, you were definitely going to have to ease back into this whole walking thing. You had imagined things going back to the way they were pre-glass in your foot and your disappointment on the car ride to Chris' house didn't escape his notice.

"What'sa matter?" he asked, pulling up to a red light and looking over at you to wait for the answer while the car was stopped.

"Nothing," you shrugged. "I just thought, you know, it'd be better when the stitches came out. This
is-" You raised your brow high, pulling your lips to one side and staring down at your foot, at a loss for a good way to describe your annoyance and discomfort. "It's like a whole new, different kind of pain in the ass. This sucks."

"It'll get better," he promised, wrapping his hand over yours in your lap and giving it a confident squeeze.

"Eventually, right?" you tried to smile.

Before the light changed, Chris leaned over to kiss your cheek. "At least you'll live to find out," he quipped, "since Frank was gonna shoot you like a lame horse."

"You saw that, huh?" you laughed, as traffic moved along again.

Chris nodded, with a grin. "I did. He's a big softy, Frank."

"Ah, he's just kidding," you said.

"I know," Chris chuckled. "You're not missing out on anything with him, while you're laid up, are you?"

"No," you sighed, in relief. "Thank god. No, I'm really just screwing the salon. I mean I missed out on the con in Cleveland, but that was my loss more than anyone else's."

"How's that?" he wondered, throwing you a quick glance as he drove.

"It was Cleveland," you noted. "I would've been, like, four hours from home. My sister-in-law was going to meet me up there on Sunday and I was going to fly out from home Monday afternoon. It wouldn't have been much, but..."

"That sucks," he frowned at you, slowing to the next stop. "I'm sorry. I had no idea."

You shrugged. "Well, how many other times will work get me that close to home?" you mused. "Even one night there was worth a shot."

"Stick with Marvel," Chris reasoned, "and I bet the Russos find an angle to shoot in Cleveland again."

You laughed at the idea. "They probably would," you agreed. "But I think I'm done with Marvel."

"Why's that?" he asked, moving along when the light turned green.

"Seriously?" you chuckled, in minor disbelief. "I'm pretty sure Frank's stint with them is done. And without Frank to get me back into a contract, I highly doubt the studio's going to independently hire me while I'm dating you." Chris threw you a look. "I can hear it now, conflict of interests." Chris snorted, giving his head a small shake. "You said so yourself, when I told you about the offers from Frank, that you wouldn't be able to hire me on to any of your projects. Same difference."

"Okay," he considered, "maybe not." Chris took your hand again, as he drove, bouncing your hand in his on top of your leg a couple of times. "So, if we go back and film in Cleveland again, you'll just have to come visit me on location and you can drive home whenever you want."

"Ha!" you barked, thoroughly amused, but a little skeptical. "Deal."
Back at Chris' house, you got to work on your foot, gingerly putting it down in step with your crutches as you went inside, careful to only put a smidgen of your weight on it. It was by no means a pleasant feeling, but you were determined to get back to walking on two legs as soon as possible. You went into the backyard with Archie. While he rolled around in the grass, you rolled your foot around, doing the stretches the doctor had recommended to help loosen up the tendons and such.

You were in the middle of a group message with your parents and brother, updating them on your foot again, when Chris pressed a kiss into the top of your head from over the back of your chaise. You tilted your head back to see his sunglassed face smiling down at you from behind your lounger on the patio. You smiled back and he came around the side of your chair. He'd changed clothes and was clearly ready for the gym.

"Do you need anything, while I'm out?" he offered, looking around the yard to find Archie.

"No," you shook you're head. "Can't think of anything. Besides," you gestured to your foot, "gotta start getting back on my feet again. If I need anything, I can get it myself."

He tipped his head, raising a shoulder in a half-shrug. "Need me to stop by your place for anything?"

Oh, yeah. You don't live here. You chuckled, thinking about how accustomed you'd gotten to being at Chris' house. It's like when you go on vacation and you just start calling the hotel 'home'. You don't even realize that it's the new normal, until you realize your vacay is ending.

"I hadn't thought about it," you shyly admitted.

"Well, Archie's set for food for a bit," Chris noted, pulling his phone out of his pocket to check the time. "You want to give it a few more days and see how you're walking then?"

You nodded. "That sounds like a good idea."

Chris smiled and you thought it might be because you hadn't tried to talk your way out of accepting any more of his hospitality. To be honest, you didn't mind so much anymore. He still frowned at you when you would get up to get yourself something to drink or anything else he could do for you, but since the two of you had broken out of your slump, you didn't feel so awkward about it or intrusive.

"Well, listen," he said, before leaning down to give you a quick kiss. "I'm going to grab your keys anyway and pick up your mail. Call or shoot me a text if you change your mind, okay?"

"I will," you smiled, watching him head back toward the house. "Thanks, babe."

"No problem," Chris called behind him. "I'll be back in, like, in a couple hours."

You heard the kitchen door shut and you settled back into your chaise, with a contented smile. Yeah, you were definitely getting used to this.

By Wednesday, you felt a little more confident about your foot. You'd been forcing yourself to cut back on how much you favored it and had been ever so gently massaging your sole to help ward off a build up of scar tissue. The stretches from the doctor were beginning to slowly help, too. You finally got Scott's hoodie washed for him, figuring out where the laundry was that afternoon, while Chris was at the gym. By the time he got home, you were sitting with one leg tucked under you on the bed, folding your clean clothes from the laundry basket by your foot.

"[Y/n]?" he called, sounding like he was somewhere in the middle of the house.
"Bedroom," you hollered back, as Archie jumped up from his softly snoring nap to rush into the hallway to find Chris.

Chris came into the room a few moments later, with Archie following happily behind. He smiled at you, dropping a knee into the mattress beside you and hooking an arm around your waist to pull you down to lie with him. He wrapped you up, giving you a tight squeeze as he let out a manly groan and you laughed. Chris held you against his chest and kissed the top of your head.

"What are you doin'?” he asked.

"I was folding laundry," you stated the obvious, with a useless wave of your trapped arm at the rumpled clothes you were both laying on now.

"Folding laundry?” he questioned, taking an arm off you to hold up a handful of clothes for inspection, only to drop it into a small heap. "You're doin' a shit job of it."

"I was doing a good job of it, before you showed up," you assured him, swatting a hand back into his leg.

"Ow!” Chris whined, giving your side a tiny pinch in retaliation. "Be nice."

"You be nice," you insisted. "And that didn't hurt, ya big baby."

Chris pressed a noisy kiss down onto your head. "I'm nice," he grumbled, into your hair. "What are you doin' laundry for? I could've done it."

"Bored," you shrugged. "You weren't here, anyway. Besides, I keep forgetting I have Scott's hoodie."

"D'ya do my laundry?" Chris wondered.

"Ha!" you barked, turning your head to try and see him behind you.

"Soo, that a 'no'?” he chuckled.

You smiled at feeling the laughter in his chest against your back. "That is a 'no,'" you said, confidently. "You got two good feet. You can wash your own drawers."

"My own dr-" Chris started to complain, hugging you closer for a moment before he let you go and sat up. "But you'll wash Scott's hoodie," he almost pouted. "So much for not having a favorite Evans. That's cool." He gave you a light smack on the ass before you sat up, asking, "You want to go out to dinner with Seb?"

"Tonight?” you checked, going back to the laundry.

"Yeah," he said, pulling off his t-shirt. "He's still in town. We got a thing tomorrow with Buzzfeed."

"Thought I wasn't allowed to hang out with Sebastian, because we get into trouble," you sassed.

Chris held up a finger in correction, before turning to open a drawer on the dresser. "Not without adult supervision," he said. "I'll be there this time."

"So, who's the adult then?” you nonchalantly teased.

He threw his wadded up t-shirt at you and you knocked it away and down to the floor, when he said, "I am, smartass."
"Ew!" you squeaked. "That's gross."

"What?" he shrugged, pushing the drawer closed with the side of his leg. "It's just a t-shirt."

"It's your sweaty gym shirt," you complained, pointing at the shirt on the floor.

"I thought you liked me when I'm all sweaty," he smirked, coming over to stand with your knee between his and bending down to push his fists into the mattress on either side of your hips.

"Okay," you said, putting a finger into his chest to keep him back. "Fooling around and getting sweaty is completely different than you coming home smelling like a gym rat."

Chris broke into a smile, dropping his head as he laughed. "Fair enough," he said, pecking a kiss to your cheek before straightening up again. He gave your knee a pat. "Be ready to go in an hour?"

"Okay, but I'm kinda working on a limited wardrobe here," you reminded him. "We're not going anywhere too nice are we?"

"Jeans and t-shirts," he promised, walking into the bathroom.

You and Chris met up with Sebastian at the pub in Atwater you'd visited before. Tucked into one side of a booth, with beers and wings spread around the table, you were introduced to a pair of Sebastian's friends, Mike and Paul. They were a good couple of guys with a great, if not sometimes raunchy, sense of humor. It was a fun atmosphere, once Sebastian got over the initial disappointment of seeing you come into the restaurant still on crutches.

"Noo. What happened?" he whined, standing from the booth with open arms to greet you, looking you up and down. "I thought you were supposed to be done with this shit on Monday."

You frowned, despite the friendly kiss on your cheek and careful hands on your shoulders in a small hug of sorts. "Yeah, well, it's not as easy as I thought it'd be to walk again."

"She's getting better, though," Chris assured him, shaking a hand with Sebastian as they met for a quick hug and clap on the back. Chris reached across the table, while you scooted into the booth, shaking hands with Sebastian's friends, as Sebastian introduced you around.

Of course you had to rehash the epic tale of what happened to your foot for everyone. What a fun reason to be the center of attention, right? Sebastian chimed in that he helped with your recovery by keeping you company that first weekend. He boasted a little about finding Chris' shield in the closet and showed his friends the photo you guys took. Passing around Sebastian's phone, his buddies had a good laugh and so did you, until Mike swiped the screen and his face lit up.

"Now this is the one I would've sent," he decided, passing the phone back to Sebastian.

Sebastian snorted, crushing his eyes closed and dropping his head. "Man," he chuckled. "Forgot those were in there."

Chris' brow was peaking, with a curious smile curling up the corner of his mouth as he folded his arms onto the edge of the table. "What's that?"

Beside Sebastian, Paul turned the phone so he could see what Sebastian was snickering about. "Nice," he nodded.
When Sebastian twisted his wrist around so Chris could see the screen, he was almost wheezing, trying to keep his laughter under control. Chris shifted to lean a bit your way and see without the glare of the light over the table. You took a peek at the phone and felt your heart stop.

It had been awhile since you'd wished for death. It was nice to know the old feeling was still there. Your gut clenched and breath caught. *Ohhhh, son of a bitch.* You ducked into your shoulders at seeing the "romance novel cover" photo of you and Sebastian.

Chris turned his head to look at you slowly, his eyebrow cocked up in question. "Excuse me?" he said, plainly surprised and mayyybe a bit perturbed. It was hard to tell. "And just what exactly are you doing with Seb and my shield in this one?"

"Uhh," you floundered, raising your hands helplessly to your shoulders as you winced further. "Romance novel cover?"

Sebastian and his friends were loving it. A vague, but thoroughly disbelieving, smirk came to Chris' gaped mouth when he glanced at Sebastian and then back to you. With a small shake of his head, he unfolded one of his hands from its place on the table to sweep it at the phone, an invitation to explain.

"What the hell," he said.

"Oh, stop busting her chops," Sebastian told him, wrinkling up his nose and scoffing, as he showed Chris the final picture. "It was all in good fun."

"That's not helping," you told Sebastian, palming your hand over his to push his phone down and the screen to the table.

"You didn't show me the other pictures," Chris pointed out, still not coming across as completely amused as everyone on the other side of the table was. "Are there any more?"

"You didn't ask," you shrugged, before taking a long drink to distract yourself from his judging gaze.

"You didn't tell me," he noted.

"I didn't?" you deflected, not at all convincingly.

"Busted," Paul declared, shaking his head disapprovingly.

"It was his idea," you reminded everyone, pointing over at Sebastian, who, according to his red and laughing face, was already admitting fault.

"It was," Sebastian confessed, trying to stop laughing and putting away his phone. "I mean, come on. I had to do something." He gestured out toward Chris. "I mean the damn thing was just sitting there."

"The shield or [y/n]?" Mike snickered into his beer.

"Both, actually," Sebastian admitted, with a thoughtful shrug.

You dropped your head into your hand, giving Sebastian a no-look thumbs up. "Thanks, Seb."

"That's not what I meant," he frowned, reaching a hand over the table to pat your down turned head.

You looked up, when you heard Chris say, "Hey, what'd I say about touching [y/n]?"
"Not too," Sebastian sulked, sounding like a scolded child repeating the rules to a disappointed parent, and settled back into the booth.

You were relieved to see the playfulness in Chris' smirk. "That's right," Chris smugly said, pointing a finger at Sebastian, as he came off of his lean on the table to rest his arm behind your shoulders.

"You gotta admit, though," Sebastian insisted, tipping his glass for emphasis, "those were some good pictures."

Everyone laughed and, thankfully, Sebastian changed the subject. "[Y/n], if your foot's still fucked up, you're still going on the press tour, right?"

"Not if he dumps her for the shit you pulled," Paul smirked, making the table giggle again.

"It's his fault for leaving his girl at home," Sebastian explained. "And what the hell is Captain America thinking, leaving his shield in the hall closet like that?"

Chris cocked his head and pointed at Sebastian again. "That he used to be able to trust Bucky," Chris fired back.

"Steve could never trust Bucky with a pretty girl," Sebastian winked at you.

"Did you guys just give away the plot for Civil War?" Paul joked.

Sebastian's expression turned serious, as he pointed a stern finger at his friend. "Don't tell anyone we told you, but yes."

Your little group shared another good laugh and Chris' arm pulled back from your shoulders to rest his hand on your leg beneath the table. You flashed him an apologetic smile and he tutted softly, giving you a small shake of his head with a crooked grin. Sebastian started up about the Asia trip again, telling you about his last trip to Beijing last fall for The Martian pass tour and about this great karaoke bar he and his friends found.

After dinner, you all parted ways in the parking lot. On the ride home with Chris, he reaffirmed his earlier decision about you hanging out with Sebastian, shaking his head as he drove, telling you, "God, you two on the press tour are gonna be the end of me."

"What?" you checked.

Was he really, actually upset about the rest of the photos with Sebastian? *Come on.*

"Are you kidding me?" Chris threw back, taking a couple quick glances over to you. "You're kidding, right?"

"No," you laughed. "Come on." You lolled your head over to watch him as he drove. "It was funny."

"You guys are alone, for one night," he said, pulling his index finger back from the steering wheel to hold up for emphasis, "and you're playing with the shield and foolin' around, while you're on crutches, practically making out with each other..."

"Oh, stop," you groaned, waving a hand through the air. "Nobody made out with anybody. There's nothing worse there than what the fangirls ask for in the photo ops you guys do. I'm allowed to have a laugh while you're out partying it up at some awards show, ya know."
"Nobody's got their face half a' inch from somebody's lips, though," Chris assured you.

You balked, twisting in your seat to give him a better view of your 'oh, really?' face, as you told him, "I have seen fan pics of you two idiots kissing cheeks and proposing to girls. Hell, I saw it in New Orleans. And you're really gonna sit there and judge me for a funny picture with, like, the world's sweetest cinnamon roll, Sebastian Stan? Is it because I didn't pay for the photo op?"

Chris gave you a sideways look. "Okay," he grumbled. "You made your point."

"Damn right, I did," you nodded. "You don't see me having a fit over your photo ops."

"I said, you made your point," he repeated, settling his eyes on you at a traffic light.

"God, you're so jealous, sometimes," you mumbled, squaring yourself back into your seat.

"Sorry," he began, pulling off from the light, "but you-"

"Don't put a 'but' on the end of an apology," you said. "It voids the apology all together, when you add caveats."

"I'm allowed to be jealous," he quietly insisted, with a bob of his head to show his conviction. "But it's not about that. You don't think about what that stuff'll do. What happens if somebody gets ahold of shit like that."

"Who would possibly-"

"Seriously?" Chris threw another pair of disbelieving glances your way. "Anybody. And they'll make a shit ton 'a money off of it. All they gotta do is crop that down and they're writing stories about Seb cheating on his girl or about you and me. You gotta be careful now that we're dating, think about things before you do them."

Well, crap. He had a point there. You hadn't stopped to consider what Margarita's thoughts would be about the pictures with her boyfriend and you had thought Chris would see it for the harmless fun it was meant to be. You supposed Margarita would be okay with it and see the joke, if Sebastian was okay with it in the first place. But now you considered how easily photos are manipulated to tell lies, slander, and sell stories and about the trouble they could cause if, say, someone like Margarita didn't have a sense of humor.

"I didn't mean for-"

"I know you didn't," Chris conceded and sighed. "But once people figure us out, it's not about you just having fun anymore. People are gonna pick everything apart. They're gonna exaggerate and make things up. You can't give them anything to work with. Believe me, they don't need your help."

"Sorry," you mumbled, realizing it wasn't so much a jealous scolding as it was Chris showing some of his worries about your relationship going public.

"Don't pout," Chris sighed, reaching a hand over to hold yours. "If I hurt your feelings, I didn't mean it to come out that way. I just- I don't want you to have to go through some of the shit other people go through."

"I know," you shrugged. "I wasn't thinking about it like that. We just thought it'd be fun."

"I want you to have fun," he told you, earnestly. "I know you and Seb are getting to be friends, and that's good. Really, I'm happy you get along with everybody."
"No," you nodded. "I get it."
You spent the better part of Thursday afternoon watching Chris' question and answer event at Buzzfeed. It was a beautiful day and, after awhile, you changed into your bathing suit and finished the rest of the Q & A with your toes in the pool and Archie wondering around the yard. With your feet dangling in the water, you laid on the patio with a towel beneath you and iPad propped up on your stomach to check out the end of the online promoting. You didn't send in a question, but your phone was on hand to send the occasional screen grab or message to Chris and Sebastian with a joke or two.

You hadn't done too much work on large studio productions yet much beyond what little you've seen so far of Chris and Frank's movies. You were kind of blown away by the variety of marketing and promos Marvel was putting into Civil War. The Buzzfeed event was thoroughly amusing and got you a little excited for what else was coming up in the schedule.

When Chris came home, you were still soaking in the sun. Archie met him at the door and you smiled up from the ground while your fingertips danced over the water after you'd flipped over to your belly, listening to music on your phone. Chris dropped into one of the loungers nearby and leaned over his knees to tussle Archie's head and ears. You talked for a bit about his day with his cast mates before he helped you to your feet so you could get a shower and get ready to go for the night.

You went on a quick adventure with Chris, needing to go by your apartment for a slight wardrobe change. You were meeting people for dinner before drinks and didn't exactly have anything nice enough to wear at Chris' place. You let him carry you upstairs again, just to hurry the night along. But after you changed into something a bit more fetching than the t-shirts and shorts or yoga pants you'd been bumming around in this whole time at Chris', you stubbornly insisted on going down the stairs on your own. You were down to using one crutch for support, determined as ever to get over the discomfort in your foot. Now that you could put your toes or heel down to help bear some of your weight, you were pretty confident with taking it a step at a time. Sure, it took a little longer than it used to, but, by God, you did it yourself and that felt good.

Scott picked you and Chris up, from Chris' place, and drove to meet Josh and a few of their other friends for dinner. The meal was good. The company was great. But when you all moved on to The Nice Guy for some cocktails, there was a small line at the door and a group of photographers on the sidewalk. Chris groaned his quiet disappointment as you turned into the lot.

"Are you fahckin' kidding me?" Chris complained, looking over his shoulder at the paparazzi waiting for anything to walk by them. "Fahckin' vultures are always here."

"Hey, no problem," Scott said, optimistically. "We'll all just go in separately."

"How's [y/n] supposed to get in?" Chris asked, checking the view in the mirror on his side of the car.

"One of us'll just tell the doorman she's with us," he shrugged. "We'll all catch up inside."

"Fine," Chris grumbled, popping the handle to open his door and plainly aggravated. "You gonna be alright?" he asked you, as you scooted out of the car.

"Fine," you smiled.

In the parking lot, your little group re-assembled. Scott filled everyone in on the plan as you made your way to the entrance of the bar. Josh took your hand, taking you along with him as you walked
ahead to separate him and one of the other guys from Chris and the rest of the group. You were waved in, after a short exchange leaned into the ear of the guy minding the door. You were surprised how easily that worked and thanked Josh for the assist, when he let go of your hand inside the door. You waited a minute, with your pair of escorts at your side, for Chris and the rest of the party to get in. Once they were all inside, a hostess showed you to a private seating area.

It took a cocktail to help you forget the nervousness that had kicked up in your gut during your little parade across the parking lot. It was the first time being in public, with anybody of any noteworthiness, so close to paparazzi like that. Everyone was relaxed again and having a good time. Despite you sitting next to Chris and his leg touching yours or his hand resting on your thigh, the running joke became who was going to be your "boyfriend" on the way out the door. Chris and Scott were too high profile, so, after a few hours of good times, when it was last call, Josh stepped up to see you out.

As you, your pseudo-boyfriend, and a couple of the guys made it out with little notice, you waited by the cars. After a few minutes, your attention was drawn back to the lightning bright flashes of the cameras behind you. You watched Chris and the rest of his friends slowly edge past the crowding photographers. Chris and Scott were pretty well hounded. This wasn't looking good, and anxious butterflies fluttered in your stomach, as the photogs continued to shadow Chris and the others into the lot. Josh tugged on your elbow, telling you to 'come on', with an annoyed sigh, and opening the door of one of Chris' friend's car for you to get in. Before the door was even shut, Josh was messaging Chris to say that they were going to take you home.

The guys made enough jokes and had enough stories for the ride home that you didn't mind that you hardly knew them at all. Instead of kicking you out at the curb to wait for Chris to get home, Josh used his copy of the key and alarm codes to get you inside. You had been sure to thank everyone for the ride and company, adding an extra thank you for Josh letting you in. What a night.

You let Archie out, leaving the back door open for him to come in when he was done. You went to the bedroom to change. In your pajamas, you settled into the corner of the couch to wait for Chris. Not long after, Archie came in to join you, lying along the couch while you poked around on iTunes and Twitter for a distraction. It was about a half hour after you'd sat down that Chris finally came in the door. He gave the dog's head a pat on his way through the living room. Chris dropped into the couch, face first to rest his head in your lap and to drop an arm off the side of the couch to pet Archie when he took his place by your feet again.

Chris made a tired apology when you lovingly ran your fingers through the side of his hair. "I'm sorry about all that."

"It's okay," you smiled, although you didn't think he could see it, the way his head was turned from you. But, at least, he'd hear it in the way you said it. Still combing your hand through his hair, you added, "Wasn't your fault."

"Scott said to tell you 'good night'," Chris told you, picking his hand up from Archie's side to lay his hand over your knee. "He's sorry he missed you."

"Me too," you agreed, with a shrug. What could you do? It wasn't his fault either.

"Sorry you had to catch a ride wi-"

"Noo," you insisted. "Don't apologize. It's fine. Josh, obviously, got me inside and the guys were all super nice about the whole thing. Guess it's not the first time."

"Actually," Chris groaned, rolling over to lay on his back and blinking into the lights on the ceiling,
"it is."

"Really?" you wondered, brow creasing in curiosity as you switched hands to keep running your fingers back through his hair, now that he'd moved.

"Yeah," he shrugged, lacing his fingers together over his stomach and adjusting his feet to prop up on the arm of the couch. His eyes tipped back to see you, when he explained, "Everybody else, the paparazzi's already known before they saw us out together."

The topic seemed a bit awkward, the way he broke off his gaze from you. You could admit, talking, even in the vaguest sense, about Chris and his former girlfriends was a bit weird for you too. Especially because all his former girlfriends you were aware of were all gorgeous supermodel-y actress types. A far cry from your humble pedigree.

"Well," you said, shaking it off, "Josh and your friends really came through then."

"Yeah," Chris agreed, with a small nod. "But still, you should've come home with us. I mean, you barely know them."

"Okay, yeah," you admitted. "Maybe it wasn't an ideal situation, but nothing makes friends faster than being involved in a getaway drive, right?" Chris finally cracked a grin, snorting and shaking his head just enough to not derail your absentminded playing with his hair. "Besides, I kinda feel like I know Josh a little and the other guys seem nice. I didn't mind. At least no one saw us together."

"At least that," he sighed. Chris raised a hand to reach up behind your neck, pulling you down for a quick kiss. "But still, sorry about all the bullshit.

For once, you beat Chris out of bed. Archie gladly came along with you out of the bedroom, when you waved a hand for him to follow you. You let him outside and went to work on making a pot of coffee. While your dog wasn't around to be under foot, you scooted around the kitchen without your crutch, walking awkwardly on your toe here and heel there, trying to get back to comfortably flattening out your foot again. It wasn't as bad as it was yesterday, but maybe a couple ibuprofen wouldn't hurt after you do your morning stretches and massage of your foot.

You fed Archie. Looking for what to feed yourself, you decided it was your turn to make breakfast for Chris. After all, you couldn't remember the last time you had. It had been more than a little while, what with your foot and that whole bitterness about Geneva. Now that you were mostly mobile, you figured it was your turn to contribute. You managed to find the cookware you needed, without too much of a clatter, and found the fixings for some loaded up omelettes and bacon. The smell of sizzling bacon appeared to have roused Chris from his slumber.

Coming into the kitchen, he was scratching back and forth at his head when he tiredly smiled, "Mm, bacon."

"Good morning, sleepy head," you smiled back, as he set his hand in the small of your back and pecked a kiss to your cheek.

"Smells good," he noted, resting his chin on your shoulder.

"Should be done in a couple minutes," you told him. Motioning behind you, you added, "There's coffee, if you want some."

His brow rose and he inhaled deeply. "Yes," he emphatically nodded, picking up his chin and
turning for the other counter. His fingertips scratched softly at you back, wandering and disappearing as he moved away, saying, "Need coffee."

While Chris poured out the elixir of life for you both, you gave the first omelette a final flip and slid it onto a plate. Stacking up some bacon, you set it aside for Chris and he traded you a cup of coffee, sweetened and lightly creamed. He took his plate around the island to sit on the barstool in front of you, while you poured some eggs into the skillet and sprinkled in your fillers. Chris cut off a bite of his omelette and hummed his approval with a bob of his head as he chewed. You smiled, proud of yourself, even though it was just eggs and bacon.

You snacked on a piece of bacon, while you waited on the egg to cook, and struck up a conversation. "So when do you leave for the show tonight?"

Chris shrugged, as he swallowed a sip of coffee. "4 o'clock, I think," he said. "You need to go by your place for something to wear tonight?"

"For tonight?" You blinked, confused, as you turned over your omelette.

"Kid's Choice Awards. Teaser trailer," he reminded you. "The after party. After after party. Did you change your mind about going?"

Hold up. Did you actually say you were going? Definitely not to this show. And the after party would be just like the show, but without the fan audience. There would still be press and paparazzi. The near miss with the shutterbugs last night left you with a sour taste in your mouth.

"Uhh," you winced. "Yeah, I don't think so. I think I'd just rather head home with Archie. It's about time."

Chris put his fork down, his brow creasing as he finished chewing his breakfast. "Like, 'go home' go home?" he asked.

You nodded, sliding your omelette out of the skillet and onto your plate. "Yeah," you agreed, paying more attention to arranging the food on your plate and making your way around the island to take a seat than to the slightly confused, and maybe a little unhappy, look on his face.

"I thought you were gonna stick around till you could walk," he said, picking up and gesturing with his fork your way.

"Well, if I wait till I can walk," you shrugged, "we'd probably be here another week or two."

Chris shrugged, seeming unopposed to the idea. "You can stay as long as you want."

"I miss home," you admitted, cutting a few bites loose from your omelette. "You know, all my clothes are there, stupid trips just to pick up the mail. I miss driving myself around."

"You can borrow the Lexus," he suggested, jutting his chin toward the garage. "Or the Audi. Whatever's in there, if I'm gone."

"That is-" You paused to snicker and take a small bite of food. "That's very trusting of you." Chris snuffled a laugh as he ate, his head bobbing with his amusement of your shy smile. "But it's not the same," you elaborated. "I miss my Jeep. I miss the top down." He nodded his understanding with a one-shouldered shrug. "Besides, I have to get back to the salon and Frank. I could probably start back on Monday. If I stay here on my ass any longer, I may never get back to work."

"Are you sure you can handle Archie and stuff?" Chris worried.
"Everyday it gets a little better," you nodded. "We'll be fine."

"What about coming out tonight?" he reminded you. "You want to meet me or me come get you?"

You shook your head. "No. I think I'm gonna stay in tonight, get settled in again back home."

Chris frowned, ahead of a sip of coffee. "Are you sure? It'll be fun. Downey's gonna be there."

"I'm sure it would be," you agreed, ducking your head as you poked your fork into your eggs. "I'm just not really into the whole...big event thing...with people and cameras and stuff. Last night was as close as I want to get to that for awhile."

Chris set down his mug again, his fingers steepled over the top of the cup, while he watched you eat for a moment. "Nobody got a picture of us together," he mentioned. "No one would be looking for it and there'll be so many other people around, they wouldn't notice."

"I'm just not ready for that," you shook your head. "I mean, I already stick out like a sore thumb on crutches, it would be-" You sighed. "I just don't feel comfortable."

"That's okay," Chris gently assured you, rubbing a hand comfortingly across your shoulders. "I understand."

Chris helped you gather up your things. While you folded clothes back into your suitcase, Chris collected your things from the bathroom. When he was finished, he handed you your toiletries case to tuck into your suitcase and went to pack up Archie. He drove you home, going up ahead of you to take up your things, while you negotiated the stairs on your own. You insisted on it. After all, you have to do this now that you came back to your apartment. Better start getting used to it.

In your humble abode, you dropped the tote bag off your shoulder onto the dining table as Chris was leaving the kitchen, saying, "Well, Archie's all set. Need me to do anything for you?"

You shook your head, with an appreciative smile. "I can manage," you assured him.

"Alright," he sighed. "I've gotta go then. I've got to get up to Burbank by 4:30." Chris stepped over to where you stood by the table, snaking his arms around your waist. "Call me, if you change your mind," he told you, pressing a kiss into the curve of your neck.

"Okay," you agreed, even though you knew there wasn't a chance you would.

You two shared a sweet, lingering kiss goodbye that ended with another quick kiss on your forehead and a grab of your ass. "Call me, if you need something, okay?"

Still blushing a little from the affectionate grope, you nodded. "I will."

Chris stopped, halfway out the door, and pointed back into the apartment at Archie. "Take care of our girl," he instructed, with a quirked eyebrow and look through his brow that said he meant business. Archie cocked his head and perked up his ears for being addressed, but didn't seem to make any promises. Chris smiled, giving you a small wave as he left. "Have a good night, babe. Love ya."

"Have fun. Love you, too," you said after him, going to lock the door behind him.
On your lazy Sunday morning, you were woken up by the chime of your phone beside the bed. You inched up to rest against the headboard and see what the noise was about. You smiled, seeing a text message from Chris waiting for you.

**Flip Cup Hero:** I think I've been robbed.

**Flip Cup Hero:** There used to be a dog on the bed and girl here that made killer omelettes

You laughed out loud, shaking your head as your cheeks warmed a little.

**You:** Call the cops! That sounds awful:(

**Flip Cup Hero:** It was a little disappointing.

**Awww!**

**Flip Cup Hero:** How do you feel this morning?

**You:** Just waking up but feel okay so far. Thanks for asking;)

**You:** How was the show?

**Flip Cup Hero:** Good. The kids seemed to enjoy it

**You:** Did you enjoy it?

**Flip Cup Hero:** Lol yeah. Did you watch?

**You:** I did. Did you keep Thumb Cap?

**Flip Cup Hero:** I did. I think I left him in the cup holder in the car

**You:** That's not very respectful to Thumb Cap

**Flip Cup Hero:** I'm sure he's fine

**You:** I liked the trailer though!! Can't wait to see the final cut!

**Flip Cup Hero:** Looked good didn't it?

**Flip Cup Hero:** Miss you guys

Eep! Awww!

**You:** Me too. I'm sure Archie does too

It was true. Sure, you can't beat the comfort of sleeping in your own bed after any time away, but you had started to get accustomed to Chris' bed and seeing him each morning and practically all day. You figured Archie, at least, missed the yard.

**Flip Cup Hero:** He's on the bed, isn't he?

You looked at the black ball of fuzz curled up beside your feet.

**You:** No
Flip Cup Hero: Send me a picture

Shit. Busted.

You: Can't. Low battery

Flip Cup Hero: Liar

You barked out a laugh. Climbing out from under the covers, you crawled head first down to the end of the bed. Archie unfolded himself enough to stretch his nose over the mattress to reach just shy of your cheek. You fixed on a goofy smile and snapped a selfie of you and your incorrigible dog to send to Chris. Reviewing the pic while you waited for the message to send, you showed it to Archie. For first thing in the morning, you both were pretty fresh faced and adorable together.

Flip Cup Hero: That's what I thought

Flip Cup Hero: Lookin good this morning;)

You: Thx

You felt the soft heat pass through your cheeks and bit you lip with a smile. He's just so damned cute.

Flip Cup Hero: Off to the gym. Have a good morning. I'll talk to you later

You: Get swol! <(-_-)> 

Flip Cup Hero: Lmao

You smiled as you rolled out of bed, proud of yourself for amusing him. Archie climbed off the bed to follow you into the kitchen for his breakfast. While Archie crunched on his kibble, you went to the bathroom to start your day. You grabbed your toiletries bag off the back of the toilet tank to start unpacking. Rearranging makeup, deodorant, hair ties, and other miscellaneous girliness, you were missing something. You double checked the pockets of your bag. Yep. Gone.

You had your toothbrush cover, but not the toothbrush. With your hands on your hips, you took a confused look over the bathroom counter and the medicine cabinet, just in case you were overlooking something. Nope. Still not there. You went back to your room, grabbing your phone and opening the message with Chris.

You: I think I've been robbed.

Flip Cup Hero: What?

You: Can't find my toothbrush. Did you forget it in the bathroom?

Flip Cup Hero: Nope

You: Well shit. I lost my toothbrush:(

Flip Cup Hero: Your toothbrush is here

You: Yay! You found it! My hero! No help to me now but I think I have a spare. Thanks for checking:)
Flip Cup Hero: Didn't check. Didn't forget either

Huh?

You: ???

Flip Cup Hero: Didn't pack it

You: Thief >:(

Flip Cup Hero: Hostage taker;) Had to make sure you'd come back

Oh, for god's sake, that- ...That is actually kind of adorable. What a dork!

You: Ah you got me. The only toothbrush in the world. Now I'll have to come back

Flip Cup Hero: My plan all along

You: Well played, sir

Flip Cup Hero: Have to get in the car now or I'm late. Talk to you later

You: Bye:)
promotion as well.

Chris' own calendar was getting full in anticipation of the Civil War premier and press tour. There was a short list of 3 or 4 magazines he had interviews and photoshoots scheduled for and it was possible you were forgetting one. You completely understood why Chris mentioned Josh so frequently lately. God knows you'd need someone reminding you about your obligations if you were as in demand as your boyfriend was. With as busy as things for work were getting and Chris still keeping up with you and his friends, you weren't all that surprised when you answered a 'good morning' phone call from Chris and heard the rasp of tiredness in his voice.

"Aw," you pouted, only needing to hear his short hello to know something wasn't right. "What's wrong? You sound beat."

"I am," he admitted. "Didn't sleep good last night. How are you?"

"Fine," you answered hurriedly, rushing to get the conversation back on him. "Why didn't you sleep well?"

Chris groaned into the phone. "Fahck. I don't know. I don't feel good."

"Are you sick?" you worried, aware of how much frowning you were doing.

"I guess so," he grumbled.

"Well, what doesn't feel good?" You shook your head at yourself, palming your hand to your forehead for how much you sounded like your mother just then.

"I don't know," he complained. "I just- My head hurts, everything aches, an' I'm fucking tired. I'm sweating my balls off here."

"You probably have a fever," you diagnosed. "Did you check your temperature?"

"No."

"Did you take anything?"

"No."

"Well, how the hell do you except to feel better if you're not doing anything to feel better?" you asked.

*Oh, Jesus Christ.* You do sound like your mother.

"I don't know," Chris whined.

"Do you want me to bring you some soup?" you giggled, despite being dead serious that you would if he asked. You were off today. It could happen.

"No," he groaned. "I don't have time. I gotta get a shower and head over to this place in Hollywood for an interview."

"Can you reschedule or phone it in?" you suggested.

"Can't," he told you. "It's a shoot, too. I don't know when I'd have time to re-schedule. And I've got a meeting with Sony after that. ...Fahck. I gotta get up."
Aww. You felt so bad for him. He sounded miserable just thinking about going to his interview.

"Is there anything I can do?" you offered. "You want me to come over later, make you dinner or bring something? What time are you done?"

His voice was muffled, like his cheek was in a pillow or something, when he said, "Wish you were here now."

Gah! Right in the feels!

"Do you want me to drive you?" you asked.

"No," he scoffed.

You looked at your watch. "When does the shoot start?"

"Gotta be there by 11:30," Chris advised, still sounding like he was in bed.

You were already looking around your room for a pair of shoes. "Get up and get a shower," you instructed. "I'll get you a coffee and be there in about 45 minutes."

"Don't do that," he plaintively insisted.

"It's 9:38," you informed him, stepping into your Skechers and looking yourself over in the dresser mirror across the room. "Quit acting like a baby and get a shower."

"Are you fahckin' kiddin' me right now?" Chris laughed, weakly. "You can't go with me. It'll be like three or four hours and then I've got my meeting. What, are you gonna sit in the car and wait for me?"

"If I have to," you decided.

"Dude, who's that crazy redhead in the car outside?" he joked. "That's what they're gonna say and then they're gonna call the cops."

"Tell 'em it's your hairstylist," you reasoned. "Who cares, but at least let me drive you. You sound like shit."

"Thanks," Chris snorted. There was a pause while you rummaged around the bottom of your purse, trying to find your keys and wondering if they were in the pocket of your shorts from last night. "You really going to do my hair for this?"

You stopped, straightening up like a prairie dog to look around for your keys. "Wha-? I mean, I can," you shrugged. "If you want me to. Even if you don't, I'm still coming over...if I can find my fucking- Ah-ha!" You found your keys under the mail on the table. "Keys. Got 'em. You want me to do your hair?"

"Sure," he chuckled.

You were already on your way to grab your work tote from the hook on the back of your bedroom door before he decided. "Okay," you agreed, shouldering your bag and heading for the door. "45 minutes. Be ready."

You could practically hear the eye roll in his "Yes, ma'am" and it made you laugh when you hung up the phone on your way out the door.
You snaked the streets, maybe taking a yellow light or two that you probably should have stopped for. But the wait at Starbucks was a bit longer than you hoped and you were cutting it close. You pulled up in front of Chris' house, balancing your coffee on top of his and using your chin to hold them down together. The paper bags of warm breakfast sandwiches and scones in your other hand crinkled when you pressed the call button on his gate and you pushed the Starbucks logo in front of the camera lense to fill the frame. The lock clicked open a few moments later and you bumped the gate open with your hip.

When Chris opened the front door to greet you, you held up a cup of coffee in each hand in front of you, proudly telling him, "Honey, I made breakfast."

His decidedly tired, and almost blank, expression was replaced by a weak smile and dishearteningly quiet laugh as he waved you in. There was no kiss at the door, like there usually was, not even at your cheek. He trudged behind you into the kitchen. You dropped your keys out of your palm and set down your coffee and the sandwiches. You handed Chris his drink, as he eased half onto a barstool and smiled his thanks.

His hair was still damp and you asked, "Did a shower help?"

Chris nodded, while he let a sip of coffee sit on his tongue a moment. "Little bit."

You unfolded the first of your paper to-go bags, sliding the sandwiches out onto the counter. "Reduced fat turkey bacon," you offered, peeking inside the wrappers, "or sausage, cheddar, and egg?" He reached out a hand for the one with sausage and you handed it over, adding, "And then blueberry, cranberry orange, or one of each?"

"Blueberry," he said, after quick consideration and another drink of coffee.

You were already taking down a pair of small plates. Back at the island, you opened the next bag of food and took out a blueberry scone to put on a dish for Chris. You set it down in front of him, while his hands were occupied by his sandwich. You picked out one of the cranberry and orange ones for yourself, rolling the top of the bag down again and setting it aside for later.

"They were a little picked over in the bakery," you apologized. "But there's another one of each if you're still hungry."

"Thanks," Chris said. "You didn't have to do all that."

While Chris drank his coffee, you picked off a little bite of your scone. "Did you eat anything this morning?" you asked, popping a piece of scone in your mouth. He shook his head and you shrugged. "Well, then someone had to feed you. God. Look at you," you complained, gesturing a hand out at him. "You're just wasting away. Ya look awful."

"Thanks," he snorted. "You sure know how to make a guy feel better."

You snickered around the bite of sandwich you'd just taken, walking over to hug your arms around his neck. Chris hooked his arm around your waist, pulling you against his side for a squeeze, as you assured him, "I've got a great bedside manner."

"I'll bet you do," he chuckled, letting you go when you straightened up and pecked a kiss to his cheek before going back to your breakfast on the other side of the island. "No crutches today?"
You smiled proudly. "Not today," you declared.

"Is it back to normal already?" he wondered, pulling a corner off his scone.

"Not really," you shrugged. "Better every day, though." You looked down at your shoes. "It's a lot more comfortable, lately, so I thought I'd give it a whirl, see how it goes for a couple days. Gym shoes are better than sandals."

Chris nodded, looking thoughtful, as he chewed. When he swallowed his food, he realized, "No more flamingo."

"Gone," you agreed, with a smile for your accomplishment.

"I kinda miss the flamingo," he shrugged, with a bit of a frown.

"Really?" you laughed.

"Yeah," Chris said, sending you a small grin ahead of his drink of coffee. "It was cute, meant you had all that free time to hang out with me."

"Aww," you cooed, feeling a little heat in your cheeks. You tittered, tearing off another nibble of scone. "Well, we're hanging out today," you reminded him, with an enthusiastic rise in your voice.

"Yeah," he scoffed. "While I'm fucking sick. And working. That's a good time, I'm sure."

In your head, you heard the phrase 'In sickness and in health' and you were overwhelmingly relieved that, for once, the words in your head didn't fall out of your mouth. "I think I can manage," you told him, instead. You checked your watch and looked over Chris in his blue sweatshirt and jeans. "You ready to go in a few minutes?"

Chris nodded, chewing on the last of his sandwich and standing up. He put a hand behind him, checking his pocket for his wallet as he grabbed his empty plate to take to the sink. "Just gotta grab a couple things," he said.

While Chris went off to do whatever he had to do, you finished your breakfast. You rinsed off the plates and put them in the dishwasher. You cleared the counter of the empty wrappers and bag and swept a couple crumbs into your palm to dust off in the sink. When the kitchen was clean, you grabbed your coffees and keys to wait for Chris in the living room. You were only perched on the arm of one of the sofas for a minute, before he came in from the bedroom hallway.

Standing up, you passed him his coffee. Chris gave you an appreciative smile and opened the front door, gesturing for you to go out ahead of him. Behind you, you heard the chirp of the keypad for his security system and then the door shut. He followed you out the front gate, climbing into your Jeep and placing his coffee in the cup holder next to yours. Seat belted and ready to go, he showed you the address from his email and you plugged it into the GPS on your phone.

It wasn't a long or especially busy drive to the house in the Hollywood hills where the shoot was taking place. You got there with a few minutes to spare. Chris groaned as he slid out of your car, muttering something with a couple four letter profanities you didn't quite catch from your side of the Jeep. You gave his arm a quick rub to soothe him, frowning briefly at his vague scowl and brow knit down into the top of his sunglasses as you walked up the driveway. A blonde, with dark rimmed glasses, came out of the house to meet you and Chris. You had seen her before, but blanked on her name and were silently appreciative of Chris' halfassed introduction.

"[Y/n], this is Megan, my publicist. Megan, [y/n]."
"Nice to meet you," you smiled, shaking her hand. She smiled, awkwardly, obviously surprised to see you there and you explained, "Just doing his hair."

"Well," she blinked, "they have someone here already, but it shouldn't be a problem."

"Last minute change," Chris said, leading the way through the door.

The house the magazine had rented for the day was a total throw back to 50s and 60s modern decor. You swooned, just picturing the likes of Don Draper coming home to a martini or whiskey for dinner when you stepped inside. You could see the Hollywood sign, high on the hill behind the house and you snickered to yourself, thinking of when you and the guy you were seeing at the time snuck up to take in the view with some tipsy friends after closing down a bar you forgot the name of.

The fashion director and photographer came up to the door to introduce themselves. Before he even shook their hands or said hello, Chris fixed on a smile, seeming to muster the resolve to just power through it. The crew was bustling around the house, setting up a couple different rooms for the shoot. The fashion director-slash-interviewer, Kate, guided you through the home to a large bedroom where a small team of people was waiting to style Chris. Your eyes ran over the dozen or so pairs of shoes laid out and the rack of designer duds from Ralph Lauren.

"So, if you’re ready," Kate suggested, tipping her hand over to a man waiting by a director's chair, "we've got our groomer here for a bit of hair and makeup, before we get you dressed."

"We brought our stylist for his hair," Megan interjected, pointing you out. She smiled, adding, "A last minute change. Just a preference."

Kate gaped for a minute, in mild confusion, but recovered like a pro. "That's not a problem then," she smiled. She held out her palms to you. "A touch of makeup first and then hair."

You nodded, with a quick smile of acknowledgment. A glance at the groomer didn't make you think he was too offended, if at all. Why should he be? After all, he was still getting paid the full rate for half the work. Megan left the room with Kate, starting some discussion about the shooting schedule and leaving you with Chris and the other staff. Chris pulled his sweatshirt off overhead, leaving him in a white t-shirt and his jeans. He handed the blue shirt off to you, without question, and you rolled your eyes a little. Just like Atlanta, all over again.

After a couple minutes of work, the makeup artist made note of the perspiration on Chris' forehead. Chris apologized, explaining he wasn't feeling well, just as Megan came to stand in the doorway. She asked him a couple mother hen questions and he waved her off, saying he just needed some aspirin or something. Megan looked through her purse, but came up empty. Rooting around in your tote, you found some Advil and one of the dressers brought Chris some water.

By the time Chris was ready for you to start on his hair, the room had thinned. The groomer was walking out his styling tools, to keep them from cluttering or getting mixed with yours, and the dressers had gone to discuss a substitution with Kate and the photographer, after some input from Chris. The room was quiet as you set out your things on the portable vanity the groomer had set up.

"You feeling any better?" you checked, walking around the back of Chris' chair to comb out his hair. He shrugged, taking a drink of water. "A little," he conceded. "Thanks for the Advil."

"Full service stylist," you quipped, taking advantage of the empty room to dot a kiss on his cheek. Chris chuckled, his eyes crinkling over the grin he sent you in the mirror. You raked his hair back with your fingertips and took a minute to massage his scalp. Chris' eyes closed and he hummed
quietly, relaxing under the touch. You wouldn't have minded to keep the massage going and indulge your secret joy of running your hands through his hair, but Chris was on a schedule. You grabbed the pomade off the counter and went about setting his hair.

When you were finished, Chris pushed up out of the chair with a sigh. You were beginning to gather up a few of your things, when you heard the voices of some of the crew on the way back to the room. Chris snuck a fast kiss on your neck and gave you a gentle swat on the ass before he moved over to the clothing rack. You did your best to control your smile, turning it into a pleasant 'hello again' to the dressers and Kate coming back in the room. Hairstylists didn't need to be around for the wardrobe parts of a shoot, so you set your bag and tools aside, slipping unnoticed out of the room.

In the hallway, you took a leisurely look around the house and you followed the sounds of voices and equipment moving. You stood in the corner, watching the crew remeasure the lighting inside, as the sun continued to climb, and the photographer make a few test shots. You introduced yourself to a couple people who said hello first. You struck up a conversation with one of the assistants, highlighting some of your work experience and using your time with Chris on the latest Captain America film to explain why you were there.

When Chris stepped into the room, the photographer instantly began discussing the style of the shoot and what he was planning to do. While Chris nodded along, Megan tapped your arm and inclined her head, asking you to go outside with her. You followed her to a pair of lounge chairs by the pool and took a seat when she did. Megan turned to the leather attaché bag she set by her feet, taking out a stylish brown leather writing pad from Bosca. She opened the cover to the pad inside, taking up the pen and setting her eyes on you.

"Okay," she began, her shoulders dropping a bit as she seemed to be settling in comfortably for a long talk. "There's some things we need to talk about. While you're here and there's time to kill, we might as well get it out of the way."

"Um, okay," you agreed, feeling a curious nervousness wash over you.

While you inched back from the edge of your chair, Megan clicked her pen, saying, "I was going to schedule some time with you the closer we got to the press tour for this. I've got some questions to discuss with you, some things about you that we might need to worry about, when we introduce you to the press."

If this were a cartoon, Megan could have heard the gulp of you swallowing down a comically large lump in your throat. All of a sudden feeling like you were about to take an exam you hadn't studied for, you simply said, 'Okay' and braced yourself.

"First off," she smiled, "it's nice to finally meet you. I've already heard some things from Chris about you. It's nice to have a face to put with it."

"Oh, thank you," you tittered.

"Now, of course, in an ideal situation, we'd like to control how you're presented to the media," Megan said.

"How I'm what?" you begged.

Megan waved a hand before she started scribbling something in her notebook. "I mean, in a perfect scenario," she explained, "there would be a formal statement ready; something light, acknowledging the relationship, with a couple insignificant bits of information dotted in there to satisfy curiosity enough to get away with asking for privacy. Ideally, at a larger event where there's plenty of other
"If you have any blemishes in your past, to share anything that might cause you and Chris any kind of scandal."

"Oh, my god. Do you do this to everybody?" you wondered, glancing past her to see Chris posing in front of a large painting on the wall.
"Yes," Megan told you, matter of factly. "Except usually I just meet with the other person's publicist."

"Well, hell," you awkwardly laughed. "You want the references from my résumé? I can give you my mom's number."

She gave you a sympathetic smile. "I know this is may be uncomfortable."

"Ya think?"

"But, believe me, I only have your and Chris' best interests at heart," she continued. "I'm sorry if this seems too personal for you, but I need to know these things so I can put out any fires before they get started. Now, about your family..."

For what seemed like an eternity, you answered Megan's questions about everything. Megan was thorough. You hoped that translated to her being good at her job and not just nosey as fuck, because damn. You got a few minutes reprieve, when Kate waved you back into the house to give Chris a touch up after a wardrobe change.

You reset his hair while Chris sat on the edge of a small, leather covered sofa. While the crew took the break to review some of the early shots they had. Chris looked a little more perked up. He asked how you and Megan were getting along, with a jut of his chin toward where you were being interrogated by the pool. You smiled and said you were 'getting along fine'.

When you finished with Chris, you retreated to the chair by the pool again, not sure if Megan had everything she wanted from you or not. When you rejoined her, she smiled pleasantly and the two of you carried on a casual conversation about the weather, how Chris was feeling, and whatever else came up while the shoot wrapped. It wasn't that you thought she wasn't being sincerely friendly, but things were kind of off to a rocky start in this "friendship" and you spent the whole time waiting for another too personal question to come up. It was ridiculous how relieved you were when the interview was ready to begin and you relocated to the doorway back into the living room to watch from the edge of the patio.

Occasionally, you scooted out of the way for a crew person going in or out. For the most part, you listened to Chris' answers, shrugging off the bad taste in your mouth that Megan left you. When the interview wrapped and Chris had changed back into his own clothes, you filed out behind him and Megan. In the driveway, you parted ways, with another bright smile from Megan and some compliments about meeting you before she got in her car and backed out to the street.

Back on the road, you drove with the air conditioner on. Chris felt like his fever was flaring up again. He said he wasn't hungry when you offered to stop for lunch somewhere. You had a little time to spare and still get down to Culver City on time for his meeting with Sony. You told him you would wait in your car, listening to your iPod or something, while he took his meeting. Chris just snorted and shook his head.

He swiped a couple more Advil from you before he went in. You flipped open the roof, put down the windows, reclined the driver's seat, tucked in your earbuds, and lost track of time. You were drumming your fingertips on the bottom of your steering wheel, when Chris rapped his knuckles on the hood as he walked across the front of your Jeep.

Opening the passenger door to climb in again, he asked, "D'you fall asleep on me?"

"No," you smiled, tugging out your earbuds as you straightened up your seat. "Probably could have though. Ready to go home, or is there something else you need to do?"
"No," Chris emphatically told you, his brow wagging up over the rim of his sunglasses to stress the answer. "I'm ready to go home."

Chris settled back against the headrest and you checked to see if he wanted the air back on, assuring him it only took a minute to close the Jeep up again. He shook his head 'no' and you backed out of the parking space to take him home. Back at his place, you parked at the curb. Chris moved a little slower on his way up to the house, sighing as he worked the key in the lock of the front door. Inside, he peeled off his sweatshirt again and tossed it on the couch.

"You hungry?" you offered. "Want me to make or get you anything?"

He shook his head, taking out the things from his pockets and heading for the bedroom. "No. Thanks. I think I'm just gonna lay down for awhile. I'm fahckin' beat."

You followed, asking, "Are you sure? It's no trouble."

Chris dropped his phone and wallet on the dresser on his way to the bathroom. "I'm okay." The faucet turned on and he added, "What's that saying? You feed a cold and starve a fever?"

You plopped down on the edge of the bed, folding one leg under the one on the floor and leaning back against the headboard, checking the time on your phone. "That's it, but I think they say it's bullshit now," you told him, hoping to be heard over the sound of the running water. "You haven't eaten since this morning, unless your meeting had snacks."

The water was off and, a moment later, Chris came back in the room. "No snacks," he smiled, with a small sweep of his head. Chris dove head first into the bed. "I'm not hungry," he said, through a groan, as he scooted up and over to lay his head on your belly and hugged an arm over and around your bent leg.

You combed your fingers through his hair. He still felt warm and he was looking pretty run down. "Alright, fine," you conceded. "You get some sleep and call me if you wake up later, let me know you're still alive."

His head lifted to see you, tipping back to rest on the pillow behind you. "You're not staying?"

"Oh, sweetie," you frowned, "I can't. It'll be almost 7 by the time I get home and I need to take care of Archie."

"Right," he nodded, turning his head down into the pillow. "Forgot."

"So, if you're all set," you began, "I need to go home."

"I'm all set," Chris said, sounding a little let down.

You tapped your finger on his arm for him to let you go. There was a bit of a plaintive moan from Chris and he hugged your leg tighter. "Come on," you halfheartedly complained. "I gotta go."

"But I'm siiiick," he practically whined.

You gave him another tap and he pulled his arm back and inched a little higher onto the pillow as you stood up, mumbling to himself, "Bullshit."

You couldn't help your snicker at how wimpy he looked. You crouched down beside the bed, resting your chin in your upturned palm. "Oh, my god," you marveled. "It's like you're skinny Steve."

You stretched forward, kissing his warm cheek. "I love skinny Steve," you assured him.

Archie was happy to see you. You set him up with dinner and whipped up something for yourself. Afterward, you two enjoyed the longest walk you'd felt good enough to take yet. Archie seemed to appreciate it. Before going to bed, you caught up on a couple shows from your DVR. You had to work in the morning and were in bed by 10. You were just nuzzling into your pillow, when your phone chimed from the nightstand.

**Flip Cup Hero:** Thanks for leaving the scones

**You:** You're alive!

**Flip Cup Hero:** I am. Thanks for your help today

**You:** Anytime:)

**You:** Feeling better?

**Flip Cup Hero:** Little better

**You:** You should eat something

**Flip Cup Hero:** Scones:)

**You:** Something better for you than scones

**Flip Cup Hero:** There's fruit in them:)

**Flip Cup Hero:** I'm going to make something

**You:** Suuuure

**You:** Gotta work in the a.m. Keep feeling better!

**Flip Cup Hero:** I will. Thanks again

**You:** You're welcome <3

**Flip Cup Hero:** Good night babe
Chapter 34

You called to check up on Chris, the next morning from work. While you folded towels in the back, in between appointments, Chris was finishing breakfast. He slept till almost 10 and sounded much better for it. A low grade fever was still hanging on, but he didn't have anything scheduled for the day. The gym could miss him for a day, you assured him. He needed to rest while he could. The press tour would be unforgiving if he didn't have his health.

You were feeling pretty good about yourself. You met Frank back at the gym the next morning. Okay, you weren't exactly hitting all the footwork and you passed on the jump rope when that part of the day's routine came around, but Frank was glad to have you back in the gym again. You were a little short of breath at the end of the session. A few weeks of sitting on your butt will do that too you, but Frank promised they could whip you back into shape soon enough. Which was good, because you had a mud run coming up at the end of May. Plus, the slowly warming weather meant that prime time for spending your days off at the beach would be upon you soon.

Getting back into a work out routine wasn't too hard. If you didn't meet Frank at the boxing gym, you took a run on the beach, trying to work your way back up to running on pavement. The take away was the resistance of the sand and the bonus comfort of less impact on your mostly recovered foot. Archie liked that you were back to running, too. And it was sweet the way that Chris would warn you to take it easy when you would mention going for a run.

The calendar rolled on. Chris had a couple more interviews and shoots under his belt by the end of the month. You were looking forward to shifting gears with your hours at the salon. April was coming and that meant just weeks until the frenzy of the press tour would be upon you. You had a few events penciled in with Frank to help round out the weeks ahead and had taken your first jog on concrete in over a month. Life was back on track. High five, self!

At the end of the month, you met Frank at his house to get him primped for an appearance at the Smash Global Market Fights. You bummed along as his guest, slinking by in the background of the red carpet and taking in the fights surrounded by a mix of Hollywood, MMA royalty, and fight enthusiasts. Like every event with Frank, you had a blast and shook hands with some of his noteworthy friends and acquaintances. It was good to be back to working with Frank.

Sitting on the couch at the casa de Evans, with Chris beside you and Archie at your feet, you were halfway through Creed when your phone rang. Chris grabbed your phone off the coffee table for you and paused the movie, seeing it was Frank. He got up to let Archie outside, while you took the call. When the boys came back to the living room a couple minutes later, you were staring at your email, waiting for a notification.

"How's Frank?" Chris asked, falling back into the couch, with an unnecessary groan and draping a lazy arm over your folded leg.

"He's good," you told him, dragging down the list of emails to refresh the screen. "He's got to go back to DC for a reshoot."

"What? For The Purge?" he wondered, glancing at your phone when you hummed your affirmative reply. "What are ya doin'? I thought we were watching the movie."

"We are," you promised, with a quick, but apologetic frown. "I just need to check my email. It
should be here in a sec.” You glanced up and saw him staring at you inquisitively and you changed your mind, leaning over to put the phone aside on the table again and waved your free hand. "Never mind. It's not important. I'll get it later."

"What are you waiting for?" he asked, shifting his shoulder back into place against yours when you sat back into the couch.

"Travel itinerary," you said, just when the soft ding of your email notification sounded.

"Travel itinerary- Where are you going?" he grimaced, sitting up to see you.

"DC," you told him. It was obvious to you. "For the reshoot."

Chris' brow pulled down, watching you take up your phone again. "Where are you going?"

Tapping open your new email and scrolling down the page, looking for the ticket date on your flight, saying, "On theee...4th."

"Of what month?" Chris needled.

"This one," you laughed. "What's the problem?"

Chris was sitting completely upright now, leaning an elbow on his knee and cocking his head your way. "For how long?"

"Oh, my god," you chuckled. "You ask almost as many questions as Megan. Two days. Fly out at 3:30 on the 4th, shoot on the 5th, and home on the 6th. As long as they can keep it down to one day, that is."

"That's a little short noti-" Chris shook his head. "Wait. What about Megan?"

You laughed again. "You mean the grand inquisitor?"

"What are you talking about?" he frowned.

"Remember?" you began. "The Esquire shoot, when you were sick?"

"Yeah," he warily nodded, waiting to see where you were going with this.

"Well, while you were inside making love to the camera, Megan took me aside to do her background investigation. I swear, she knows more about me than my gynecologist does now."

Chris didn't look happy. "Are you kidding me?"

"No," you told him. "I mean, I get it. She told me your people don't need anything coming up in the press they don't know about first. Luckily for you, I'm not too shady."

Chris didn't seem too won over by your wink and smile at the end. Instead, he wiped his hand down his face, scratched at the side of his perfectly bearded jaw, and shook his head.

"I'm sorry about that," he sighed. "We talked about her getting some time with you to get to know you before the press tour started. I didn't know she'd corner you like that."

"I wasn't cornered, per se," you waved a dismissive hand. "It was...more surprising than anything. She is-" You tried to think of a good word. "Thorough. Incredibly thorough."
"I'll have a talk with her," he decided. "I didn't mean for that to get sprung on you like that. It was supposed to be something casual, over lunch or something."

"It's okay," you shrugged. "It took a minute to get used to is all. I just never had somebody ask me questions like that. If she ever starts looking for a new career, I'd recommend the FBI."

Chris shook his head again, looking a little embarrassed. "I'm sorry, [y/n]."

"Hey," you smiled. "Had to happen eventually, right? Make sure I'm not gonna ruin your good name or have your people working overtime, right?"

He leaned over, putting an arm around your shoulders to pull you to him for a hug. "Something like that," he begrudgingly agreed. "She usually doesn't talk to...people directly."

"Yeah, well," you tittered, knowing he meant she always spoke to some famous girlfriend's handler and not the girl herself, "none of my people were available to meet with her on my behalf."

"Smartass," he grumbled into your hair, ahead of a kiss. "Now, about DC..."

"What about it?" you asked, smoothing the side of your hair back as he let you go and you sat up again.

"Do you have to go?" Chris wondered.

You laughed. "Of course. I'm his hairstylist for the production. And the production is filming again in DC. Where Frank goes, I go. What's the big deal about DC?"

"Because," he began, "I have this thing scheduled. I'm doing this podcast for my friend, Anna. Anna Ferris? Chris Pratt's wife?"

"I know who she is," you nodded. "She made the 'woman crush list' after I saw The House Bunny."

"I wanted you to come with me and introduce you to her," Chris explained. "Maybe grab dinner or something with them after the show."

"A double date with Anna Ferris and Chris Pratt?" you coughed, plainly surprised by the novel idea.

"Yeah," he chuckled, with a lopsided grin. "You could call it that."

"I'm sorry," you pouted. "It sounds like fun, but I can't get out of this. It's my job."

"I know," he sighed. "Just shitty timing."

"Well, it doesn't have to be right after the podcast," you offered. "Maybe we can all get together after I come back."

Chris gave a halfhearted shrug. "Guardians 2 is still in the middle of principle photography. Pratt is back to Atlanta on Friday."

You frowned for a moment. "Well, shit." Chris chuckled at your reply. "But, hey," you chirped. "Filming can't last forever. We'll make something happen when shooting wraps. Deal?"

"Deal," Chris agreed, looking a little less disappointed.

"Besides," you said, putting on an arrogant tone and reaching for the remote to get the movie going again, "it's not my fault you're dating a girl as in demand as I am."
"Thank you for making time to watch the movie with me and Archie," he snorted.

"You're welcome," you told him, with a smug smile.

"Speaking of the little man," Chris led you on.

"What about him?" you frowned, curious if there was some gripe or problem coming.

You couldn't imagine one. After all, it was Chris' idea for you to bring Archie with you. You had taken him for a ride to the pet store to get more dog food, when Chris called to say he was home early. He invited both of you to join him for dinner at the house.

"Where's he going when you go to DC?" he asked.

"Dog sitter," you reminded him. "There's this girl in Ocean Park he goes to. A friend of a friend thing. She runs a small doggie daycare and boards a few here and there, like Archie, for people who do location work. I'll call her in the morning."

"He can stay with me," Chris offered.

You blinked, surprised. You didn't see that one coming. "Really?" you checked. "Don't you have your own shit to do to worry about him?"

Chris chuckled, bending down to rub Archie's belly. "Little things," he assured you. "He wouldn't even know I was gone."

"Noo," you cringed. "He can go-"

"Come on," he gently urged. "I could use the company. I promise," he added, raising a hand to vow, "I won't let him go out partying every night, picking up strays."

You laughed, shaking your head at the idea of your lovable Archie out pimpin'. "Are you sure?" you hesitated still.

"He knows his way around," Chris confidently nodded. "He's got the yard. It'll be just like old times, huh, bud?" he prodded Archie. "Just a couple 'a dudes hanging out."

"You're ridiculous," you chuckled.

"Ridiculously awesome," he arrogantly corrected, giving Archie a couple thumps on his side and jutting his chin your way.

"You are," you agreed. "I'll have his driver drop him and his things off on Monday."

"We'll have his room ready," Chris smiled. "Now, about this 'woman crush list'..."

Monday rolled around and you had packing double duty. You measured out a couple days worth of food and packed some toys for Archie. For yourself, you stuffed a couple days worth of clothes, your toiletries, and some things for work into your small rolling carry-on bag. With the car packed, you corralled Archie and headed to Chris' house to drop off your dog.

Chris met you at the gate, wearing a wide smile. "Here," he said, sticking his hand out to take the small bag you'd packed for Archie off your hands.
"Thanks," you smiled, following him up to the house.

"We shoulda planned this better," he considered. "I could have taken you to the airport, instead of leaving your car there."

"Nah," you shrugged. "It's alright. That way nobody's dealing with delays or anything. You sure you don't mind?"

Chris opened one of the back doors for Archie to come and go as he pleased. "Of course not," he assured you. "I like having a dog around. It's been awhile." He picked Archie's water bowl out of the bag and went to the sink to fill it. "Besides, it'll give us some time to do some male bonding."

You snickered. "Alright, but just remember," you warned him, "he's my baby. Don't go corrupting him or anything."

"Who me?" Chris angelically smiled.

"My god," you muttered. "I'm gonna come back and he's gonna have a tattoo or something."

"Promise," he winked. "No tattoos. We'll just hang out, read the bible, and count the minutes till you get back."

"And I'm the smartass?" you doubted, giving him a playful backhand into his arm.

"You're gonna miss your flight," he reminded you, with a chuckle.

"Yeah yeah," you waved him off.

Chris came over to you, folding his arms around behind you and pressing a kiss to your lips. "What time do you land on Wednesday?"

"4 o'clock-ish," you answered. "Will you be home so I can pick up Archie?"

"We'll be here," he nodded, hugging his chin over your shoulder as you squeezed each other tight. "Have a good trip, babe. Don't work too hard."


For being in town for just a flash, you were set up in a pretty decent hotel in downtown DC. The large Art Deco lobby was classy and the small room was pretty plush and comfy. Before you went to bed that first night, you laughed out loud at the photo Chris texted you. He'd coaxed Archie up onto one of the chaises on the patio and set a pair of sunglasses on his face. Archie was clearly in good hands.

You were disappointed that the short trip and long shooting day didn't allow for any sight seeing, but, after the last scene wrapped, you did have an indulgent meal and sampled some craft brews at the District Chophouse with some of the crew members you'd worked with in Rhode Island last fall. It was nice to see friendly faces again and everything on the reshoot schedule was in the can. All in all, it was a successful trip.

Back on the ground in LA, you suffered through the mind numbing crawl that is midweek, rush hour traffic on the 405. What the hell was the point of having expressways if the 'express' never applied? At least returning to your usual time zone meant you still had a few hours in the day to hang out with
Chris. You shook off the bitterness of the insufferably long commute when you buzzed the intercom at Chris’ gate. The lock clicked open and you pushed inside. Ahead of you, the front door opened and Archie shot out to meet you, with Chris sending him on.

"Go get her!" Chris coaxed, waving a hand through the the air after him. "There she is."

You crouched down to meet Archie, his tail wagging uncontrollably as he sniffed and licked at your chin. "Hello, handsome," you smiled, trying to hold onto him for a hug as Archie wiggled excitedly.

Chris had joined you in the yard, smiling down at you and waiting with his hands in his pockets. You stood up and he gave you a kiss, asking, "How was DC?"

"I don't know if I was there long enough to be able to answer that honestly," you laughingly admitted, walking with the boys up to the house.

Chris chuckled, sweeping a hand in front of him for you to go in first. "Doesn't necessarily sound like a complaint either."

"Nah," you smiled. "It was a good trip. Hotel was nice, saw some people from the New England shoot. That was fun. But, ugh. Traffic coming here was a bitch."

"Hell of a commute," Chris agreed, checking his watch to see it had definitely been awhile since you sent the text saying you'd landed. "You hungry?"

"Starved," you groaned, in dramatic fashion. You jokingly added, "You cooked, right?"

"No," he snickered, "but I'm buyin'. You wanna order in or go out?"

"Can we just stay in?" you begged, trying not to look or sound too whiney. "After the flight and rush hour, I'm over traveling anywhere."

Chris took your cheeks in his hands and kissed your forehead. "That's fine. I'll order something."

While you disappeared to throw some water on your face and generally wash off the grime of travel, Chris ordered in pizza. When dinner arrived, you curled up on the couch to watch TV. A little weary after your flight and drive, you were a bit heavy lidded at the end of the couch. You gave Chris your keys, when he asked for them, and he went out to your car on the street to bring in your little suitcase. You were just going to spend the night, instead of dealing with the hassle of driving home.

Chris deposited your bag and keys in the bedroom and rejoined you in the living room. "So, Saturday," he began, putting an arm across your shoulders to pull you back to rest against his side, "they're taping the MTV Movie Awards. Got another clip to show."

"Oo," your inner fangirl perked up. "That's exciting."

He smiled, seemingly amused with your enthusiasm. "A few people are going to be there. I know Mackie is and I think Hemsworth. You want to go get into trouble after the show?"

Your face fell. "I can't."

"Why not?" Chris frowned.

"I'll be in New York, remember?" you refreshed him. "With Frank for The Contenders Emmy panel?"

"That's this weekend?" he checked, brow creasing down in thought.
"Yep," you nodded. "Out late Saturday and flying back after the panel."

"Shit," he muttered. "Thought that was next week." You shook your head and his head ticked back with a thought. "Huh. Should probably have you send me a copy of your schedule so I can pair it with mine."

"That may not be a bad idea," you agreed, "for both of us."

"Yeah," Chris nodded. "You know, the press tour kicks off on Sunday. There's this Twitter thing on Monday and Stan and Mackie are doing Fallon with me that night. The premier's on Tuesday. The week after that, we head overseas."

"Be here before you know it," you noted, slowly, taking it in and doing a quick checklist of the things you needed to do to get ready and the things you had to do for work in between.

Damn. Time really was flying. You had hoped to do a little shopping for yourself, needed to check the forecast to know how to pack, and had to get Archie squared away for the sitter's. You wanted to make a hair appointment for, at least, a quick trim before you left, as well. It would be a tight schedule, but you tried to remain optimistic.

You ticked off some of the finer points of your future out loud. "Yeah, New York this weekend. The premier for Frank on Tuesday, work the 14th and 15th, Vegas the 16th and 17th, and then my last shift at the salon before my flight on the 19th. Holy shit."

Beside you, Chris snorted and gave your shoulders a squeeze. "You gonna have time to pack?"

"I might as well not even bother to unpack," you half-joked, realizing there wasn't much of a reason to put away your suitcase after this most recent trip.

"Kinda snuck up on ya, huh?" he smiled, watching you roll your eyes as your head fell back into the couch.

You held up your thumb and forefinger, with just a fraction of space between them. "Little bit, yeah."

"Are you excited?" he wondered.

"I am," you nodded, enthusiastically. "Get to put some stamps in my passport, maybe see a sight or two, get some experience with a press tour before I go with Frank on his tour this summer. Yeah, pretty excited." You bit your lip for a moment, while Chris chuckled at your enthusiasm. "How about you?"

"Me? Excited for the tour?" he checked, his brow rising at the idea. "Uh, yeah, I guess." Chris snorted, with a hint of an awkward smile. "I mean, I'm excited to have you coming along. Having you around will be fun. But, the tour itself?" He shrugged. "Honestly? Not really."

You smacked your hand enthusiastically on his leg. "Well, then," you declared, "Team Cap's just gonna have to work extra hard to make sure you have a good time."

"Oh, Jesus," he worried. "I shoulda kept my mouth shut."

"Probably," you winked.
You tried to go at all of your upcoming traveling with a plan. You sat down at the table after work one night and made a few lists. You organized your lists into different categories: toiletries, travel clothes/stuff, nice outfit(s), casual, etc. There was a list for your trip to New York with Frank, one for the Asian and European trip with Chris, and one for Archie. His list was obviously, and thankfully, much shorter than either of yours, but the extra detail of him having a list was helpful. And, hey, didn't Archie deserve a nice and hassle free stay with the sitter as much as you deserved to have fun gallivanting around the world with Chris and his Marvel cohorts?

Chris had offered to let Archie stay with him for the weekend while you went to New York. In fact, he lobbied for it, saying the first time had worked out so well, what with Archie not getting arrested by the dog warden or going home with a tattoo, and it was only for a night. He insisted it didn't matter that your flight didn't land until just after midnight. What was the sense in packing him up for a short turnaround trip and pay someone to take care of him when Chris could do it for free. Besides, he liked having a dog to play with. It wasn't too hard to convince you. After all, you figured Archie liked having a Chris to play with. It was kind of a win for everybody involved.

Before the weekend rolled around, you had most of the things prepped for your trip. You saw the weather was supposed to be warm in China and planned out a few light outfits. You had piled up the clothes you planned on taking in a laundry basket and set it aside until your suitcase was free after your trip to New York with Frank. You collected a few pairs of shoes around the basket to take with you, as well. Yep, you were feeling pretty accomplished by the time you dropped Archie off at Chris' house on your way to the airport. You wished Chris luck for his presentation at the Movie Awards and told him to have fun at the after party. With a good tailwind, you were in the Big Apple a little over five hours later.

You eventually caught a cab to your hotel. Checked in to your room, you messaged Rick, Frank's assistant, to let him know you had made it into town. There were a few restaurants up and down the street and you took a short walk to get dinner for yourself. It was a little disappointing to not have any real time to go sightseeing. You hoped maybe you could squeeze some in on the next visit and went back to your room to settle in for the night.

In the morning, you had breakfast at the hotel, taking advantage of the free wifi and the Starbucks in the lobby. Frank's panel didn't begin until late afternoon and you caught up with him at 11 in his room to help him get ready. You were pleasantly surprised when you did Frank the favor of answering his door and his costar, Jonathan, appeared on the other side, his jaw dropping open to smile at you like an idiot. You waved him in and he gave you a friendly squeeze on the arm as he walked by.

"Hey, stranger."

"Don't you look fancy," you remarked, gesturing to the grey jacket over his arm and shiny tie bar pinning down a narrow black tie to his shirt.

"I can clean up," he insisted, raking his eyes down you in feigned offense. He flashed a smile again, looking around the room, as you shut the door. "And where's Francis?"

You inclined your head toward the bathroom just as the door was opening and Frank stepped out, pointing a warning finger at Jonathan. "What'd I tell you about callin' me 'Francis'?"

"I never say it to your face," Jonathan said, waving a dismissive hand through the air as he dropped into the couch, "so what's the difference?" Frank growled at the wink Jonathan sent him before Jonathan looked back to you. "You flew all the way out here just to do his hair? You're job is ridiculous."
You shrugged, smiling as you packed up your things. "It pays the bills."

"With this guy," Jonathan noted, nodding toward Frank, "it better."

"She does alright," Frank nodded your way, adjusting his sport coat on his frame.

There was a quick knock on the door before it opened and Rick walked in. "Car's ready downstairs, when you are," he announced.

Jonathan stood up, shrugging on his jacket, declaring, "Shotgun." He looked down and smoothed his tie as he moved to stand in front of you. Lifting his chin and turning his head for inspection, he worriedly asked, "Does my hair look alright?"

You snickered and Frank smacked his hand up the back of Jonathan's shortly shorn head, as he walked by on his way to the door. "What fuckin' hair?" Frank groaned.

You arrived at the theater in time for lunch and you were a little disappointed to see Anthony Mackie had been a part of the morning for his project, All The Way, with HBO, but that he had seemed to be gone from the show before you arrived. During the Kingdom panel, you stood by to watch with Rick. The appearance wasn't long, but the discussion with Frank, Jonathan, and the show's creator, Byron, was interesting. It made you a little homesick for the set, but also a little proud to be able to see first hand how well the show has been received. Maybe you were just the Key Hairstylist, but, dammit, this was your show too and you loved it.

Your suitcase had been kept in the car with everyone else's and, after the event, you all carpooled to the airport. You only had to wait around for about 45 minutes for your flight. On the way home, your seats were all booked close enough together to have tiny conversations over a shoulder or across an aisle. Back in LA, Frank double checked you didn't need a ride home, when you parted ways with him at the curb in front of the terminal. You held up your keys to prove you were parked in the lot.

Frank leaned in before he got in his car, kissing the air by your cheek, when he told you, "Be careful driving home, alright? We'll see you on Tuesday. Thanks for comin' out, kiddo."

"Anytime," you smiled, waving as you headed off for your car.

The late Sunday night commute wasn't nearly as bad as the drive from the airport had been earlier in the week. Luckily, you weren't as run down as you were coming home from DC either. Keeping good company at the airports on the long trip had made all the difference in the world. Archie was as delighted to see you as ever. Chris waited, with a warm smile for you, at the doorway. It was almost 2 in the morning and he didn't look like he'd been to bed yet.

"See?" Chris asked, looking down at Archie as he went inside ahead of you. "That wasn't so bad. You hardly knew she was gone." He turned to you, giving you a kiss when you met him at the door. "Welcome back."

"Made it," you smiled.

Shutting the door behind you, he asked, "You didn't think you would?"

"Nah," you shook your head. "It's just always nice to go home."

"That's true," he nodded, heading toward the kitchen. "D'you eat on the plane? You hungry?"

"Grabbed a quick bite on the layover," you said after him. "I'm good, thanks."
"It's late. You staying here tonight?" he called from the kitchen.

You looked at your watch and shrugged. "If you have room to spare," you quipped.

Chris came back into the living room. "I think we can squeeze you in," he winked.
Hello everyone!

Just a quick note from your author...

I'm leaving for vacation and will not have Internet access while I'm gone. Unfortunately, that means no new chapters until I return.

I will be back on my regular weekly posting schedule beginning Monday August 22. Please be patient and maybe enjoy rereading from the start to kill time:)

Trust me, I'm going to miss this as much as you are. If you follow my main blog (@whostheblondegirl) or my writing blog (@whostheblondegirlwriting) over on tumblr, there are some scheduled posts to keep the blogs running. Check out the writing master list there for an extra way to kill time.

I'll miss you all (and my muses). I'll answer comments here and tumblr messages/asks as soon as I get home, so feel free to keep sharing your thoughts and such with me.
Chapter 36

You know how you get over waking up and realizing it's Monday? Opening the messages on your phone to see one from your boyfriend that says,

**Flip Cup Hero**: Good morning beautiful

You giggled, tapping open the keyboard to reply. Before your first sip of coffee, you replied.

**You**: Hey there, handsome :)

You scooped out Archie's breakfast and poked around in the cupboards to decide what you were eating. Sipping on your coffee, you pulled down a box of cereal. Frosted Flakes would work, because no matter how old you got, they were still grrrreat. From the other side of the kitchen, your phone chimed a new message. You finished sprinkling flakes into your bowl, before you checked it. Munching on a few dry pieces of cereal on your way to the counter, you unlocked your phone.

**Flip Cup Hero**: What are you up to?

**You**: The breakfast of champions/toys r us kids

**Flip Cup Hero**: Lol what does that even mean?

**You**: I'm eating frosted flakes

**Flip Cup Hero**: Nice. What's the plan for the day?

You cocked your head, in a moment of contemplation.

**You**: Gonna sit on the couch, stare at twitter all morning and eat cookie butter out of the jar before work

**Flip Cup Hero**: Lmao now that sounds like a hell of a Monday morning

**You**: #adulting

**Flip Cup Hero**: #winning

**You**: You know it!!

**Flip Cup Hero**: Is today the day you're with Frank or did you mean the salon? When do you get off work?

**You**: With Mr. Grillo. Probably 5-ish.

**Flip Cup Hero**: Well shit

You snickered, before turning your attention to pouring milk into your bowl. With the thumb on your left hand, you sent back a reply, asking why the potty mouth.

**Flip Cup Hero**: My mom's coming in for the premier tomorrow. Scott's picking her up while I do the twitter thing and film some promo vids. We were going to an early dinner before Kimmel and I wanted you to come
Thank goodness your spoon was only a few inches above the bowl, otherwise the drop from your hand could have been catastrophic. Ohmygod. You reread the message, just to be sure. Yep. Chris was inviting you to dinner...with his mom. Ho-ly shit.

Were you there yet? Is this really when you meet his mom? Okay, no, it's cool. It's fine. You seemed to have passed inspection from two out of three siblings already. That's a good start, but...Chris' mom? That's, like, wow. This was not a little thing. Chris adored his family, but none more so than his loving mother. The protective woman who'd start a fight on the internet if she thought someone was being-

**Flip Cup Hero**: You there?

*Crap!* How long were you just freaking out? You looked at the time stamps on the screen. Okay, just a minute. *Whew!* But still, too long to not be suspicious after he just mentioned his mom.

**You**: Sorry. Put you down to have a couple bites

You will never stop lying to Captain America, will you? Shame.

**You**: Can't make it. I'm sorry

**Flip Cup Hero**: No problem. I knew you had something to do today. Just thought I'd ask

**You**: :( 

**Flip Cup Hero**: How about tomorrow?

*Gulp!* You apparently weren't getting away so easy. Why were you so fussy about this? Oh, yeah. It's *his* mother. You've met other guys mom's before. No big deal. But this wasn't just your boyfriend's mother. This was Lisa Evans. She's practically a celebrity in her own right. You'd seen her from afar in Atlanta a couple of times, but you'd never even been close enough to even smile politely at her. And now, *sweet Jesus*, you were going to be face to face, right across a table, close enough to smell her perfume, because she looks like a hugger, and *OH MY GOD!* She's going to decide if she likes you. She's going to decide if you're good enough for her son. *Eep!* She's going to look at you and know you've had sex with her son.

**Flip Cup Hero**: More cereal? :)

*Fuck!*

**You**: Lol yeah sorry. Hungry

**Flip Cup Hero**: Understandable

**You**: I'm meeting Frank and Wendy at 4 tomorrow.

**Flip Cup Hero**: How does noon sound?

*Dear god.* This is happening. You can't stop it.

**You**: Sounds good:)

Yeah. Smiley face. Good call. Nothing puts the fun back in funeral like a smiley face, right?

**Flip Cup Hero**: We'll eat here at the house. You should bring Archie
Yes! Everybody loves Archie. He'll keep you safe.

**You:** We'll be there

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Except for a run with Archie, you really did piss away the rest of the morning on the internet. You caught up on all your social media creeping, while your iPod kicked out some tunes. When you knew the Twitter take over was happening you were glued to your app, giggling at the replies for Team Cap and Team Iron Man. Of course, Cap played all his replies pretty straight laced. Not that you were picking favorites, but Sebastian had some of the best responses for the fans who picked Team Cap. Elizabeth Olsen was good, too. You honestly didn't put up much of a fight, when the devil on your shoulder told you to tweet #TeamIronMan. You laughed out loud when you tapped your video reply and Chris appeared, shaming you by saying, "Team Iron Man? I expected more from you." Of Course you tweeted #TeamCap and were ridiculously happy when Sebastian told you, "Once you join Team Cap, you can't go back."

By noon, it was time for your twitter watch to end. You grabbed your bag and were off to meet Frank. He was doing an interview and photo shoot for DA MAN Magazine. You met him on set just before 1 o'clock. He was all smiles, as usual, and he thought it was funny when you told him about tweeting Team Iron Man just to see what would happen. He also reminded you about taking your HYDRA t-shirt on the press tour. You were kind of hoping he'd forgotten about that. No such luck.

You moved around a couple different sets and outside with Frank, following like a puppy when the crew moved to a new spot to photograph him. You cut in with every wardrobe change to tweak his styling a little for subtly different looks. Frank made your life difficult by shadow boxing some body shot combos, while your raised arms, to preen his hair, left you wide open. He laughed at the trouble he was and you just smirked and shook your head. When you were done and bringing your hands down, you snuck in a quick tap at his cheek, ducking to miss his playful swing in retaliation.

"Ho ho! Did you see that?" he gaped. "Did you see that?" Frank looped a hand for you to come back over and he grabbed you into a hug, tipping you from side to side. "Nice," he smiled, proudly. "That's my girl. You find that shot and you take it."

"Hey, easy now," you tried to warn him off of you. "That's Burberry you're wearing."

He hooked his arm over your neck to pull you down for a fake gut punch, before he sent you away again. Your hair ended up a little mussed and you pulled out your hair band to rewrap your ponytail, just to have something to do while the photographer got back to snapping pics. When your hands were free, you grabbed your phone from where it had buzzed a moment ago in your back pocket. You opened your message from Chris.

**Flip Cup Hero:** You tweeted #TeamIronMan??

Ha ha! Busted!

**You:** AND #TeamCap

**Flip Cup Hero:** But you did iron man first

**You:** I wanted to see what happened 0:

**Flip Cup Hero:** What did you get?
You: You telling me you expected more from me

Flip Cup Hero: I really did expect more out of you

Flip Cup Hero: But I'm not surprised

You: Oh my god that hurts my feelings:(

Almost. Maybe just a teeny bit. Maybe if it had been a phone call and not a text you might have heard a hint of sarcasm or laughter in his voice.

Flip Cup Hero: Traitor

You: At least Sebastian's message was happy for me and my Team Cap tweet :P

Flip Cup Hero: She said, while standing next to Crossbones

You: Lol you're so bitter. And FYI he's over there

You snuck and sent a quick photo of Frank, a good twenty or so feet from you, waiting for the lighting to be checked after the photographer made an adjustment.

Flip Cup Hero: Smartass

You: You like it

Flip Cup Hero: I love it

Your brow quirked up with an idea.

You: The sass or the ass?

Flip Cup Hero: Yes

You almost let your laughter slip out, pressing your lips together while your shoulders shook.

You: Sooo does that mean I'm still allowed to be on Team Cap?

Flip Cup Hero: Always

Flip Cup Hero: Gotta go. Scott and mom just got here. Talk to you later

You: Have fun tonight

Flip Cup Hero: You going to watch?

You: Duh!

__________

You went to dinner with Frank after the shoot. You followed him for a short trip over to a casual Italian restaurant in Santa Monica Place where you met up with his little family. Over pasta and wine for the grown ups and pizza for the kids, you talked about the premier tomorrow. In addition to styling Frank's hair, you were going to help with Wendy's as well. Wendy told you about the dress she was wearing to give you a few ideas about what to do with her style.
After dinner, you headed home and took Archie out for a nice, long walk to the beach in the mild evening air. You got a message from Sebastain, telling you 'we were disappointed you didn't show up with Chris'. You asked who "we" were and he sent you back a selfie with a pair of the saddest puppy dog faces you'd ever seen on his and Anthony's faces. Chris was nowhere to be seen, but you thought you saw part of Paul Rudd in the edge of the picture, on the far side of whatever room they were in. You dragged your finger through the wet sand and sent them back a photo of a smiley face before the ocean washed it away.

When Archie had had his fill of the fresh air and running in and out of the surf, as usual, you washed the salt water off his fur under one of the rinse-off showers and walked him home. Archie got a minutes worth of extra towel drying and you grabbed a quick shower for yourself. You settled into the couch in your pajamas and searched through your DVR for something to watch. It was around 8 when Chris' self-ascribed nickname popped up on the face of your phone and you said, 'hello'.

"How was the show?" you asked.

"Good," Chris told you. "It was a lot of fun. The guys missed you."

There was a little heat in your smiling cheeks. "Yeah, I heard."

"Oh, yeah?" he mused.

"Yeah, I got a message from Sebastian, earlier," you told him.

"You did, huh?"

"And a sad selfie with Mackie," you giggled. "But I'm sure you all got over my absence pretty quick."

"Well, I still miss you," Chris offered.

"Do I get a sad selfie to prove it?" you wondered.

Chris laughed on the other end of the call and it made you smile. "No sad selfies tonight."

"Oh, that's right," you considered. "You're mom's in town. You must be happy."

"Very," he agreed and you could almost see the smile in his voice. "She's looking forward to tomorrow."

Your gut clenched at the mere thought of tomorrow's lunch with Chris and his mom. "Oh. Yeah. Big day for you tomorrow," you said, trying to deflect your nerves by thinking about the premier.

"The premier?" he checked, but you didn't have to answer, because he went on. "That, too. But I mean she was looking forward to meeting you at lunch."

Yep. That's what you were afraid of. But, for god's sake, don't let on about it!

"Me, too," you smiled. Everything sounds more energetic and confident when you say it with a smile.

"We'll eat around noon," he told you, "but you guys can come by anytime."

You suddenly remembered your manners and asked, "Anything you need for tomorrow?"

"Just your beautiful self."
The nervousness in your belly was replaced by a feeling of giddiness at how sweet his answer was. "No, I meant, is there anything I can bring?"

"I know," he chuckled. "Nah. I got everything here."

You sat up, crossed legged on the couch, to watch Chris and the rest of Team Cap on Jimmy Kimmel Live. Archie enjoyed it with you, curled up at your side with his head resting on your knee. You shook your head at Chris and Anthony's not-so-secret secret handshake. You had plenty of good laughs during the interview and almost cried you were laughing so hard over Sebastian talking about lube and his costume arm.

In the morning, you took Archie back to the beach for a run. You woke up full of anxious energy. The dry sand under your feet helped burn it off. At home, you put Archie in the large utility tub in the basement for a bath. It's all about making a good first impression today and that goes for Archie, too. You showered and had an existential crisis in front of your closet trying to decide what to wear.

Literally four outfits later, you settled on a pair of white denim shorts, with a neatly folded hem, over your straw braided wedge sandals. The medium sized hoop earrings matched your necklace and watch and popped over your trim-fitting green and white plaid button up and polished ponytail. You drove with the air conditioner on low, keeping the windows closed and the wind from messing up your hair.

Parked at the curb outside Chris' house by 11:30, you checked yourself over in the mirror of your sun visor. You added a dab of lip gloss, pressing your lips with a pop, and sucking in a deep breath. Taking hold of Archie's leash, you made sure there were no cars coming and found the nerve to get out of the Jeep. Archie led the way to the gate, having learned a long time ago where he was and obviously excited to see his other favorite toy, Chris. With him pulling you along, you couldn't run away. You bit your lip and hit the call button on the intercom. The lock clicked open and, shitshitshitshitshit, this is it. Be brave. You got this. People love you. Or, at least, that's what you hear. Just... deep breath... act natural.

On the short walk up to the house you muttered a plea for Archie to be on his best behavior. You fussed over yourself one last time, adjusting the clasp of your necklace out of sight and tucking a couple escaped hairs behind your ears. You barely got your hand raised near the door to knock before it opened and Chris greeted you with an enthusiastic smile. Oh, God. He's so exited about this. Don't screw this up.

"Hey," he said, dotting a fast kiss to your lips. "Come on in." Chris shut the door behind you and added, "We're out back."

"Okay," you smiled, "great."

Chris was about a step ahead of you, on your way through the house. When you rounded the dining room and could see his mom and Scott in the backyard, you let his lead stretch to two or three long strides. You kept Archie on his leash, shortening it with an extra loop of the nylon around your hand, just in case today was one of the days he jumped up to say hello to anyone he could reach. Pinning on a smile and pulling the sunglasses down from the top of your head, you swallowed the lump in your throat. There was no turning back now.

"Hey, lady," Scott called, smiling at your approach.

"Hello," you replied, giving a small wave.
With Mrs. Evans smiling at you, Scott stepped past her to give you a welcoming hug. "You look like a long tail cat in a room full of rocking chairs," he whispered, giving you a squeeze. "Relax." You smiled when he straightened up and told you, "You look cute today."

Their mother's grin widened a bit and you hoped that she agreed, because you had tried to look cute. Chris stood next to his mom. With his arm across her shoulder, he smiled and gestured to you.

"Ma, this is [y/n]," Chris announced, proudly. "[Y/n], this my mom, Lisa."

"How do you do?" you smiled, meeting her hand with your own. "It's so nice to meet you."

"It's lovely to meet you, [y/n]." Lisa reciprocated. "I've heard so much about you." She looked down at the eager ball of fur wiggling at your side and reached out to pet him. "And this is?"

"This is Archie," you said, loosening his leash a bit when you saw he was, mercifully, going to be a gentleman today.

"Archie?" she considered. "That's cute. What made you think of that?"

You snickered and shook your head at yourself. "I don't know," you shrugged. "He was just so handsome. I thought he needed something a little debonair."

"Archie is debonair?" Lisa giggled, taking Archie's paw when he fanned it at her for more attention.

"Well," you began your explanation, "it's actually Archibald. He gets the full name when he's in trouble."

"It's gets bigger than 'Archibald'?" Scott asked.

*Oh, geez. Wait for it.*

"Yeah," you winced.

"Don't stop now," Scott led you on.

You sighed your defeat and said, "It's Archibald Fauntleroy [y/l/n]."

Everyone shared a delighted laugh and you ducked your head, a bit embarrassed, as Chris grabbed his chest and Scott doubted, "Are you serious?!"

You nodded. "Yyyep."

"That's amazing," Chris declared.

"Why do I know that name?" Lisa wondered.

Chris was just barely collecting himself when he and Scott chimed in with you to say, "It's Donald Duck's middle name."

The guys rolled with laughter again, as Lisa's face lit up with realization. "Oh, that's it!"

"My friend thought it sounded fancy," you felt the need to elaborate.

"I see it," Scott nodded.

"No shit," Chris agreed, coming closer to tussle Archie's head and unclip his leash. "Now that I
know that, it suits him."

You bit at your lip, watching your four legged safety net circle everyone once and prance off to roll his shoulder in the grass. So much for his bath. This was off to a good start.

Scott touched your elbow for your attention. "You want something to drink?"

"Sure," you smiled, but then quickly thought of a more refined response. "Yes, please."

"Cocktail?" he offered, jerking his thumb towards the kitchen. "We're day drinkin'."

Booze? Yes. Desperately, yes, please.

"Oh, no," you daintily waved him off. "No, thank you."

"You sure?" Scott double checked, making a half-turn toward the house. "We're already shaken, not stirred."

You caught sight of the glasses of some orange juice look-a-like beverage, on the table behind behind everyone. "Well," you reconsidered, "if you've already got it made..." Thank god.

Scott flashed a smile and disappeared into the house. Chris invited you to sit with him and his mother. There was a tray of fresh fruit in the middle of the table and small plates for everyone to use. You looped and tucked Archie's leash into the edge of your chair. You had just asked Lisa how her flight was, when there was a short tug on your ponytail and Scott came up beside you to set a drink on the table in front of you, before taking his seat.

You thanked him, with a quick smile, only taking your attention off Lisa for a moment. There was an attentive grin on your face as you listened to her talk about her trip. You were proud of yourself for not grabbing your drink right away. Lord knows, you could have used it. You'd gotten past the initial meeting, but the nerve racking part was still to come. The part where pleasant filler conversation gave way to actual inquiries. Fuck it. Have a sip.

Your brow involuntarily rose, recognizing the dragon fruit cocktail you'd whipped up for Scott and Carly during her visit. Scott noticed and grinned, giving you a wink. God bless Scott Evans, that beautiful master of the bar. Definitely a close 'second place' for Favorite Evans.

"So, Chris tells me you met in Atlanta," Lisa wound up.

 Fucking hell. That was fast. Straight for the jugular. You pressed your lips together in a grin and nodded.

"Mm hm."

"You're a hair stylist," she lead you on and you nodded again. "I hear you've been working on a TV show. Anything I've seen?"

 Fat chance. "Maybe," you suggested. "It's called Kingdom. It's about a former MMA fighter running his gym, his family and stuff. It's on Direct TV, but you can find it around."

"She's the Key Stylist, Ma," Chris chimed in. "She works on the leads, for Frank Grillo. I told you that."

"I know," Lisa conceded. "I'd just like to hear it from her." Scott was snuffling his laughter, but his bouncing shoulders gave him away, as Lisa added. "It's called 'conversation'."
Scott snorted and Chris jutted his chin at his younger brother, his wrinkled brow saying there was a dirty look behind his sunglasses, as Chris told him, "Fahck you."

"I also have a chair at a salon, over in Culver City," you offered. "I fill in there between shoots or if I'm not traveling for Frank and the show."

"Is there much traveling in your job?" Lisa wondered.

"Sometimes," you shrugged. "I just had a couple short trips to New York and DC for it."

"She's Grillo's personal hairstylist, too," Chris bragged, popping a grape into his mouth. "She just worked the next Purge movie with him last fall."

"Oh," Lisa lit up. "You're still working on films then?"

"Anything that Frank does," he answered for you, picking out a strawberry and a palm full of grapes from the fruit plate.

"What are you working on next?" she asked.

"Nothing, immediately," you admitted, feeling a little embarrassed for some mysterious reason. "Lately, he's just been doing some small appearances, styling for photo shoots." You rebounded. "But we're optimistic the show will get renewed for another season and he's in some talks for other things."

"Another season," Lisa repeated, with a thoughtful purse of her lips.

The way she said it had you worried that your long view plan was much shorter and less stable than you had previously thought. All of a sudden, you felt like you had no job prospects. Oh, my god. She's disappointed. You don't have a solid plan for your future. You are not impressing her. at. all.

"They've got her contracted for the life of the show," Chris noted.

"So, another season is good," Lisa suggested and you nodded, hoping your grin was holding up against your racing mind.

"Well," he shrugged, chewing on a grape in the side of his mouth, "even if it doesn't, Grillo really does keep her busy." Chris picked up another grape and gestured to you, saying, "That's why she missed dinner yesterday."

"Sorry about that," you smiled, shyly. "He had a magazine shoot yesterday."

"Eh," Scott waved a hand through the air. "It happens."

"It sounds like you're busy," Lisa considered.

You nodded along. "Sometimes, it's hit or miss, but things will be picking up next month. I'm working with him and his wife for the premier tonight," you offered.

"Oh," she blinked. "You're not coming to the premier?"

Everyone was looking at you. Lisa expecting your answer, Scott with some kind of tiny smirk at watching you maybe crash and burn in front of his mom, and Chris leaned onto the arm of his chair, with a thin smile on his face as he ate.

"I am," you assured her. "I'm helping Frank's wife with the kids, too."
Okay, wait. Did that sound like you have a side job babysitting? You didn't think it was a big deal, before you actually said it out loud and wondered what it sounded like to Lisa. Wendy would be walking the carpet with Frank. You didn't think anything of it, a couple of months ago, when you suggested you could help Remy wrangle his younger siblings. After all, as part of Franks' little entourage, you were one of his guests for the premier. It was the least you could do to show your appreciation.

"[Y/n]'s not comfortable, right now, being up front on the red carpet," Chris told his mother. "Besides, we're not interested in everybody getting into our business."

Lisa nodded. "But I'm sure we'll all catch up somewhere later."

"I'll keep my eye out for her," Scott promised, sending you a smile.

There isn't a scale to measure the amount of relief you felt, when Chris clapped his hands together and recommended starting lunch. After all, he mentioned, you had to meet Frank for work in a couple hours. It had only been a few minutes. You took another drink folding your hands to rest around your glass on the table, holding it like a cross and trying to remember to smile. Just breathe.
Meeting Chris' mother was nothing like meeting his sister, or his brother for that matter. Chatting with them was a breeze. But talking to Mrs. Evans, you were in a constant state of worry. Did you sound smart enough? Were you really funny, or did she give you a fake laugh? Did you smile enough? Oh, no. Too much? Are you interesting at all? Never before had you wanted so badly to march down the hill and just scream, with all your might, into the valley, just let out all the nerves and tension.

All you could do was hope it was going well. Scott, sure as hell, looked amused. Chris had a smile on his face, in one shape or form, practically the whole time. But Mrs. Evans? She was hard to read. You answered all her questions about your jobs, about your time in Los Angeles, your family back home. You made sure to ask her about her grandkids and listened attentively to anything she had to offer about her children and Boston. It looked good on paper, but- Gah! You just weren't sure.

When Scott smacked your knee under the table and suggested you help him with dessert, you practically jumped at the chance. In the relative safety of the kitchen, you let out a sigh of relief and he laughed at you. Picking out the pieces to make strawberry shortcakes from the fridge, Scott shook his head at you.

"You look like you're going to have a heart attack," he told you.

"Yes," you empathically nodded. "I am." You turned to see him. "Is it that obvious?"

"No. I'm just teasing. It's going great," he assured you.

"Is it?" you worried, taking down a stack of bowls from the cupboard. "Because I can't tell. I think she hates me."

"She doesn't hate you," Scott laughed.

"No," you disagreed. "I feel it. There is no way I'm good enough for him." You grimaced, palming your hand to your forehead. "Oh, my god. She thinks I'm a gold digger. I know it."

Scott was clearly enjoying watching you sweat. He threw a quick glance outside, before coming over to give you a hug. "You're not a gold digger," he reminded you. Scott cupped your cheeks in his hands, doing his best to straighten his face as he looked you in the eye. "And you're better than good enough for him. Shit, if anything, he's not good enough for you," he said, humorously patting your cheek.

You turned out of his hands and rolled your eyes. "Oh, my god," you groaned. "You fuckin' actors and your lines."

"It's not a line," he insisted, unable to hold back his chuckle anymore. "It's fine. She's just being a mom. Of course, she's gonna try and bust your balls. It's her oldest son for fuck's sake."

"So, she does this to all his girlfriends," you hoped, helping arrange cake and fruit in the bowls.

"Not really," he shrugged. "Honestly, other girls always struck me a little vapid or self-absorbed. She hasn't even met them all."

"Did she like any of them?" you asked, biting the side of your lip.
Scott snorted. "Does it matter?" You started to shrug, but he went on. "None of them are here right now. You are. It doesn't matter, if she did."

"So, you're actually trying to convince me that I could go toe to toe with Jessica Biel," you scoffed.

He gave you a quick double take and seemed to realize that you understood that Jessica was probably the standard you'd be judged against. And how could you not? Just by the sheer amount of time they were together alone, she was the most successful relationship anyone knew he had. Hell, looking back on when they were dating and you'd see the gossip mags or tabloid tv, Chris and Jessica used to be relationship goals. Even for you!

"I don't know," he finally said, cocking his head and giving your bicep a squeeze. "I think you could take her."

You ducked your head, blushing a bit with your smile. "That's not what I meant."

"I know," Scott nodded. "But it got you to laugh." He nudged your elbow with his. "Trust me, sweetheart. You're good enough, you're smart enough, and gosh darn it, people like you."

You sputtered out a laugh and gave him a shove in the arm. "Shut up."

By the time you had to say goodbye at Chris' house, you still didn't feel much better. Despite Scott's pep talk, you just couldn't shake the feeling of not measuring up. You had thanked everyone for having you to lunch, gushed about how nice it was to meet Mrs. Evans, and got a quick hug from Scott before Chris walked you and Archie out. He sent you off with a contented smile and an extra kiss, at the door, saying he would see you in a few hours.

At home, you set up Archie with an early dinner. While he ate, you traded your shorts for a simple sleeveless A line dress. It modestly hit just above your knees and it's white flowered pattern at your shoulders and across the hem, over the black base of the material, was nice enough for the background of the premier. Despite highlighting your curves, the playfulness of the pockets at your hips toned down the look enough to be appropriate for a family event. You added some stud earrings, a thin, silver watch, and a multi-banded cocktail ring to finish off your look. you touched up your makeup and hair and were off to the Grillo residence.

Frank, Wendy, and the kids were picking at some delivered pizza for a quick dinner when you arrived. It was the first time you had been to Frank's home and the mix of toys, in the corner of just about every room downstairs, with the comfortable style of the home was welcoming. You could tell a family who had fun lived there. They invited you to join them at the table. Before you could decline, Wendy was already pulling you a plate from the cupboard. You sat down for a quick bite, listening to the youngest boys talk about how excited they were for the movie.

Wendy kept everyone on schedule with an attentive eye on the time. You helped her first, finishing the zipper on the back of her dress and giving her a stylish up do, before perfecting Frank's signature look. The boys managed to dress themselves with a little direction from Frank. You left your car at Frank's house, piling into to the SUV with him and his family for a ride to the Dolby Theater. The arrival for everyone on the red and blue carpets was coordinated down to the most minute detail. You and the kids, well, if Remy could be called a kid, split off from Frank and Wendy. The cast would be arriving at the press and fan lines in vehicles provided by Audi. Frank and Wendy were whisked away to stage for their entrance.

You kept a close watch on your young charges. You kept Rio's hand practically glued to yours, as
he had a tendency to get distracted by all the activity and the props on display. Thankfully, Liam kept close to his older brother. You guys made a lap of the attractions and made a quick restroom break before the arrivals were scheduled to begin. There really wasn't any place to watch, except from the end of the carpet. With dozens of members of the press lined down the long carpeted walkway and a large gathering of fans before that, you knew it'd be awhile before any of you caught a glimpse of anyone.

You found a spot off to the side, just big enough for you to sit down on the floor with Rio set up in your lap. While he played games on your phone, you chatted with his brothers standing next to you, taking and sharing fun selfies with each other and sending them to their parents. At the very least, it kept the boys distracted and would be a reassurance to Frank or Wendy that you hadn't misplaced one of their children and all of them were still alive and well, if they happened to check their phones.

It was surprisingly easy for you to spot the celebrities coming down the way from your seat on the floor. You caught peeks past hips and around skirts and pointed out people the boys might be excited to see. When you caught a glimpse of Frank and Wendy coming, you popped up and straightened the boys, tugging collars, smoothing ties, and taming wild hairs. By the time Frank and Wendy joined you again, the theater was open for seating and you shuffled along with the rest of the crowd inside. You met up with Frank's assistant, his publicist, and his agent in the theater. Your small group passed the time talking about the movie and a couple quick items about some potential projects for Frank coming up. When Frank was escorted back stage to cue up with the rest of the cast for a short introduction before the film began, you all settled into your seats. You craned your neck and thought you spotted Scott and his mom, along with some of Chris' friends and "people" a few rows ahead of you and across the aisle at the front of the theater. You were seated on the Team Iron Man side and they were obviously Team Cap. You smiled to yourself, imagining the shit you'd get from Chris, if he saw you sitting where you were.

You could hardly contain your excitement, when the room was quieted by the announcement from the stage. You weren't sure if it was osmosis of the enthusiasm from Frank's boys that had you so wound up listening to the cast introductions or if it was the culmination of all the long, hot hours in Atlanta about to come to life on the screen. Both sounded good. Your giddiness peaked, when Team Cap made their appearances and the stage lights dimmed to start the movie. You kept track of Chris for as long as you could, as he made his way down into the darkening theater to join his family and friends. Frank came back to a welcoming kiss from Wendy and high fives from his boys, before he was able to sit down. Everyone was in their seats, eyes glued to the screen. And your heart was beating like a drum.

You. loved. it. You clapped every bit as wildly as the rest of the guests in the theater. Down your row, Frank looked hopeful as he leaned over to ask the boys what they thought. After he got their undeniable approval, Frank sent you a wink and proud smile. You smiled back and nodded your agreement. He wouldn't have heard your praise over the noise of the crowd anyway. You all stood up, bunching together and waiting your turn as the theatergoers slowly started to file out.

There was a reception in the lobby that everyone seemed eager to get to. You looked around, trying to spot Chris or anyone else you knew in the crowd, but the theater was so congested and everyone was packing together so tightly, it was practically impossible. Frank looped his hand, coaxing Liam to him so he could pick him up. Shuffling along, you put Rio on your hip, much to the relief of Wendy, who was getting pushed a little further ahead of you and having a hard time getting back to her youngest. You all finally met up again, at the back of the theater.

Frank and the rest of the family were waiting for you along the wall. He put Liam back down, now that the crowd was thinning, and held out his hands to you. "Here," he said, with a thankful smile. "Gimme that."
You laughed, transferring Rio from your arms to his. "Thought you might miss this one," you quipped.

"Well," Frank shrugged. "We got extras, but...Yeah, we'd probably miss 'im."

Rio pretended to be offended, hugging his arms around his dad's neck and clenching his Iron Man action figure in his fist. Frank swatted his son playfully on the butt and planted a loud kiss on his cheek. He smiled again, jutting his chin for you to look over your shoulder. You turned, smiling at Chris behind you. In tow behind him was Scott, his mom, and the rest of his entourage. You didn't expect anything in front of his mom and the crowd, but your heart swelled when you felt Chris' hand smooth across the small of your back and he dotted a quick kiss to your cheek.

"You're supposed to wear blue for Team Cap," Chris pointed out.

"Not when she's on Team Crossbones," Frank argued, with a smirk. "You still haven't beat me in a fight for her."

"Yeah, right," Chris snorted, shaking Frank's free hand and then leaning in to hold Wendy's hands and kiss her cheek, telling her, "It's good to see you again." He looked at the kids. "What'd you guys think?"

He and Frank beamed at the boys' animated approval of the movie. Chris playfully frowned at Rio's Iron Man toy, putting his hand over his heart, as if he had been wounded. Frank commiserated, reminding Chris it wasn't a Crossbones toy either. Your small group shared a laugh and, from behind you, your sides were gently pinched. You jumped, seeing a shit eating grin spread over Scott's face. He gave you a quick hug, telling you you looked great.

Scott bent down to your ear, adding, "Bonus points for putting a kid on your hip in front of Mom."

He straightened up, giving you an exaggerated wink and flashing a fast thumbs up close to his chest. You felt your cheeks immediately flush and you gaped at the suggestion you were doing anything more than helping Frank and Wendy with the kids, like you'd promised, and somehow were trying to use Rio as a prop to win Chris' mother's approval. You reached out, landing a grazing slap on Scott's arm before he'd made his escape. His shoulders shook with laughter as you huffed and Chris looked back and forth between you two, trying to figure out what he'd missed.

Chris gathered everyone's attention, suggesting both groups moved on to the after party. You stood aside, waiting with Wendy while she straightened out young Liam's tie. You watched as Chris' mom went by, chatting with one of his friends. Maybe she didn't notice you. After all, she was preoccupied. Gah! But you still hadn't figured her out and it was driving you mad with curiosity. What if she was snubbing you on purpose? Ah, dammit. Just stop. Try not to think about it.

There was food and drinks waiting in the lobby. Of course, there was plenty of glad-handing and congratulations going around. While Frank and the others milled about, making sure no one important from the studio was overlooked, you took a seat at the table with Frank's little family. You ate and drank sodas with the boys, helping to keep the young ones entertained and talking shop with Wendy. You spotted familiar faces all around you, some execs you recognized, obviously "your" cast, and the production team. You shared waves and smiles and had short visits at the table. After the boys were finished eating, Wendy shooed you away, encouraging you to go find Chris, or any one else, and have a little fun.

You had no trouble finding fun. Wandering through the lobby, you locked eyes with Sebastian and he waved above the crowd for you to join him. He was all smiles as he welcomed you with a hug and introduced you to his girlfriend, Margarita. Sebastian grabbed you a flute of champagne from a
passing waiter and you gushed about the film and Bucky's role with him and his gorgeous girlfriend. You all had a good laugh over the pictures from your tiny Oscars viewing party with Sebastian back in February. Thank god Mararita had a sense of humor, covering her hand over her mouth to contain her boisterous laugh at "romance novel cover" and the minor fuss it caused with Chris. She did give a halfhearted shrug about how she could understand his worry about how the pictures could be misinterpreted in the wrong hands.

The three of you migrated to the bar to refresh drinks, stopping along the way to share the love with Mackie and when you crossed paths with Frank and the Russos. Mackie gave a wink to you, playfully wondering aloud if Chris' polka dot based ensemble was some kind of hint about something. Frank gave you a tip that there was something in the works for a new project with them, promising you he'd let you know if it came together. Something about an opportunity with a new production company Joe and Anthony were trying to get off the ground.

To say you ended up "stuck" at the bar with Margarita would imply she wasn't good company. But Sebastian did get pulled away, leaving the two of you to your own devices. You talked about New York, about each other's dogs, and some of the places she had traveled. You two looked at pics on each other's phones and you decided to follow her on Instagram later. It was not a bad way to spend time at all. You should have seen it in Margarita's smile, but you were surprised by the arm sliding around your waist.

Twisting over your shoulder, you were met by Chris' smiling face, telling you, "You're a hard woman to track down."

"I have been in the same rooms as you all night," you coyly reminded him.

"It's a big room," Chris chuckled, shaking his head at you. "Margarita," he said, taking her hand, "looking beautiful as always." She thanked him for the compliment and returned the favor to him about the movie. "Ah, yeah. Thanks," he smiled, with a bit of an awkward pull in his smile, almost hesitant. "You never really know till everyone else sees it," he confessed. Chris turned to you, looking anxious. "What did you think?"

"It was great," you smiled, putting a reassuring hand on his arm. "I can't wait to see it again."

"Well, you'll get plenty of chances at the other premiers," Margarita quipped. "Are you excited? What are you going to wear?"

"Oh," you began, putting up a hand to slow her, "I'm not, like, actually doing the premiers." She gave you a quizzical look down her glass, as she finished her champagne. "I mean, I'll be there for the tour, but I'm not going with him, per se, to the premiers."

"I don't understand," she said, wrinkling her brow and gesturing toward Chris. "Why wouldn't you?"

You winced. This was sounding more awkward the more often it came up. Hissing in a breath, you explained the whole avoiding paparazzi and hoping to stay low key as long as possible. All the while, Chris' hand ran soothingly across you back. Margarita hummed and nodded.

"I see," she told you. "See, that's so great about New York. You can kind of choose who is in your business. Out here..." She scrunched up her nose and shook her head. "But still, you can have a wonderful time."

"It'll be fun," Chris agreed, sending you a warm smile and an extra rub on your back.

"I'm really looking forward to it," you promised.
When Sebastian came back to find Margarita, and she wouldn't be alone, Chris lead the way for you to a table nearby. He stood off your shoulder, having pulled out the last empty chair at the table for you to sit. He leaned toward you, with his hand on the back of your chair and foot cocked to rest on the toe of his shoe, listening and laughing with the conversation around the table. Everyone was having a good time and you were enjoying the atmosphere. The movie was a hit and spirits were high for a huge box office success. Not that you had any doubts.

As the night started to wear on, you excused yourself and found your way back to the Grillos. You hadn't meant to be gone so long, but Wendy assured you everything was better than fine. The young ones were beginning to tire out and you couldn't blame them. It was a big night for everyone. On the way out, you sidetracked your way back to Chris' table to say goodnight to everyone. You made a point to say how nice it was to see Mrs. Evans again, although she was admittedly distracted by catching up with Chris' friends, and you got a bear hug and pinch on your cheek from a slightly tipsy Scott.

Before you could go, Chris wondered, "Do you really have to leave?"

"I came with Frank's family," you said, apologetically. "My car's at the house and everything."

He came in closer, preparing to say goodbye and offering, "I could give you the key and meet you at home."

You gave him an odd smile, realizing, "Wait. Isn't your mom staying there?"

"In the guest house," he specified.


You saw the restrained affection in Chris' eyes when he gave you a hug and pressed a kiss into your hair. Before he let you go, he noted, "It was worth a shot." You separated and he added, "You look amazing tonight, by the way."

Your cheeks flushed and you bowed out before anyone caught on to your shyness. You told him again how much you enjoyed his movie and that you would talk to him later. Hurrying to catch up outside with your boss and his family, you threw a few smiling waves to say goodbye as you passed people you knew. On the ride back, Liam passed out, head tipped onto your arm while the adults in the car chatted in hushed voices. At the house, Wendy couldn't thank you enough for all your help for the night, kissing at your cheek as her only way to show her appreciation with her sleeping son in her arms. Frank gave you a hug and his thanks, pointing at you on your way to your car to insist you get to the boxing club at least one more time before you "skipped the country" on him. You promised you would.

You didn't mind too badly about not staying at Chris' house after the premier. Besides the super awkward fact that his mother would be there- "Guest house" or no, this woman was still literally upstairs and you literally just met her. You and both Chris had to work. Okay, to be fair, you were the only one actually working. Chris got to loaf around his house for the afternoon and bullshit with some guy from Rolling Stone after a photo shoot. You had a shift at the salon.

After work, your phone chimed just before dinner. Wiping the water from your hands, from having just washed and refilled Archie's water bowl, you caught a quick peak at the screen of your phone on the kitchen counter. When you opened your messages, you laughed at the picture from Sebastian. He and Chris had hopped a flight in one of Marvel's planes to make a surprise appearance at a theater in
Phoenix. In the seat across the aisle of the private jet, Chris was talking to someone you couldn't see and completely oblivious to Sebastian and his smiling open mouth full of Skittles taking the picture. You laughed and messaged back.

**You**: Dork

**Sebastian Stan**: He's not even paying attention. I've thrown like 3 skittles at him

**You**: You poor thing:( How rude of him

**Sebastian Stan**: Exactly!

**Sebastian Stan**: I hope when he gets up they're stuck on his ass or something

**You**: Shame on you

**Sebastian Stan**: Shame on him!

**You**: Please don't let him walk around with candy on his ass. Don't want the fangirls to get too excited

**Sebastian Stan**: It's a theater. It'll be free snacks

**You**: Off Cap's ass? Lol no

**Sebastian Stan**: Holy shit. Imagine how many tickets we could sell with that promo!!

**You**: Again, I'm voting "NO"

**Sebastian Stan**: You're no fun

**You**: Please try to stay out of trouble

**Sebastian Stan**: "Try" HA!

You shook your head. At least someone was having fun. You were ready to start laundry. Gearing up for your trip to Las Vegas with Frank and the upcoming tour, you had to catch up on laundry, trying to make sure you had any and everything you could possibly want to take on you press tour trip freshly washed and available to you. Archie's sitter was happy to make arrangements for his stay during your trip with Chris and to set Archie up for your short excursion with Frank. Chris had offered for Archie to stay with him while you went to Nevada, but the logistics were kind of a pain in the ass.

As it was, you barely managed to see Chris before you headed off for Vegas and he went the other way to China. Between work, catching up with Frank at the gym, as promised, and Chris catching up with friends who had come in from out of town for the premier, it was a busy few days. If he hadn't come to see you at your place the day you left with Frank, you might have missed him altogether, until you met up with him in Beijing that is. While you tucked away a few things for your overnight to Sin City, Chris laid over your bed, feet crossed at the ankles and skimming the floor. With one arm folded under his head, he scratched Archie's side where he laid on the corner of the bed.

"So, where are you staying at?" he asked, watching you fold a shirt to pack.
"The Wyn," you answered.

"Nice," he said, with a raise of his brow and approving pout. "But you're not back in time before I leave, right?"


"Yep," Chris nodded. He gave Archie an affectionate pat on his belly. "You got enough time to take him to the dog sitter's, or can I take him for you?"

"I do," you assured him. "Besides, it gives me a few more minutes with him before all this traveling. I hate leaving him."

Chris held up his hand in question. "What about me?" he complained.

"I'll see you soon enough," you reminded him, with a playful swat at his knee.

You zippered your small suitcase closed and Chris sat up. He reached over, hooking a pair of fingers over the waistband of your denim shorts to pull you over. A little off balance for being so close to the mattress and having Chris' feet under yours, you couldn't really put up a fight, when Chris tugged you down to his lap. Not that you would have anyway. He wrapped his arms around your waist and yours found their way behind his neck. Chris gave you a noisy kiss on your cheek.

"Two and a half days," he reminded you, "then Beijing, baby."

"That's crazy, right?" you marveled, eyes widening just thinking about it.

"What's so crazy about it?" Chris chuckled.

"All of it," you decided. "It got here so fast. Like, I haven't even legitimately packed yet and I already feel like I'm forgetting something. And the LA premier the other day, all those people." You gestured out a hand at the enormity of it all. "And your mom," you added, exhaling through puffed out cheeks, with a small sweep of your head.

Chris laughed. "Yeah, my mom."

You bit your lip, working up the nerve to ask, "So, about that. Did she, ya know, say anything...like, about me?"

He nodded, as his expression sobered up and his brow knit down. "Oh, yeah. She had a few things to say," he mentioned, as if he'd already forgotten about the visit.

"Were they good? Bad?" you worried. "Indifferent?"

He hissed in a breath and cocked his head, looking like he didn't know how to break it to you. "Well," he began and paused...and your heart stopped beating. "The good thing is, she said you did alright with my hair in the movie."

Your mouth fell open. What? That couldn't be it. That couldn't be the only nice thing she had to say about you. Holy Jesus Christ. Could it?

"That's it?" you managed to get out. "She said, I did alright with your hair?"

"Yeah," he nodded. "And she said you were taller than she thought you'd be."

This can't be happening. Should you be offended? Because you were starting to feel a little offended.
You were on your best behavior. You looked cute. You were charming, god dammit. How could she not like you?!

"Are you shitting me?" you begged.

"Baby," he said, putting a consoling hand on your knee, "it doesn't matter, because I love you." Oh, my god. Chris shook his head, adding, "And if you could see your face right now..."

Chris sputtered into laughter, completely proud of himself, and you smacked his arm with everything you could muster. "You son of a bitch!"

Archie popped up, coming over the bed to see what all the excitement was about, as Chris let out a yell and grabbed his arm. "I'm just kidding," he laughed. "Jesus fuckin' Christ. What ah' you doin' with Frank at the gym? Fahck! That hurt."

"Christopher Robert," you complained. "You're an asshole."

But he still couldn't stop laughing. "C'mon," he insisted. "That was hilarious. My gahd, the look on yoah face."

"That wasn't funny," you assured him, trying to stand up from his lap.

Chris cinched his arms around you, holding on tight and keeping you down. "I'm sorry," he said, doing his best to straighten his face, despite obviously still being amused with himself. "Don't be mad."

You gave him a push in his shoulder. "You're such a jerk," you pouted.

"Baby, come on," he smiled, sweetly. "I'm sorry. I mean it." Chris stretched to kiss your cheek, while you stubbornly crossed your arms. "She thinks you're great. It was perfect."

"You are so full of shit," you told him, sending him a side eye.

"I'm naht," he assured you, hugging you close. "She thinks you're a sweetheart and you're very pretty. Scott and Carly were talking you up, too. And now that she's seen you for herself, she loves you." You rolled your eyes and he went on. "She did say the thing about the movie. Well," he reconsidered, "she didn't actually say 'alright'. She said it looked 'great', but she says you have a good sense of humor, that you're smart, and that she sees why I love you."

He sucked a loud kiss to your cheek, to get you to smile again, and you relented. "Really?" you asked, slightly skeptical still.

"Yeah," he nodded. "In fact, she only had one bad thing to say."

Oh, no. Here it comes.

"What was it?"

"She's pissed off at me 'cause I haven't taken you to Boston to meet her sooner," he smiled.
Chapter 38

Archie was set up for his long stay at the sitter's with his doggy daycare friends, you were headed off to Vegas with Frank, the press tour was only a few days away for you, and Chris' mom gave you her seal of approval. Everything was going so well. Chris had sent you off with an extra kiss, hooking an arm around your waist and leaning in one more time to tell you he loved you before he kissed your forehead, told you to have a safe trip, and headed off to his car and you toward yours. The little bit of afternoon delight you snuck in before you had to leave also contributed to the clouds you were floating on.

Your iPod got you through your flight. You took in the view of the strip from the limo you took with Frank and Rick to your hotel. You were already contemplating how much you'd let yourself lose to the casino after dinner, when the car pulled up to the hotel. You parted ways with your travel buddies to settle into your room. Grabbing a quick bite to eat downstairs, you tried your hand at some of the slots. When you were up $325, after some well played pulls on the machines, you had a hard time figuring out why everyone cursed Lady Luck in Las Vegas. You knew better, to stop while you were ahead, and cashed out feeling like a winner.

You sent a bragging text to Chris about your windfall and he told you, next time, you were buying dinner. He also sent over Josh and Megan's phone numbers and emails, in case you had any problems on your trip to meet him in China and you couldn't get ahold of him. He called you after the info was sent, spending some time on the phone with you while you painted your toenails to kill time before going to bed. Chris told you to have fun and reminded you how excited he was to have you coming along on his trip.

"It's going to be great," he promised.

"Think there'll be any time for sight seeing?" you wondered, giving a dirty look to the thin, errant line of color on the end of your toe.

Chris hissed in a breath. "I 'eeeee don't know," he slowly admitted. "My schedule is pretty full. I've got photocalls, press conferences, fan appearances, and-"

"That's okay," you shrugged, picking off the misplaced paint from your big toe.

"What I'm saying is, I don't know that I'm going to get much in," he said. "You don't have to stick around all day, waiting on me. I don't want you to miss out on something you want to do because you sat in some hotel conference room staring at me all day."

"Ditch you on your press tour?" you balked.

"You're not ditching me," he insisted. "But it's kind of ridiculous to expect you to sit around all day, waiting on me. I don't want you to miss out on something you want to do because you sat in some hotel conference room staring at me all day."

"I don't kno-ow," you sang. "You're not too shabby to be staring at all day."

On the other end of the line, Chris barked out a laugh and the joyful sound made you smile. You could picture him grabbing at his chest or tilting forward with the force of his amusement. You twisted the cap down on your bottle of polish and set it aside.

You inspected your work and Chris recovered, saying, "Thanks, babe."
"Any time," you promised. "After all, I am a USDA certified beefcake inspector."

He laughed again, as he lovingly assured you, "That's not a thing, sweetheart."

"It should be," you decided. "I'd be the fuckin' boss of that job."

"I bet you would," Chris agreed and you beamed at still hearing the smile in his voice. "But seriously though," he went on, "don't waste the whole trip waiting on me. We'll have some time together in the evenings. We'll figure out some things to enjoy on the trip, I promise."

"I can think of a few things," you playfully suggested.

"I'm counting on it," he chuckled.

You felt adventurous and headed out to see the sights Saturday morning. You looked around Madame Tussauds, a little bit disappointed none of the Wax Caps lived in Vegas. It would have made for a fun selfie to send Chris. You peeked inside some of the hotel lobbies and did some window shopping around Caesar's Palace and the grand canal at The Venetian. The afternoon was gone before you knew it and you hurried back to the hotel for work. On your way into the bustling lobby of your hotel, you caught your phone ringing, just before the call went to voicemail. You had to be one lucky son of a bitch, because it was your manager at the salon, Laura. She was calling to let you know that one of the girls had had a last minute schedule change. She was available to cover your last shift after all. When Laura asked if you were still interested in having the day off, you jumped at the chance. Laura took you off the schedule and you took the elevator upstairs to your room. You opened up your email, looking for the email confirmation for your trip to Beijing. Back in your room, you were on the phone waiting for a rep from the airline. While you were on hold, you got your things together to work on Frank's hair for the night. When the representative connected to your call, she was more than helpful and patient with your questions about rebooking your trip with an earlier departure. She ran down some options for you and you were able to come up with a flight out late Sunday night that, because of the miracle of time zones, had you arriving just before the press events started. The difference in ticket prices was covered by some of your casino winnings and you gladly spit out your credit card info to the nice lady to get you on the new flight. Getting off the phone, with just a few minutes to spare, you grabbed your bag and hurried to meet Frank. You were scrolling through your text messages from Chris, hoping not to blindly bump into anyone in the hall while you scoured your texts for Josh's number. On the short ride up to Frank's floor, you sent Josh a message, telling him about the change in your travel arrangements. You asked him to keep the details to himself, saying you just wanted someone to know when to expect you. Josh said your secret was safe and told you he'd update your arrival information with the hotel for you. You were practically bouncing down the hall, you were so excited. You cleared your throat to collect yourself before knocking on Frank's door and getting to work.

Rick and Frank talked business in his room, while you styled his hair. A few friends of Frank's met him there before heading out to the fights. You shook some hands and hung out at the back of the pack on the way down to the limo for the Knockout fights. You snapped a group photo for Frank of him and his friends and his pick to win, Chris Van Heerden, before the fight. You enjoyed your ring side seat, as Van Heerden went blow for blow for ten rounds and took the decision. You were almost as pumped as Frank was about the win. Seriously, Frank Grillo might be a bad influence on you and your free time interests. Mmmm...nahhhhh.
You couldn't believe the luck to be able to bail out of work early. Too be fair, you were owed a couple favors. You stepped up to fill hours as often as you could, sometimes when you really didn't have the time, but you squeezed it in anyway. Your boss was good about remembering favors and she was happy to return one by letting you get to your "vacation" a bit sooner than planned. Home from Las Vegas, you did one last load of laundry and obsessively double checked you weren't forgetting anything. You spent some time Sunday on the phone with your parents, just catching them up on the usual BS and letting them know you were leaving early for your trip. You were giddy as hell. It was like you were a kid again, waiting for Christmas morning.

With your suitcase zipped up and waiting by the door, you curled up for a little nap. It had been a long day, with traveling back home, fretting over your suitcase one last time, and getting your apartment spruced up a bit so you didn't have a messy home to come back to. There wasn't much food in the place, so you stepped out for a fast dinner from a drive-thru. At home, you sprang to your feet when the door bell rang just after 11 o'clock. The friendly driver helped you with your bag and loaded it into the car for you. And you were off to Los Angeles International to start your press tour adventure.

You were only a few minutes behind schedule, landing in Beijing at around 5:30 in the morning. You slept for as much of the 13 hour flight as you could, amused, and a little weirded out, that technically it was already tomorrow when you touched down. You managed to navigate your way through the airport. By the time you hailed a taxi and pulled up to the hotel, it was almost 7 a.m. You signed in at the front desk, getting a copy of the key card and directions to the room. You popped into the restroom in the lobby to give yourself a quick once over. Travel and the early hour hadn't been too terribly unkind, but you combed through your hair, brushed your teeth, and spritzed on a little body spray before heading upstairs. The room was easy enough to find, just around the corner and down the hall. You bit your lip and took a breath, to get your excited smile under control, and knocked on the door. You inched to the side, trying to hide from the peephole in the door to keep from being spotted and ruining your “surprise!” moment.

For a long few seconds, you were nervous. There wasn't an answer right away or even a voice calling out to ask you to 'hold on'. Now, chewing on your lip, you were worried he wasn't in. Maybe he was still sleeping and he couldn't hear you. You knocked again, still hopeful and figuring you could always let yourself in. You didn't have to go to the trouble though, because you heard the deadbolt unlocking from the other side of the door. The door opened and you were bubbling with anticipation.

Scratching a hand back through his hair, a very tired looking Chris shuffled into the partially opened
door. He leaned his shoulder into the doorframe and lifted his gaze up from the floor. You smiled, wide and eager, and it, apparently, took a moment for Chris to process the scene. All of a sudden, his brow rose up his face and he dropped his sleepy yawn to open his mouth into a dumbfounded smile. His whole face lit up and he fumbled for a moment for something to say.

"Holy sh- [Y/n]?” he managed. "The fuck are you doin' here?" Chris straightened up in the door, opening it fully and reaching out to pull you to him. "Hey, baby."

"Hey," you smiled, nuzzling your cheek to his shoulder, as he squeezed you tight.

"Wha-” Chris let you go, his hands sliding down the back of your arms and looking you over. "What are doing here? I thought you weren't gonna make it till tomorrow."

You threw your hands up. "Surprise!"

"Yeah, no shit," he laughed. Chris shook his head clear, still smiling at you, as he reached around you to grab the handle of your suitcase. "Fucking hell," he muttered, still plainly a bit off balance. "Well, come in. Don't stand there in the hall."

You followed him in. Chris dropped the collapsible handle of your suitcase and picked it up to carry into the bedroom. You slipped your purse off your shoulder, turning to take in the features of the small suite. Not too shabby. You nodded your approval and set your purse aside on the small table for two along the wall. A little flutter went through your gut. You made it. You were actually there. You were on the Civil War press tour, in China, with your boyfriend- Captain America, himself. This is insane!

Chris came back to the room. He headed straight for you, wrapping you up in another tight hug and leaning back to lift you off your feet. He made a playful little growl as he set you back down and gave you another squeeze. Chris bent his head down to press a firm kiss into the crook of your neck. When he picked his face back up, he smiled brightly at you.

"How are you even here?" he wondered, his brow folding down in curiosity. "Not that I'm complaining."

You giggled at his quick caveat at the end there. "One of the girls at work had a day free up," you explained, "so she picked up my hours and I changed my flight."

"When did all of this happen?" Chris asked, before planting a kiss on your forehead.

"Saturday afternoon," you told him. "I got the call before the fights and was able to grab an earlier flight." Chris chuckled and you added, "I let josh know. He let the hotel know I was coming early."

"Josh knew?" he parroted. "Why does everybody know where you're going but me? First Grillo, now Josh." He tutted. "How's a guy supposed to trust anybody?"

"You always find out, eventually," you reminded him and it kept him laughing. You added, "You didn't answer right away and I thought, for a minute, you weren't here."

Chris twisted around to look at the clock on the wall. "No, just sleeping. I have to be getting up anyway."

"Better wake up call than your alarm?" you suggested.

He captured your lips with his. "Definitely," he smiled. He seemed to realize something and his brow climbed in a kind of worried expression. "How are you? Did you sleep on the plane?"
"Yeah, actually," you nodded. "My flight out left at, like, 2 in the morning. It wasn't that hard to fall asleep."

"Have you had breakfast?" Chris asked. "You hungry?"

"I am," you said, with wide eyes and an exaggerated nod. "Very."

Chris chuckled, shaking his head at you. "You want to order room service or go downstairs? I'm s'pose to meet Joe at the hotel gym at 8, but we should have time to eat, if you don't mind my company."

"Well, I didn't fly over 6,000 miles to eat meals by myself," you pointed out.

"Ha ha," Chris said, dryly. He pointed to the table and gave you a gentle swat on the ass, as he turned to go back to the other room. "Order breakfast, smartass."

You spotted the room service menu book and shook your head at him. "I will," you assured him, "but because I'm starved, not because you told me to."

"Oh, good," Chris sarcastically called, from the other room. "You didn't leave the sass at home."

You chuckled mischievously to yourself, sitting down and taking up the menu. Yeah, this was going to be a good trip.

Breakfast came pretty quick. Probably something to do with who the order was for. You didn't mind thinking about the perk that might be, while you were traveling with Chris. After he ate, Chris disappeared to meet Joe, as planned, in the hotel gym. With a full belly, you were in no way, shape, or form to even want to consider joining him. You opted, instead, to unpack a few things from your suitcase that you would need for the day. You took advantage of the shower, washing away the grim of travel in the warm water, and helped yourself to one of the fluffy hotel bath robes. You fiddled around and reconfigured your phone for international travel, like your provider had instructed, and sent a quick text home to say you'd arrived safe and sound. Curled up in the end of the couch, you thumbed through the hotel's information book, scoping out its dining offerings and amenities.

Chris came back from the gym and woke you with a soft kiss on top of your head. You didn't realize you had nodded off and didn't even hear the door open. Chris laughed at your assertion that you shouldn't even be tired. After all, you slept on the plane.

"What do you expect?" he smiled, sitting on the far end of the couch, when you pulled your feet back. "All the shit you did this weekend to get here, flying from Vegas and then out here in the same day."

"Seemed like a good idea at the time," you shrugged, rubbing your eyes. You looked around, with a look of pure, determined concentration. "Son of a bitch," you marveled. "I don't even know what day it is."

Chris snuffled his laughter, patting a consoling hand on your calf. "It's Tuesday, the 19th, sweetie."

"It should be Monday," you muttered, flexing your wrists in the air and reaching your feet out over his lap, in a full body stretch.

"I know, baby," he smiled. "Time travel is a bitch."
"I don't like it," you frowned, curling up again.

"Neither do I," he agreed. Chris pushed himself up off the couch, checking his watch. "You have three choices," he advised, holding up his fist to start ticking out fingers with each option. "You can come with me to the press events today. Two, you can stay here and lounge around all day, till you figure out what day it is. Or three, you skip the events and go do whatever you want; check out the spa, see some tourist traps. What d'ya think?"

Your brow rose, in consideration, and you gave a thoughtful hum. "They all three sound pretty good," you mused.

"Think about it," he told you, stepping around the couch. "I need to shower. If you want to follow me today, you need to be ready to go in an hour."

You gave him a salute, with a resolute pout on your face. Chris shook his head, with a smile, and disappeared to the other room. A couple minutes later, you heard the water running in the bathroom and you picked up the hotel information book again. You opened up to the pages in the back that advertised what there was to do in the city. By the time Chris had showered and was opening the bathroom door, you had transplanted yourself from the couch to the bed, sitting cross legged with the hotel book in your lap.

"Figure out what you're going to do?" he wondered, one handedly roughing a towel over his wet hair.

You nodded, watching him take the corner of his towel to wipe some errant drops of water from his shoulders. "How disappointed would you be," you cautiously began, "if I caught the hotel shuttle to the Forbidden City?"

Chris tossed his towel onto the bed, walking over to the closet. "You'll come back, right?" he teased.

"Yes," you rolled your eyes.

"That's fine," he shrugged, unzipping the garment bag hanging on the closet rod.

"You sure?" you checked. "It's just, I've never been to Beijing and, last year, Sebastian came for the premier of The Martian and the press had all these pictures there and they looked-"

"It's okay," Chris chuckled, throwing a quick smile over his shoulder to you. "Really, whatever you want to do is fine. You should go."

"Have you ever been?" you asked, looking over the photo of a large temple as the background for the excursion advertisement. Chris shook his head and hummed, no. "Aw, then I feel bad going without you."

"Don't," he frowned, laying out a suit and long sleeve V-neck on the bed. "Why? I told you, most of this trip I'd be working."

"I know, but-"

"But nothing," Chris insisted, taking a moment to consider what he might be wearing for the day. He looked up at you again. "Honestly, at least one of us should see it."

It was a struggle to decide if you felt more excited about going on the little excursion or if you felt like a heel for sneaking off to have fun while he suffered through press junkets all day. "I kind of feel like you're getting ripped off here."
"I am," he agreed, with a snort and a rise in his brow for emphasis. "The start of this schedule is so packed, I'm not gonna do shit."

"Okay," you decided, closing the book in your lap. "I'm not going."

"What?" he questioned, the side of his mouth pulling up in an unhappy sneer and his hands going to his hips to rest above the waist of his shorts.

"I'm not gonna go," you rephrased, not that you figured you actually had to. He clearly heard you.

"That's stupid," Chris argued, gesturing a hand out. You started to open your mouth to respond to his displeased grimace, when his upturned palm turned into a raised finger to stop you. "[Y/n], you didn't come all this way to sit in a conference room all day. Go, have fun. If I didn't want you to, I wouldn't have mentioned it in the first place."

"You're not going to be jealous or anything?" you checked.

Chris set his knee into the bed, leaning down to crawl up to you. He twisted around to sit beside you, wrapping his arms around your shoulders and tipping you into him. He pressed a long kiss into the top of your head, while you were leaned over.

"Sweetheart," he began, letting you go so you could find your balance again, "I swear to gahd, if you don't get on that hotel shuttle, I will steal a car and drive you there my damned self."

"Fine," you feigned offense, throwing a hand up in the air. "I know when I'm not wanted."

Chris laughed at you, leaning over to give your cheek a noisy kiss, before he climbed off the end of the bed. He grabbed his towel on the way into the bathroom, asking, "What time does the tour end?"

"4:00," you told him, loud enough for him to hear you in the bathroom.

"You coming to the premier?" he called from the next room. "We're gonna do dinner before the carpet and press at 6."

"Uhh," you considered, with a shrug. "I think I can do that."

"Don't rush, though," Chris told you. "You can always catch up to us. Josh gave me an envelope with passes and stuff to get around with, if you were coming."

"Sweet," you grinned to yourself, scooting off the bed to change clothes.

"Yeah, it's over on the dresser," he said, "under my wallet."

You shuffled across the room, finding a letter envelope with your name on it, right where he said it would be. "Got it."

You peeked in the envelope, thumbing out the pass and lanyard folded in behind the day's itinerary. You tucked it all back into the envelope for safe keeping. Draging your suitcase up onto the bed, you pulled open the zipper and dug around for a touristy outfit to adventure in. While Chris was in the bathroom, you hopped into a pair of shorts and a t-shirt, setting aside a baseball cap while you tied your gym shoes. By the time he was out in the bedroom again, you slid by to comb up your hair and leave a couple necessities on the vanity.

Chris was messaging someone when you reappeared and dotted a kiss to his cheek while his focus was down on his typing. "I have to go, if I'm going to catch the shuttle."
A smile lifted the side of his concentrating face and he turned to keep facing you as you picked up your hat and pocketed a some essentials, like your room key. "Have fun for me," he quipped.

"It'll be a tough job," you started to shrug.

"But someone's gotta do it," he finished for you, reaching out for your hand to tug you back for a kiss. "If I'm not here, try my phone. You did remember to get international service for your cell, right?"

Your jaw dropped, in mocked offense. "What d'ya think I am, some kind 'a moron?" you balked, heading out of the room with a smile.

"You used to be blonde, you know," he called after you. "I'm just sayin'."

You barked out a laugh, as you leaned back into the bedroom doorway to flip him off. He laughed after you, a sound that carried you all the way out to the hallway. Down in the lobby, a helpful bellhop pointed you to the shuttle and you crammed yourself inside with other hotel guests.

On the ride out to the Forbidden City, you made friends with the couple sitting beside you. A nice pair of recently-weds from Arizona, they had put off the honeymoon to save more money for a larger trip. Beijing was in the middle of their tour of Asia/"slightly later honeymoon". Of course they asked what brought you to China, a young lady traveling on your own. You smiled, vaguely saying you were a hair stylist and traveling for work, taking advantage of a free morning. They understood when you didn't want to give away your client's name or specific business in town. You played dumb when your adventure buddies told you they heard some of the Civil War cast was staying in the hotel, hopping on the bandwagon of their enthusiasm at maybe spotting a celebrity on their trip. After all, the new Mrs. was a big fan.

At the Forbidden City, you opted for the self-guided tour. With your headset on, listening to historical tidbits and facts about the temples and art you saw as you shuffled along with other headphoned visitors, you snapped pictures on your phone and hoped you remembered enough of what you heard to be informative later. At least, you hoped, to be able to not mislabel the photos or forget names all together when you had a chance to upload them to your Instagram and such. Oo'ing and aweing at the beautiful sights had time flying. Naturally, you grabbed a few selfies for posterity and you were more than helpful when you bumped into the newish-weds, making sure they got some quality couple shots for their photo albums.

You almost nodded off on your van ride back to the hotel. In serious need of a pick me up, you made a plan to start some coffee brewing in the hotel room while you grabbed a quick shower. Well, that was the plan anyway. When the shuttle caught a bit of traffic, you worried if there was time for coffee and still catch up with Chris and the others for dinner before the premier. When the road turned into a parking lot, you debated whether or not you could get away without a shower.

Hurrying off the shuttle and across the lobby, you were cutting it close. Practically bursting through the door to your shared suite with Chris, you blew a relieved breath out of your cheeks to see Chris still there, standing in the living room. He looked up to smile at you, fastening his watch to his wrist and asked how your tour was.

Yanking your cap off your head and pulling the elastic band from your hair as you scurried into the bedroom, you assured him, "It was amaaaazing! You should have gone." Rifling through your suitcase for a change of clothes, you caught Chris leaning into the doorway as he listened. "I think I got some good pictures."

"I'm sure you did," he smiled, tugging up the sleeves of his cream colored v-neck. Apparently
picking up on your sense of panic as you hurried on your toes for the bathroom, pulling your t-shirt off overhead as you went, Chris offered, "You know, you don't have to rush to make dinner. You can order room service and meet us downstairs for the show. I'm sure the guys would understand."

"No. I got this," you promised, combing through your hair with one hand and unzipping a pocket of your toiletries kit with the other. "I just need, like, ten minutes."

"Ten minutes?" you heard him chuckle. "Hon, the Beijing Olympics were years ago. You don't have to set a new record. Dinner will still be happening when we get there."

The comment made you snicker, as you rewrapped your hair into a bun and smoothed back some wild hairs to spray down. "I'm a girl. That makes me part quick change artist."

With your hair out of your way, you gave your face a quick wash and brushed your teeth. As you brushed, you shimmied out of your shorts, kicking them aside. Mouth rinsed and lips patted dry, you slipped a blue and white maxi dress over your head, giving the girls a little lift and tuck to show off just the right amount of cleavage. Dress smoothed and twisted into place, you swiped on a quick touch of foundation and a dot or two of concealer, dabbed on some creme eye shadow, and dusted on some rouge. You leaned into the mirror for your final inspection and were pressing your lips together to smooth out your gloss, when you caught Chris watching in the doorway. He checked his watch.

"No shit," he marveled. "That was legit, like, ten minutes."

You flashed an innocent smile. "Told ya," you winked and sidestepped past him through the bathroom door.

You pulled out a pair of sandals from your luggage and slipped them on. You spritzed on some perfume and fished out a pair of earrings and a bracelet from a small drawstring bag of miscellaneous accessories you had brought. Chris was in the next room, shrugging on the matching jacket to the pants he wore and you gave him a wolf whistle that made him duck his head with a modest smile and small shake of his head.

"You don't look so bad yourself," he told you, recovering from his moment of humility and grabbing the hotel room keycard off the table to drop in his pocket.

You were stuffing your lip gloss and a couple other odds and ends into a small purse for the night. "It's not too casual?" you double checked, looking over your shoulder and down at yourself.

"No, you look great," Chris nodded, resting a hand on the door knob while he waited for you to come along. Pulling the door open, as you met him, he added, "And you're wearing the right color tonight."

"Well, I'm not working for Frank tonight," you said, with a shrug. "Figured I could pick a side."

"The right side," Chris playfully insisted, testing the door to make sure it locked behind you two.
Team Cap took over a corner of one of the hotel restaurants. Megan and Josh were there to meet Chris. Sebastian and his manager, Mackie and his small team, and Joe Russo and his wife were all seated. Anthony stood and reached over the table to take your hand, smiling broadly as he called you Polka Dot and told you how glad he was you made it. You got a bear hug from Sebastian before he introduced you to his manager. You settled in next to Chris at the end of a table.

Dotted around the tables were a smattering of Marvel reps and other coordinators for the premier. The meal was more of a working dinner, as a majority of the conversation revolved around the upcoming event. Sebastian leaned around a couple people to ask how your foot was doing, which caught Mackie's ear and he chimed in he'd heard about that. They were both pleased to hear you'd declared yourself fully recovered.

After dinner, the group was corralled by a handler to set up for the "blue carpet". Walking through the service hallways of the hotel, to avoid eager fans and press, you enjoyed the all too short moments while you walked with Chris' fingers twisted lightly together with yours. Chris and the rest of his "team" were directed to the ride for their entrance. With a quick kiss dotted to the side of your head and a squeeze of your hand, Chris was whisked away. Josh beckoned you to follow him.

Outside the theater, the street was packed with fans trying to catch a look or a chance to get inside. You flashed your credentials, like everyone else, as you shuffled in line with Josh into the venue. The two of you hung out in a green room of sorts, sipping on refreshments while you waited. You passed the time thanking Josh for his help again and chatting about your trip and visit to the Forbidden City. Almost an hour later, there was an announcement made and Josh ushered you into the theater, pointing out the seats reserved for Chris and his guests.

Taking a seat, at the end of Megan and Josh, you looked around, taking in the exciting moment. Okay, yeah. So, you already saw the movie in LA. But you never really see everything the first time you see a movie like Civil War. Everybody knows that. Your curiosity was piqued for what you might have missed. And besides, last time you watched with Frank and his family. Not a bad place to be, by any means, but this was your boyfriend's movie and, this time, you were going to watch it together.

Much like in Los Angeles, there was a small presentation of Team Cap before the viewing started. When it was over, you were applauding with everyone else, a soundtrack as Chris and his cohorts made their way into the theater seating before the house lights lowered and the show would start. You hadn't expected anything but to blend in with the crowd and Chris' little entourage. So, when Chris waved Josh down so he could sit next to you, your heart skipped a beat and your smile beamed at his hand coming rest on your thigh, as the screen and speakers came to life. You put your hand over his and your fingers curled around each other's hands, like you were on any other date to the movies.

The applause in the theater was thunderous. The premier was another success. This was going to be big. Like, could be bigger than people were already projecting big. And you were thrilled to have been a part of it then and getting to watch it unfold now. Who woulda thunk, huh?

A reception followed the showing. You were definitely out of your element on this one. The number of people there you actually knew could be counted between your two hands and with fingers to spare. And it's not like you could cling to your boyfriend's arm and have him show you the way
around and make introductions for you. You hadn't really considered that part of the night.

While Chris made the rounds, you enjoyed the free drinks and spread. Megan helicoptered near Chris, making sure he managed his time to see everyone he was supposed to. Josh turned into your travel buddy, wondering around the room with you and doing his half of the work to keep a light conversation going to pass the time. Thank god for Josh. He really was good people. You were definitely warming up to him.

You almost spilled your drink, somehow managing to dip with the glass and spare anything from rolling out, when someone quite literally slid into you at the bar. The laugh that followed, for your "oh, shit!" face at the moment you thought the cocktail was a loss, told you it was Sebastian that had just given you a minor heart attack. You looked, shaking your head at his eyes crinkled shut in absolute amusement of himself and trying so hard not to smile. You gave him a push in the arm, with your free hand.

"What's the big idea," you chided him, "you jerk?"

Sebastian laughed again, leaning in to give you a sympathetic grin and a half-ass apology. "That may have been a little harder than I meant it. I'm sorry," he smiled. "But good save though."

"Yeah," you scoffed, "I got magic hands."

His brow rose with a thought. "Oh, my god. Please, tell me that's on your résumé."

You couldn't fight the smile anymore and broke into a laugh. "No, but I might add it," you considered.

"Put me down as a reference," he encouraged, holding out his palm to you.

"Yeah," you nodded. "That'll keep me out of trouble."

Sebastian laughed, raising his hand for the bartender's attention. He ordered a gin and tonic, before turning his attention back to you, asking, "Having a good time? How was your trip?"

"I am," you smiled. "Trip was good. Still don't know what day it is, but I'll figure it out eventually."

"I feel ya," he agreed. "It takes me a day or so to even out when I come to China. It's weird. But I love it here. Wish we had some time to actually visit, though. There's some great people over here I know you'd like."

"Yeah, I saw your trip for The Martian last year," you told him.

"Oh," he smiled. "That was the best. Had waaay more time here to do things."

"I snuck out today to see the Forbidden City," you offered and his face lit up.

"Oh, my god. You did?" Sebastian marveled. "What'd you think? It's amazing, right?"

"It was incredible," you gushed, eyes wide with enthusiasm.

"Did you get the guide? Take any pictures?" he rattled on.

"No, I did the self-guided tape thing," you frowned. "I just got in this morning, so I only managed to do the little half-day trip the hotel had."

"Oh, no," Sebastain disapproved. "No, you gotta go back and do the whole thing."
"I would, if there was time," you agreed. "I'm lucky I got what I did."

"Well, that settles it," he decided, smacking his hand down on the bar. "We'll have to come back, when there's more time."

You laughed out loud accepting Sebastian's hand when he offered it to seal the deal. He raised his glass to you and you did the same for him, drinking to his toast for the "to be decided field trip to the Forbidden City" together. He asked what your favorite part was and you took out your phone to show him a picture of one of the temples you especially liked. You spent the next several minutes sharing your photos with Sebastian and trading tidbits and things you saw on your respective trips. You two only stopped going on about your adventures when Chris came over to join you.

"How you holding up?" he asked, cleverly using his move of reaching behind you for one of the set up flutes of champagne on the end of the bar to brush a kiss over the point of your shoulder.

You smiled for the seruptious affection, telling him, "Surprisingly well, all things considered."

"She tell you how she got here?" he asked Sebastian, gesturing to you with his drink. Sebastian shook his head, saying you were just talking about your earlier excursion, and Chris explained, "She was in Vegas with Frank Sunday afternoon, goes back to LA, grabs a suitcase for, like, some fahckin' one in the morning flight, and shows up at my door at 7:30 this morning."

"Jesus Christ," Sebastian gaped. "How are you still awake?"

"Well, it's Tuesday," you shrugged. "Apparently, I slept all day Monday."

The guys shared a laugh with you and Sebastian added, "What are you doing with a cocktail in your hand? You should have a pot of coffee."

"Who could sleep, with all this going on?" you wondered, waving a hand over the room. "I can sleep when I'm dead. But this? This only happens once in a lifetime."

"Not true," Sebastian corrected, straightening a finger off of his glass to knowingly point at you. "We have our field trip coming up."

"True," you thoughtfully nodded.

"What field trip?" Chris asked, ahead of a sip of his drink.

"Yeah," Sebastian seemed to realize. "Gonna need you to sign a permission slip for [y/n] here. We need to come back and do the full tour of the Forbidden City. She didn't get the whole experience."

Chris' brow rose in amusement, looking at you. "Is that so? When's the trip?"

You shrugged. "Beats me."

"Details are sketchy, but I'll have my people call your people," Sebastian assured him, with a confident wink. His brow rose, suggesting to Chris, "You should ask your mom if you can come along."

"I'll get right on that," Chris smiled, lifting his champagne in promise. He took a sip and turned to you. "How long you wanna stick around?"

You blinked, taking a second to absorb that, apparently, how long Chris stuck around the party for his movie was up to you. "Uh, whatever," you shrugged. "Whenever you're ready."
"You look a little tired, babe," he noted, with an unseen sweep of his thumb down the back of your arm.

Surprised, because you thought you were holding up well, you looked at Sebastian. With his sympathetic nose wrinkling and head tilt in agreement, you realized, "It has been kind of a long day, hasn't it? Maybe I should just catch a cab back to the hotel, get some sleep."

Chris grimaced, his head ticking back in disapproval, before a head shake 'no'. "Gimme a few minutes to make a lap, and then we'll get out of here," he told you, throwing back his glass for the last swallow of champagne, before he set the flute back on the bar.

"No, really," you began to protest, holding up a hand. "This is your big night."

He flashed a smile and shook his head, saying, before he stepped away, "There's three more just like it later." He held up his hand, fanning his fingers apart. "Five minutes," he promised you and pointed at Sebastian. "You got her?"

"No problem," Sebastian saluted with his drink.

Watching him disappear into the crowd, you admitted to Sebastian, "Gah. I feel like such a bum, making him leave early."

"You're not making him leave early," he assured you. "You do look beat and it's been a long day for everyone."

"Thanks, I think," you snorted.

"I mean it in the nicest way possible," he smiled.

You gave him a nudge, with your elbow. "I know."

True to his word, Chris was back at the bar about five minutes later. He gave Sebastian a handshake for keeping you company, telling him to have a good night and that he'd see him tomorrow.

Sebastian sent you away for the night with a friendly kiss puckered at your cheek, wishing you sweet dreams. Chris navigated the way out of the party and out to the car, with an occasional soft touch at the small of your back to bring you with him through turns of halls and doors. Megan and Josh followed you out and the four of you shared a limo back to the hotel.

On the ride, Josh gave the details for the next day's itinerary. You were flying out to Singapore tomorrow. Josh noted the times to be checked out of the hotel and at the airport by. They had arranged a late check out, as your flight didn't leave until just after 1 o'clock. A car would be waiting at 11:30 and you were in heaven at the thought of being able to sleep in. Leaving the party a little early didn't translate to avoiding fans camped out at the hotel, though. Safe behind the dark tint of the windows, Chris dotted a kiss to your cheek and fished the room key out of his pocket for you, telling you he'd meet you upstairs.

Chris and Megan got out of the car together and he started working the little crowd of Team Cap supporters gathered outside the lobby entrance. You waited another minute in the car with Josh, to be sure everyone was thoroughly distracted by their favorite star. The two of you slipped out the far side of the car and walked by without any notice. Although his room was a floor below, Josh rode the elevator with you to make sure you got in alright and no one had managed to figure out where exactly Chris was staying and snuck upstairs. You thanked him for the kindness.
Alone in the suite, you kicked off your sandals and headed into the bedroom. You frowned, remembering you hadn't really unpacked anything. Not that you were staying there long enough to warrant hanging anything in a closet or using an empty dresser drawer, but still, it would have been convenient to see your pajamas waiting on you. You had to admit, with the soothing feel of your feet on the cool marble floor of the bathroom and a catch of your reflection in the mirror, you were suddenly aware of how tired you actually were.

Teeth brushed and jewelry pulled off, you shuffled back into the bedroom. Tucking away your accessories, you tugged off your dress, folding it to lay to one side while you pulled your shorts and top from your luggage. You changed into your final outfit for the day and went to sit in the living room to wait for Chris' knock at the door. Thankfully, with the time you used to change, you didn't wait too long. Chris knocked only a few minutes after you'd settled into the end of the couch.

You hopped up, with as much energy as you could muster, and opened the door. "Can I help you?" you asked, standing in the doorway.

"Good evening, miss," Chris smiled. "I was wondering if you had a few minutes to discuss our hero and savior, Steve Rogers?"

You smiled, nodding and waving him inside. "As a matter of fact, I do," you told him, shutting and locking the door behind you both. "And, boy, let me tell ya, did you pick the right door for that."

Chris laughed, waiting just a couple steps away for you to come into his arms. "My luck doesn't seem to run out," he smiled, giving you a tight squeeze. He planted a kiss on your forehead, before letting you go and turning for the bedroom, asking as he went, "Did you have a good night?"

"I did," you smiled, turning off the light in the living room, as you followed.

"So, the Forbidden City with Seb, huh?" he said, quirking up an eyebrow, as he slipped his jacket off his arms. "You two trying to cause an international incident?"

"Mmmaybe," you shrugged, crawling onto the bed.

Tugging up the sleeve of his left arm, Chris unfastened his watch by the dresser, throwing a glance up at your reflection in the mirror. "My two cents?" he offered. "Just remember what I told you. Run away. Don't go to jail for that guy."

"Solid plan," you nodded, giving him a thumbs up. "Got it."

Chris chuckled. "Good lord," he mumbled, shaking his head. He looked back up at you in the mirror, as he set his watch carefully into its box. "You two are starting already. I thought we'd at least make it to London before the shenanigans started."

"I have not yet begun to defile myself," you winked, giving him your best version of Val Kilmer's Doc Holiday.

Laughing his way into the bathroom, he shut the door behind him and you climbed under the covers. You did some math in your head, comparing how much sleep you thought you'd had in the last day or so versus how much you figured you needed for tomorrow, setting the alarm on your phone with enough time to eat and shower before check out. Putting your phone aside on the nightstand on your side of the bed, you nestled into your pillow, pulling the blankets up under your chin.

When Chris came back to the room, you hid your long yawn under the edge of the covers, while Chris pulled off his sweater and hung it back up in the garment bag in the closet. You gave your eyes a long, two handed rub and, when you were finished, Chris was just folding back the sheets on the
empty half of the bed.

"I just picked a spot," you shrugged. "Didn't know which side of the bed you were using."

He smiled, reaching for the light switch on the wall. "It doesn't matter," he told you.

It took a moment for your eyes to adjust to the darkness in the room and, in the meantime, you felt the mattress move as Chris shifted to get comfortable. Once he was settled in, like a beacon from Boston, you heard his gentle, "Come heah" and found your way to rest under his open arm. You draped a lazy arm across him and he folded his around your shoulders, squeezing you close to press a kiss into the top of your downturned head.

"G'night, baby," he whispered.

You were too tired to remember if you said it back.

"Hey. ...[Y/n], babe, wake up."

You grumbled petulantly, screwing your eyes shut even tighter and frowning. You didn't want to get up. You were frickin' exhausted. You had no idea what time it was and didn't hear your alarm going off. But there was something about Chris' tone that invited you to at least open one eye. The grin he wore widened to a smile, looking a little proud that he'd brought you back to consciousness or proud of you for at least trying to look at him. He was sitting on his side of the bed, dressed in a pair of jeans and a red t-shirt. You could see from the way his left leg was cocked to lay on the bed that he even had a pair of gym shoes on.

"Come on," he said. "Time to get up."

You groaned into a long stretch of your arms over your head and up the headboard, the tired noise becoming a question. "What time is it?"

Chris looked at his watch and told you, "It's 6:46."

"What?" you whined, crushing your eyes closed again and balling up on your side, with a frown. "Noo. Whyy?"

"Because we gotta go," he chuckled, poking a finger into your ribs.

"Nooo," you insisted. You swatted his hand away, pulling the covers tightly over your shoulder to hide, and mumbled, "Plane doesn't leave for, like, five hours."

"We're not going to the airport," Chris told you.

"Wha-?" You shook your head, nuzzling your cheek further into the pillow. "I don't get it," you pouted.

Chris snickered, reclining onto the mattress, twisting onto his side to face you and rest his cheek on the end of your pillow. Tickling your side again, he persisted, "Wake up, sleepy head."

"Where are we going?" you gave in, realizing he wasn't giving up and rubbing the sleep out of your eyes.

"On an adventure," Chris teased.
"On an adventure?" you repeated, although with noticeably less enthusiasm and definitely more confusion.

"Yep!" he beamed, reaching over top of you to smack you on the ass, as he sat up. "Get up."

You jumped, grabbing the pillow from under your head to swing at him as he stood up. The end of the pillow caught him in the backside and he jerked around quickly to see what you hit him with. He laughed, bouncing a step away and out of reach. You fell back into your spot on the mattress, covering your head with your pillow. How the hell was he so damned chipper before 7 a.m., after the premier events yesterday, anyway?

Suddenly, the sheets were gone, whipped aside by Chris. He grabbed the pillow on your head and a brief tug of war ensued. Very brief, actually. Hey, you tried. But, damn, you're tired and he's got those fucking arms.

"I don't want to kill you," you warned, loudly, so he could hear as he went into the living room, "but you're not giving me any reasons not to."

"You're naht gonna do it," he smugly assured you, coming back into the bedroom from turning on the light in the next room. "You'd have to get out of bed to do it."

You flipped him off and he laughed at you. "Touché," you unhappily conceded.

"But if you don't get your ass out of bed," he began, pointing a stern finger and gaze your way, "I'm just gonna grab you and throw you in a cold shower."

"You don't have the balls," you assured him, pushing up to slouch against the headboard.

"Try me," he promised, with a cocky eyebrow raised.

You weren't interested in testing the theory. He could. Easily. And you knew it. No, thank you.

"C'mon," he said. "breakfast will be here soon. Grab a shower real quick. We're not coming back here today."

Thorougly confused, you moved aside the covers left over your knees and swung your feet down to the floor. "This is bullshit," you wailed through a yawn, while you stretched.

"Yes," Chris sarcastically agreed. "This is the worst thing that's ever happened to you."

Standing up and making your way around the foot of the bed, you suggested, "I don't know what's going on. It very well might be."

"I swear to gahd, [y/n]," Chris exclaimed, taking a swipe at your butt when you crossed his path. With an excited shriek, you leapt away in the knick of time, throwing the bathroom door shut behind you, as Chris threatened, "I will go without you!"

You chuckled on your side of the door, hearing the exasperated laughter from him on his side. You told him not to get his panties in a bunch and grabbed your toothbrush. Teeth cleaned and toilet used, you hopped into the shower. You let your hair air dry, as you slipped a hair band around your wrist and packed up your toiletries kit. Wrapped in a hotel robe, you elbowed the bedroom door shut, when you heard the knock at the front door. You heard the muffled sounds of Chris speaking with Room Service and the subtle rattle of wheels and dishes on a cart. In a soft, V-neck tee and a pair of denim shorts, you set aside your gym shoes for later and hastily tucked everything else back into your suitcase. Chris knocked gently on the bedroom door to let you know breakfast had arrived.
Over your meal, you tried needling the details of your "adventure" out of Chris, but the didn't budge. Sometimes he said he wouldn't tell you, it would ruin the surprise. Mostly, he just grinned smugly and shook his head. With a full belly and a couple cups of coffee, you were finally beginning to come to life. You and Chris wandered around the suite, doing a last minute inspection to make sure neither of you had forgotten to pack anything. He told you Josh would take care of getting the bags to the airport and you guys would meet him there. You slung your purse over your shoulder, with a few essentials for your plane ride later, pulled your hair up, and caught up to Chris waiting for you at the door. He adjusted a ball cap low on his brow and slipped on a pair of sunglasses, before ushering you out of the room.

You followed him across the lobby and out the front door. There was an SUV and driver waiting for you both. The driver opened the door for you to get in the backseat and Chris slid in beside you. He didn't tell the driver an address or anything, making you even more curious about where you were going and what you were doing. You were a little impatient during the commute. Morning traffic was starting to build and none of the scenery was familiar that you could have gotten a hint. When the car finally pulled to the curb and stopped, you looked down at the finger poking you in the side of your leg for your attention. You looked up at Chris, who was beaming proudly, and followed the jerk of his thumb to direct your attention out the windows on his side.

"We're here," he announced.

You ducked your head, peering past Chris to the sight outside of tourists flocking to a gate and the tip of some ornate structure rising in the distance over some treetops, asking, "Where is 'here'?


"What is that?" you wondered, trying to squint down the path and around people.

"Let's go see," he enthusiastically suggested.

The driver had come around the SUV to open the door for you both. You climbed out behind Chris and fell in at his side. Mingling in with the morning crowd of visitors, you set up your rented audio guide as you walked along. When the path opened up ahead of you, you were a little awestruck to see the Hall of Prayer for Good Harvests. Holy cow. Chris was right. This was not the worst thing to happen to you.

Taking in the expanse of the grounds around the temple you had to ask, "Where did you come up with this?"

Chris chuckled, the apples of his cheeks pressed into the frame of his sunglasses by his proud smile. "The hotel concierge was pretty helpful, last night."

"Last night?" you repeated, making a slow turn to take it all in.

"Yeah," he nodded. "I felt kinda bad that you were so rushed yesterday that you didn't get to see more of the Forbidden City. You were out like a light, so I called downstairs with some questions about some of the tourist ads in the hotel binder. The concierge recommended this one, since we didn't have a whole day to spend; helped me with some of the details. What d'ya think?"

"First impressions?" you considered, with a thoughtful pout. "Not bad, Evans. Not bad."

With an amused shake of his head, Chris pointed toward the temple and suggested you guys start there. You wandered around the site, listening to recorded tidbits about the historic structures you saw and snapping pics on your phone. Chris chimed in a couple times with little facts he picked up
from a quick online search last night. You had to admit, you were impressed.

You caught a show, making a couple short videos, in The Hall of Sacred Music. You tried your luck at the Echo Wall, but there were too many people around for you to see if you could actually hear anything. You kicked yourself for stubbornly being one of those people who rebelled against the 'selfie stick' when you tried to fit in as much of the large buildings as possible into the background of a couple pics. The extra inches of Chris' wingspan helped some and you couldn't help the lip bitten smile the first time he helped.

"What'sa matter?" he frowned, maybe a bit confused by your shaking head and soft giggle.

"Nothing," you assured him. "It's just, that's our first selfie on my phone."

"Was it?" he doubted. You nodded and he still didn't quite believe. "No way. ...Wait. ...Fahck, it is, isn't it?" His head cocked to the side, in thought. "No, it's not," he argued. "We took a picture in Atlanta, at the movie, remember? I sent it to Pratt."

"Yeah, you did," you agreed, pointing a finger at him. "But that's it and I don't have anything on my phone of us. ...Do you still even have that pic?"

Chris paused, a contemplative wrinkle coming to his brow. "I don't know," he realized. "Maybe? ...Okay, but how the fuck have we gone this long without another picture of us together?" he wondered.

"I don't know," you shrugged. "I guess it's 'cause you're so ashamed of me."

"Me?" Chris scoffed, steeping his fingertips into his chest in feigned offense. "I thought I was your secret shame." You laughed and Chris dug his own phone out of his pocket. "Oh, we gotta fix this shit," he said, sounding quite determined.

You twisted over your shoulder, trying to keep tabs on Chris as he maneuvered around behind you again. He pointed his finger for you to turn around and face forward, as he stretched his arms out together, reaching past the sides of your head in front of you both, his phone in his hands. He told you to 'look like you're having fun' and bent down a little, adjusting his aim and settling on a good angle to keep the Imperial Vault in frame behind the two of you. You laughed at his instruction, which put a convenient, and genuine, smile on your face. Your smile lit up and brow rose in surprise, when he puckered a noisy kiss to your cheek at the end of his 3-count and snapped a pic. He was pleased with his accomplishment, despite your protest that the picture made you look 'like a dork'. He assured you, he loved 'your dorky face' and stashed his phone as you started to walk along again.

At the Circular Mound Alter, you stood in the upper circle, the one that represented heaven over the lower rings of hell and earth. You tried not to laugh and elbowed Chris for his whispered joke in your ear, cheekily betting that 'no other guy had ever taken you to heaven before'. You scolded him, with as straight a face as you could manage, reminding him to behave himself. You were on sacred ground, after all.

With a disappointing check of Chris' watch, you realized you had to head back to the car. You put a little extra pep in your step to return your audio tour rentals and not miss your window to get to the airport on time. You let out a relieved breath when you clicked on your seatbelt in the chauffeured SUV and saw you had a couple minutes to spare, in case of traffic. By the time you reached the airport, you were cutting it close; meeting Josh, checking in, and getting to the gate just before boarding began. On the plane, you tucked in your earbuds for your iPod, while Chris scrolled through the music on his phone beside you. In the air, you nestled into your seat. While you napped, the Singapore press was getting their first peek at Civil War. Tomorrow would be another crazy day.
of junkets and premier events for Chris, but, for now, his shoulder made for a great pillow.
The gentle rise in Chris' shoulder woke you. Blinking the tired dryness out of your eyes, you looked around and over the back of your seat. Flight attendants and other passengers were settling in to land in Singapore. Chris smiled at you, asking if you had a good nap. You nodded, turning off your iPod and wrapping your earbuds around your music player. Reaching down to the floor for your purse, you tuck away your music and peaked out the window. You were still in the clouds, but every few seconds they thinned and you could see brief glimpses of land below. With seatbelts fastened, you watched out the window as the plane descended to the airport.

The captain taxied the plane to the gate, with an announcement of local weather and time info and thanked you for flying with them. As soon as the brakes went on at the jetway, people were on their feet, jockeying for space to reach their carryon in the overhead compartments and impatiently lining up to deplane. You rested a knee into your seat cushion, waiting for your turn, as Chris stood with one foot in the aisle to mark your places in line. He looked ahead through the cabin, hands stuffed in his pockets and back pack slung over his shoulder, seeming a little eager to get off the plane.

The door at the front of the plane opened and the flight attendants lined up to give you and the other passengers their fond farewells. Chris ushered you into the aisle to walk ahead of him. You smiled politely and thanked the flight crew on your way out. Stepping over the thin gap between the fuselage of the plane and the gangway, you exaggeratedly gagged at the humidity that smacked you in the face.

Turning over your shoulder to pant your tongue out at Chris, you quipped, "Can we get back on the plane?"

"Oh, my god," he complained, his face pinched unhappily. "It's like walking in soup."

"So glad I left LA for this," you teased, beginning to feel a little relief from the thick weather the further you got down the boarding bridge into the airport terminal.

"You and me both," he griped. "Jesus Christ."

The two of you stepped aside into the seating area outside of the gate, waiting for Josh, who was just a couple rows behind you. Chris waved up a hand to signal his assistant and, reunited, you all headed to the baggage claim area. With luggage in tow, you made your way out of the airport. Waiting for you at the curb, with a private car and driver, was Megan. She flagged your trio over and the driver set to work on taking everyone's luggage off their hands and stowing it in the rear of a newer model SUV. You climbed in with the others and were off to the hotel. On the way, Megan mentioned the press screening was almost over and the team from Marvel expected to hear first reviews soon. The film was raved about in Beijing. There really wasn't anything less to be expected in Singapore, but there was still an excitement to waiting to hear for sure.

At the hotel, Megan gave Chris the key cards for your room. She had arrived earlier that afternoon and took care of checking you both in. In the elevator, Chris checked his phone, while Megan rattled off a couple notes about the next day's events and mentioned the rest of Team Cap was already settling in and was going to have dinner at 8:30 downstairs in one of the hotel restaurants. If you wanted to join them, she could add a couple seats to the reservation.

Eyes fixed on you as he spoke, Chris told her, "It's been a long day. I think we might do dinner on our own. If we go down, we'll chance it on squeezing in with them."
You didn't argue, feeling a little travel weary now that you were standing still. When the elevator opened to let you off on your floor, Josh and Megan said their goodbyes. You and Chris headed down the hall and around the corner to find your room number. Chris unlocked the door, taking a minute to make sure both keys worked. When the lock clicked open the second time, he handed you one of the cards as he elbowed the door open. Chris held the door for you, shutting and locking it when you were inside.

This suite was a little bit larger than the one before. At least the area for the living room and dining area seemed bigger. The balcony ahead of you offered a view of the garden. With a fast look around, you spotted the doorway on your right to the bedroom and tugged your suitcase along behind you. You admired a large floral arrangement set on the four person dining table, beside a silver tray with a bottle of champagne in a bucket with glasses for two to welcome you, compliments of the hotel.

In the next room, you realized the balcony extended along the length of the suite. A set of doors off the bedroom opened to a small coffee table between two arm chairs to relax in. You hoisted your bag up onto the luggage rack with an unnecessary grunt of effort, much to Chris' amusement. Still chuckling at your pretended struggle, he set his suitcase up to balance on its end and hung his garment bag in the closet. You fell backward onto the bed...with a completely necessary sigh of contentment. Ahhh. It felt sooo good to stretch your hands up over your head and point your toes. Chris joined you, dropping face first into the plush bed, with a tired groan of his own.

You reached over, giving him a smack on the ass. "Welcome to Singapore!"

Chris swatted blindly at the air behind him, without much conviction and missing you completely. "Where did you get a second wind from?" he wondered, the sound of his voice slightly muffled from his cheek turned into the fluffy bedding.

"I have no idea," you admitted.

"What time is it?" he checked.

"You're asking the girl who isn't completely sure what day it is?" you teased and Chris laughed, rolling onto his back.

He checked his watch and let his hand fall to rest on his stomach. "7:49," he announced. Chris turned his head to see you. "You wanna go down for dinner or you wanna eat here?"

You shrugged, genuinely indifferent. "It's up to you."

"Well, shit," Chris grumbled. "I don't care either." He contemplated the decision for a moment, staring at the ceiling, before looking back to you. "Ro, sham, bo ya for it."

You snickered, intrigued by the idea. "Seriously?"

"Yeah," he nodded. "I'm restaurant, you're Room Service. Best two outta three. Ready?"

"Oh, wow. Okay. Yeah," you agreed, balling up a fist and flattening out your other hand, holding both in the air over your belly.

"Okay," Chris guided, setting up his own fist and palm, "one... two... three."

On the first shot, you beat Chris' paper with your scissors. You felt a little bit stupid for deciding the fate of dinner this way. On the next, his scissors cut your paper. By now, you were both taking this a tad more seriously than you probably should be. With the final throw, Chris' paper covered your rock, and the previously sleepy man-child beside you threw up his hands in victory.
"Yes!" he exclaimed. "Wwwinnah!"

"I thought you didn't care where we ate," you laughingly reminded him, knocking away his finger pointing, annoyingly, in your face.

"I don't," he assured you. "I care about winning."

"Oh, my god," you mockingly deadpanned. "You're so humble."

"Winner," he proudly repeated, pointing at himself, before he pushed himself up off the bed. Chris grabbed his suitcase off the floor and swung it onto the bed. "I gotta get a shower before we eat. I swear that humidity is stuck on me."

With a fresh set of clothes in hand, Chris disappeared to the bathroom. You opened up your suitcase for your toiletries kit. You pulled out a nicer looking top and kicked aside your gym shoes for sandals. Chris was already running the shower. You let yourself into the bathroom, needing the light above the mirror to paint on a pretty face for dinner. By the time you brushed out your hair, the mirror was starting to fog. You wiped a hand through it to clear a space to see the line you drew along your lashes.

"I can't see the mirror," you told him. "You were just complaining about the humidity and you turn the bathroom into a rain forest. You're like an ox and a moron."

"What did you just say?" he checked.

Speaking up, you smiled, saying, "I said you're an oxymoron. You can't complain about humidity and then steam up the bathroom."

"Whatever," Chris snorted, just as a series of water droplets came flying out from the cracked open, fogged up shower door.

You flinched, at the unexpected water splashing on your skin and your hand slipped. You stopped, frowning at the black jag of liner on your right eyelid, as you heard the shower door shut. Shooting Chris a dirty look you knew he couldn't see anyway, you grabbed a washcloth and wet the corner to erase your mistake. You were almost ready to redraw the line along your lashes, when you noticed the pair of drinking glasses beside the sink. You grabbed one of the cups and turned on the faucet to fill it up. You selected the cold water tap, for obvious reasons. Mwah-ha-ha. Tiptoeing to the end of the bathroom, you inched up to the shower door, moving with all the stealth of a ninja to gently pull the door open just enough to throw the cold water in.

You cackled proudly. Chris... Well, Chris was less enthused, letting out a startled and slightly pained yell, followed by a string of half-articulated profanities. You caught most of the syllables, that should not be repeated in polite society, which only fueled your laughter more. The shower door opened enough for Chris to grab a towel off the rod outside and you hightailed it out of there. In your hurry to escape, you fumbled your grab for the bathroom door handle. A miscalculation that gave Chris just enough time to whip the towel around his waist and slide to a stop next to you, his hand undoing the progress of the few inches you'd managed to pull the door open.

It's a distinct possibility that you'd never let out such a frightened shriek in your life. But, when dripping wet Chris hooked an arm around your belly and tilted you into his hip to swing you back around toward the running shower, you had never been more certain that you were in some serious trouble. Literally, kicking and screaming, you lost the struggle to free yourself. With a few long strides from Chris, you were back at the shower. Your pleas fell on deaf ears, as he yanked the shower door open again and twisted around to drop you into the water.
You sputtered and spit, shaking and swiping your now sopping hair out of your face. While it was your turn to swear and complain, clamoring like a newborn deer to get back on your feet, Chris, on the other hand, was exceptionally pleased with the result. You looked down, in absolute disbelief, of your soaking wet clothes, while he laughed his ass off, bent over at the waist with one hand clutching his chest and the other bracing himself on his knee. When he raised his head up, his face was red from laughter. You wiped your hair back off your brow and raised your chin up, intent to save what little dignity you had left. Chris wheezed, stuck in that place between hilarity and suffocation. You grabbed the shower head and turned it on him, catching him in the face.

He raised and flailed his hands, trying to shield himself from the spray, as you scolded him, "You sonuvabitch! What if my phone-"

Chris pushed past you to turn off the water, still laughing as he interrupted, reminding you, "Your phone's on the frickin' counter." He even pointed at it, after he shut off the shower. "Cahlm down."

"You didn't know that," you grumblingly persisted, flinging your arm out to throw water at him again.

From the vanity, Chris' phone started to ring. He put up a finger, warning you to stop and he insisted, "I did so." He picked up his phone to answer it and you stuck out your tongue at him. "Hey, Ma...It's 'good evening'. It's almost 8 o'clock at night over here...Yeah. Just got to the hotel a few minutes ago."

You were a mess. You grabbed the front of your t-shirt to, literally, wring it out. In front of you, Chris stifled his laughter behind the thumb of a balled up fist pressed against his lips, as he listened to his mother's end of the conversation for a minute. Peeking around the side of the shower, you spied a towel on the next rack over and grabbed it to start blotting yourself dry. While Chris quietly snickered, you peeled off your t-shirt, whipping it at him and smirking when it stuck to him with a loud, wet slap. His jaw stretched open in a silent cry at the apparent sting the impact made on his bare shoulder when he turned to try and avoid your throw. With an indifferent shrug to his plight, you bent over, twisting your hair up into the towel and brushing by him to go back to the other room [aggravated sigh] for some dry clothes.

Now that you were alone, you let yourself giggle, shaking your head at the idiots you two were. You glanced over at the clock beside the bed. Eek! It was just past eight. You dug through your suitcase, fishing out a whole new outfit. You could still hear Chris on the phone in the bathroom. When you heard him say 'goodbye', you would holler out the time to him. In the meantime, you tugged off the remainder of your wet duds and put on a fresh set of under clothes, a pair of skinny jeans, and a lightweight grey cardigan you buttoned all the way up. You rolled up the hem of your jeans a few flips and yanked up the sleeves of your sweater.

You needed to do something with...Hell. Everything, actually. Comb out and dry your hair, style it, put on a little makeup, and, ahem, hang out your clothes to dry. You went back into the bathroom. There was a slight wobble in one of your steps, as your heel slipped in some water on the polished marble floor. You stayed on your feet, with a little panicked wave of you arm, and Chris made a teeth baring wince, in anticipation of a fall but too far away to be of any help. You both breathed a sigh of relief and he threw a towel on the floor, moving it around with his foot to mop up the trails of wet footprints and drips across the floor. He picked up the towel, pecking a quick kiss to your cheek as he went by to throw it over the side of the tub to hang. In the mirror, you watched and smiled at seeing your t-shirt wrung out and draped over the side of the tub to dry as well. You made the universal sign of "we're going to be late", raising your wrist to point where a watch would be, and Chris nodded his understanding of the time. On his way out of the bathroom, he gave you a playful smack on the butt and sent you a wink in the mirror when you jumped and smiled.
With your water logged clothes laid out over the tub side and towel rack to dry out, you turned the blow dryer on your hair for a couple minutes. It wasn't perfectly dry, but it was good enough to knot up in a loose bun and still look cute. You smoothed on a dab of crème eye shadow, redid your eyeliner, and dusted some color onto your cheeks. By the time you were pressing and popping your lips, to even out your lip gloss, Chris poked his head in the door to see if you were ready.

"Not brave enough to step all the way in?" you teased, mischievously squinting at his reflection from the side of your eye.

Chris smiled and shook his head. "Not while you're in there." You shrugged, innocently, and he asked, "You ready to go? It's almost 8:20."

"All set," you nodded, putting your makeup away in its zippered pocket of your travel kit.

For no particular reason, the short walk to the elevator was quiet. Chris' fingertips were twisted loosely with yours when you entered the car for the ride down to the lobby. Downstairs, he let your hand go, sweeping an arm out in front of him for you to go ahead. You spotted Mackie in the lobby before you spotted the sign for the restaurant. As he was pulling the door open, he caught sight of you two and waited, with a grin on his face.

"What's up, Polka Dot?" he smiled, opening up an arm to you and dropping it around the back of your waist.

You said 'hello' and Chris shook Anthony's free hand. Turning you with him, Mackie ushered you in the door, as if you were his date. Waiting to be seated, Joe and Sebastian chatted in front of the hostess' podium. Sebastian's smile lit up when he saw you, stopping in mid-sentence to take you off Mackie's hands for a hug. Chris exchanged manly nods in greetings with the others and Joe leaned in to ask the hostess if they could squeeze in a couple more seats in at the table.

Dinner was delicious and the conversation came naturally. Tomorrow was going to be a long day for Team Cap. And you, too. You were going to tag along for the day's events. The day would kick off with the press junket and photocall, then another photocall before the fan event/blue carpet in the Marina Bay Sands shopping mall. Although your day would differ significantly, you wholeheartedly agreed with the guys that it was a good idea to go to bed early. In fact, after dessert, everyone parted ways for the night.

Back in your suite, you locked the door and turned off the lights on your way back to the bedroom, assuming you were calling it a day. There was a TV at the end of the room, if either of you weren't ready for bed yet. Chris stepped out of his shoes, setting them beside his suitcase, while you folded a leg under you to perch on the side of the bed and answer a 'checking in' text from your brother. After a brief search for the hotel wifi, you sent him a couple pics from your sightseeing adventures to share with the rest of the fam. You wasted a minute, thumbing through your photo album on your phone, to wait and be sure your brother was done messaging you for the night, and Chris came to sit by you, peering over your shoulder.

Your scrolling and tapping held his interest for several photos. You snuffled a laugh, with a grin pulling your lips tight when Chris turned his attention to peppering your neck with kisses. His warm exhales on your skin gave you an excited tingle. You closed your album and locked your phone and Chris pulled it from your hand, blindly reaching behind him to set it aside at the foot of the bed. Chris reached a hand over you to cradle the side of your neck, when the soft bristles of his beard tickled your skin and you shied away.

Chris turned your chin in his hand, leaving lingering kisses on your lips. He trailed away, nibbling along your jaw, the tip of his nose brushing past your ear. His fingertips drawing lines down the left
side of your neck as slowly as his lips drifted down the right, your hand found his arm across your
chest to hang from. As his mouth followed the curve of your neck, his fingers found the collar of
your cardigan, dexterously undoing each button in order, as he guided you back to the mattress and
you were reminded: making out with Chris Evans is awesome.

Your hips twisted, one leg hooking behind his, as he traced a finger down your belly to the top of
your jeans, with a touch so light you fought hard not to giggle. Combing your fingers into the back
of his hair, you shared a deep kiss, while Chris thumbed open the button on your pants. The giggle
couldn't be stopped, when your skinny jeans proved too skinny for Chris to tug open the way that
you were laying. You held up a finger for him to hold on, before you dotted a fast kiss to his lips and
stood up to shimmy out of your jeans. While you were at it, you figured you'd ditch the sweater, too.

Chris smiled his approval, when you gave his shoulder a push to tell him to lie back down. He
seemed to enjoy the sight of you, in your pale colored bra and panties, climbing back onto the bed to
straddle his lap. His hands ran up your thighs, slowly, and you leaned down to capture his lips with
yours. The kisses were hungry, as if you somehow hadn't just enjoyed a good meal. Your hands
between you, you found and undid the button and zipper of his jeans, pushing the material aside and
reaching into his boxer briefs to stroke and free his hardening length.

He let out a breath, his eyes lidding heavily at your twisting pull of him. You inched backward,
never loosing touch, as you took him into your mouth. The hum you made elicited a hissed profanity
from under his breath. You pulled back, working him with your hand and drawing with the point
your tongue in teasing circles around the tip of his cock. Chris swore again and you slid your mouth
over him, hollowing your cheeks as you sucked. You alternated the move with taking him in as far
as you could. It wasn't a complaint when his hand found yours on his side and he squeezed, picking
his head up to pant out, "Wait."

You looked up, keeping your hand wrapped around him and moving slowly. "What?"

"Jesus," he breathed out, letting his head fall back for a second.

His eyes met yours again, tugging on your hand to bring you up to him. He pressed a firm kiss to
your lips, rolling you onto your back to lie beneath him. Chris dragged his lips over the curves of
your breasts peeking out from the cups of your bra, massaging whichever breast his lips weren't
presently on, before he sat up and scooted off the bed.

Chris made short work of removing his shirt, muttering, "Wait. Waitwaitwait."

He pulled off his jeans and underwear, tossing them haphazardly aside, as he fumbled through a
pocket on the inside of his suitcase lid. Chris found a strip of condoms and tore one off the end, on
his way back to you in bed. He dropped the extras on the nightstand and you moved back on the
mattress, as he rolled on the condom.

Chris climbed back over you with a quickness that made you smile against the kiss he planted on
your lips. He wasted no time tugging your panties off your hips and down your legs. His weight on
an elbow near your head and his hand at your hip, he pushed inside, with a low groan, and fell into a
fervent rhythm right away. Chris' enthusiasm was catching and you nibbled and bit at his lower lip and
shoulder, pulling him to you when you folded your arms and splayed your fingers over his
back.

He put a hand under your thigh, raising up your leg and driving deeper into you. You tilted your hips
to find the friction you wanted, giving a moan and small gasp of approval when he shifted and there
was a subtle change in the angle he had you at, finding just the right spot. You bit and tugged at his
earlobe and he sucked wet kisses to your throat. You tightened up around him, your breath ragged
past his ear and a whimper and cry of his name in the air as you let go. Chris pressed on, following you over the edge, with a growled out profanity into your shoulder, after several moments of you drawing out your own bliss by clenching and releasing your walls around him in sync with his strokes.

Chris crumpled, resting his forehead in the crook of your neck. He swallowed, gulping down a breath to steady himself. You smiled a contented kiss into the top of his head, as you lovingly scratched your fingernails through his hair. With a small sigh, Chris picked up his head to give you a kiss.

After a quiet moment, he playfully smirked. "You know, if you hadn't fallen asleep so fast in Beijing," he noted, "we could'a put a pin in the map for every stop of the press tour."

You laughed and he bucked his hips against yours, mischievously wagging up his brow at the idea of screwing in every city the tour stopped. Your own brow rose, enjoying the feel of him still inside you, as you smiled and shook your head at your incorrigible boyfriend.

"You're ridiculous," you decided.

"I'm just sayin'," he shrugged. "We've done LA plenty of times. Now Singapore, then-"

"Yeah, I get it," you snickered. You smooshed your hand over his face to get him to stop listing cities you still had the opportunity to christen and he puckered a noisy kiss into your palm.

"Still can't believe you threw me in the shower," you grumbled, as his head ticked away from your hand.

He gave you an incredulous look. "What'd you think was gonna happen?"

"Something reasonable!" you declared, with a gentle swat of the back of your hand into his chest. "Like flushing the toilet when I'm in the shower next. An eye for an eye, not a nuclear assault."

Chris hung his head, his shoulders shaking with the laughter he was failing to hide. "Nuclear assault?" he repeated. "And you say I'm the ridiculous one?"

"Oh, shut up," you said, doing your best to frown at him.

You couldn't hold back your smile though, when he flashed you his and pecked a kiss to your nose. Chris climbed off of you, disappearing to the bathroom to clean up. You sat up and slipped off the straps of your bra, unhooking it to toss at your suitcase across the room. Stretching down to the end of the bed, you grabbed your phone and Chris' t-shirt. You pulled on his shirt to sleep in, setting you phone on the nightstand and sliding under the covers.

Chris came back, grabbing the rest of his clothes off the floor. He pulled his boxer briefs back on, fishing his phone out of his pants pocket before he dropped his jeans on top of his luggage and joined you in bed. Settling under the covers, he eyed you suspiciously, noting, "That looks familiar" and nodding toward the cotton covering your shoulders.

"Something I just picked up," you winked.

Chris twisted over to reach the switch for the bedside lamp and turned off the light in the room.

"I like it," he smiled, highlighting his approval with a kiss on your forehead, as you both turned to each other to cuddle up for the night. "Looks good on you."
"What? This old thing?" you snickered.

He gave you a squeeze and asked, "So, how's the trip, so far?"

"Exhausting," you quipped and you smiled at feeling the snuffled laughter move his chest against you. "I like it," you told him. "I mean, I know I kinda just got here, but this is fun. And thank you. The Temple of Heaven? Yeah, this morning was awesome."

"Good," he nodded, sounding pleased, despite not being able to see his face above yours, as you nestled into his shoulder.

"How's the trip been for you?" you checked.

"Hectic," he admitted and you could understand why, thinking about tomorrow's itinerary. "But it got way better when you showed up."

"Naturally," you giggled, with no sign of even fake humility.

Chris chuckled and turned his chin down to kiss the top of your head. "Smartass," he grumbled against your hair.
Chapter 41

Fucking hell. There it was. Inescapable. Right in front of you. Mocking you. Tormenting you. Reminding you, you had only one thing to do on this press tour...and it wasn't going to be pleasant.

Looking up at you, from the middle of your suitcase, was the red, menacing face of your HYDRA t-shirt from the NOLA comic con. You were having such a good time, you'd forgotten your triple dog dare from Frank. To get his blessings to be gone for the trip, you had to send him a photo from the tour, of you and Chris, with you in the un-official uniform shirt of Team Crossbones. You still didn't know how you were going to make that happen, but you were smart enough to flip the lid of your suitcase closed when you heard the handle of the bathroom door turning to open, keeping the tee out of sight as Chris came back into the bedroom. You made a distracted and casual play at inspecting your long sleeve t-shirt for wrinkles against the morning light in the window, before pulling it on overhead and pushing up the sleeves below your elbows.

It was an adorably domestic morning in Singapore. While you loosely gathered up your hair in one hand, turning from side to side to eye your reflection and debate a hairstyle in the bathroom mirror, Chris reached around you for his watch from the vanity. He could have asked you to move, but instead he leaned to bend under your raised elbow, as you twisted your hair around your fingers to see another style, dotting a kiss behind you ear when he stood back up. You bit your lip with a smile at him in the mirror, your eyes tracking him in the mirror on the next wall back to the bedroom, as he fastened his watch band. He picked up the half-empty coffee mug he'd been wandering around with since breakfast, disappearing into the living room as he checked his phone and sipped his cooling coffee.

You were just tucking in a simple gold colored bar style bun pin, when Chris called from the other room to offer you the last of the coffee. You told him it was all his, moving on to put on a little makeup for the long day ahead. The light addition of copper colored crème eyeshadow was its own accessory for the thin navy stripes that crossed your v-neck shirt you selected with your pale khaki shorts with the cuffed hem and wide brown belt with a gold buckle. The subtle tan that your skin had begun to soak up from the spring sun in L.A helped highlight all the effort you'd been putting in to "getting back into fighting shape", as Frank had called it, after your little stitched foot disaster. You gave yourself an approving nod, tucking in an off center tab of your shirt's hem behind your waistband to show off your belt and give you just the right amount of effortless hotness.

Chris crossed paths with you, on his way to the closet for his suit coat and your way out of the bathroom. You both turned to slide past each other, with a cute titter from you both at the near collision. He flattened the collar of his white polo shirt in the mirror and you spritzed on one of your favorite flowery scents from the travel-sized bottle you picked up at Bath & Body Works. You dropped the mini-bottle in your purse and stepped into a pair of wedge sandals. You traded balance from one leg to the other, kicking your foot up behind you to adjust the straps at your heels and caught Chris admiring the view, his eyes finishing their trip up your legs to settle on your ass. Realizing he'd been busted, when you cleared your throat and quirked an eyebrow at him from over your shoulder, he ducked his head, running his hand over his bearded chin beneath a shyed smile.

"You look very nice," he complimented.

The sincerity in his voice, mixed with that hint of bashfulness, practically made you swoon. You didn't mind the attention or the compliment, but still decided to play.

"Uh-huh," you nodded, planting your hands on your hips. "Nice try, buddy." You pointed to your face, adding, "My eyes are up here."
Chris laughed, shaking his head at you. He took a few steps forward to meet you, putting a hand lightly on your elbow and turning his face to kiss your cheek. He let go of your arm, reaching behind you to give your ass a gentle swat.

He gave you a wink, saying, "I'm not even a little sorry."

"Typical," you scoffed, with a playful smirk.

You followed a few steps behind, with Chris leading the way to the next room, as he teased, "I kinda liked it." He slipped his phone in his pants pocket and adjusted his jacket over his arm. With a warm smile back at you, he added, "It was like I had my flamingo back again."

*Oh, he's good.* How were you supposed to see anything with all these hearts in your eyes? Here's hoping that you don't trip.

"You ready to go?"

You nodded and smiled, "Yep."

Chris opened the door, placing the door hanger on the handle outside handle to ask for housekeeping to clean while you were out. Holding the door open for you, he swept his free hand out to usher you ahead of him. You felt his hand smooth across your back and curl around your waist, pulling you into his side, as you walked down the hall.

"You really do look nice this morning," he kindly insisted, punctuating his assertion with a kiss to the side of your hair.

"Thank you," you smiled, hooking your arm around his waist, with a small hug into his side.

"Do you have your passes and stuff from Josh?" he checked.

"In my purse," you confirmed, giving the bag hanging from your shoulder a little pat.

"It's going to be a long day," Chris reminded you, taking back his arm to reach across you for the elevator call button. "You got your room key, in case you want to-"

"Ohh, you're not getting rid of me that easily," you promised, nudging your elbow gently into his ribs. "I'm with you till the end of the line, today."

The bell rang the elevator's arrival and Chris looked at you for a moment, an expression akin to "Did you just really?" The doors slid open to the empty car and you popped up on your toes to peck a kiss to his cheek. You wagged your brow up, smiling as you got in the elevator. Chris chuckled, shaking his head and stepping in behind you.

"You're ridiculous," he decided, pressing the button for your stop.

"You are," you muttered back.

Beside you, Chris snorted softly and insisted, just as quietly, "No. You ah'."


"Said the girl quoting superhero movies," he argued.

"I've changed teams," you resolutely decided. "I'm Team Bucky now."
"Yeah?" Chris mused, raising an eyebrow, as he watched the floor numbers counting down. "Well, nobody's more Team Bucky than Steve," he pointed out. "Enjoy second place, loser."

The bell dinged again and the car doors slid apart. Chris walked out, confidently, leaving you to stare after him for a moment, your mouth gaped in surprise at the burn. Impressed, but still stung, you hurried to catch up with him. Chris swung his jacket around to slip his arms into, like nothing happened, and waved 'good morning' to Megan and Josh waiting for you. You put on your lanyard and pass when Josh put on his and you were set.

Your tiny entourage met staff from the conference center at the door and were ushered to a small conference room that stood in for a green room. Joe was already there, sipping from a tall paper coffee cup and nodding along to whatever Anthony was saying. You were greeted warmly with the others. Joe gave your hand a kind squeeze and gave a surprised look on his face that you were going to "tough it out" all day with them. Anthony gave you a friendly push in the arm, saying it wasn't anything "Boots" couldn't handle. Sebastian showed up a few minutes later and made you the winner of his only hug offered during his hellos. Everyone milled around for a bit, chatting and picking at the selection of breakfast quiches and tarts, pastries, and fresh fruit in the room.

One of the event coordinators came in and explained the schedule for the press conference and photoshoot that followed, noting the location of the next room and briefly describing the set up of the stage in the room and how the stars would enter. He said the journalists were just being allowed into the room and told the cast they had about 20 minutes until they took the stage. Josh went out for a cup of coffee, from one of the conference center vendors, for Chris to take with him, Megan and the other PR-type people in the room huddled, and you relaxed in a plush rolling chair around a table with Team Cap. You made a mental note to not sit in wheeled furniture when you're next to Anthony Mackie. Whenever your attention wandered around the room, you found yourself rolled away a couple feet; the result of Mackie pushing his foot into one of the spokes of your chair and sending you away, making you have to quite noticeably scoot back to the table. After the second time it happened, and the table snickered at your expense, you parked your chair against his and held onto the arm of his seat, anchoring yourself in place. Anthony just grinned at you from the side of his eye and kept talking.

Chris had his coffee and checked his watch. It was almost time and he asked if you wouldn't mind keeping his jacket for him, opting against it to blend in with Sebastian and Anthony's more casual look. Hey, at least he asked this time, instead of just throwing his sunglasses or whatever your way presumptively, right? Of course, you would and you'd nodded, just as staff came to escort you and the other "guests" to the next room. You left Chris with a small wave and a smile, continuing on with Josh and a handful of the other people from the green room.

In the press conference room, photographers and writers were divided between sitting and standing in the rows of seating, their conversations an indistinct murmur in the room. The emcee was crouched on the corner of the stage, having a discussion with some convention center staff and you and the others were shown to a patch of empty seats in the back corner of the audience. You settled in, folding and laying Chris' coat neatly over your lap to wait for the Q&A to begin.

The crowd of reporters began to still themselves as the emcee stood up and moved to stand beside the table on stage. You sat up a little straighter in your chair, trying to find the best angle through the sea of heads and cameras ahead of you. Shifting an inch to your right made all the difference and you had a pretty good view of the middle of the table, where place cards told you Sebastian and Chris would be seated. The emcee took a cue from some unseen source behind the projector screen beside the stage, took a breath, and began his welcome and introduction. Time for the Singapore press conference to begin.
The press conference was amusing. Some of the questions were a bit lighter than you expected. You didn't expect a stuffy, all business style Q&A, but you definitely were surprised by how much Team Cap kept you laughing. Sebastian was a little muted, but he didn't seem to get too many questions. It was like the panel in NOLA. You almost didn't want it to end.

Unfortunately, it did end. You snuck out the back with Josh and Megan to go back to the green room. The stage was going to be turned over from the table and chairs setting to a blank space for the photocall. The switch gave everyone a fifteen minute break. Team Cap was huddled together, not taking the time to get too comfortable in the short in between. You ducked out,-excusing yourself to run back to your room and stash Chris' jacket, since he decided he didn't want it anymore for the day.

You got back just in the nick of time. Flashing your laminated badge to get back into the conference room, the emcee was just starting his announcement to bring Joe and his actors back out one at a time for photos. You snapped a picture of a shy, yet bright, smile from Sebastian, sending it on to his phone just before he left the stage, labeling it, "Found: humble Romanian puppy."

The announcer began to introduce Chris and, when you turned your eyes to the side of the stage, anticipating his appearance, you saw him peeking into the crowded room. He was crouched on the steps up to the stage, leaning into his right hand on the edge of the short platform, holding onto the rigging of the screen he peered out from behind with the other. His gaze scanned the room under the slight furrow of concentration in his brow, like he was looking for something. Your eyes met his just as the emcee said his name. The corners of his mouth tugged up into a grin and his brow relaxed, looking a bit relieved. You hadn't made it back with enough time to see him in the green room again. Maybe he had thought you weren't there. In any case, he popped up the stairs and strolled confidently out to the center of the stage, tugging his shirt smooth as he went.

The almost instantaneous second hand embarrassment you felt for Chris was doubled by his awkward smile. Someone called out for him to show them his abs. He didn't seem to hear it at first, or maybe he hoped he'd heard wrong, but when he questioned, "What?" and they did it again, you registered the subtle crinkle in his brow. It wasn't there from the squint of adjusting to the stage lighting and camera flashes. His shaking head and uncomfortably chuckled, "No...No." made you cringe. The awkward moment was compounded by the emcee noting he could see Chris' abs from where he stood and Chris deflected it all, gesturing and explaining it's a tight shirt.

The shoot seemed to go back to normal. Chris pocketed his hands, turning his head to give the people in different angles of the room a chance to catch a good shot. You had taken a few pictures for yourself, before the whole abs debacle. Looking at the shots you grabbed of him coming in, you realized the harsh lighting in the room thinned his shirt and you could trace around his tattoos showing through the light colored material. There was something kind of hot about the phenomenon, but you couldn't stop the thought that others had noticed before you, and that's probably what got the cat calling started, from running through your mind. Poor guy. Sure, your boyfriend was hot as hell, but he was still a human being.

When the photocall was over, you and the others returned to the green room again. Chris' face brightened up, as soon as he saw you come through the door. He smiled, raising his chin in a nod to say he saw you and you went straight to him. He took his hand out of his pocket to pull you into his side for a brief hug and looked much more relaxed. Sebastian pointed at you, laughing about your picture and how he sent it to Margarita with your caption, saying, "She'll send you a reward."

It was time for lunch. Before the junket continued, and Team Cap would sit down for the rounds of individual interviews, you went back across to the hotel. You soaked up the view from the rooftop
restaurant, at tables grouped together to accommodate the guys and a handful of their entourage. Your scored the prime real estate between Chris and Mackie.

Chris reminded you, the one on one interviews were blocked for a couple hours. They were scheduled very tightly and there wouldn't be much room for interacting in between. He offered you the out to go back to the room or maybe check out the casino or something else fun to kill the time. He could call you when they were finished and figure out where to meet back up, before the fan experience and blue carpet events.

"Do it," Anthony ominously insisted. "Get out, while you still can."

"It can't be *that* boring," you assured him.

"It'll suck the life right out of ya," Sebastian agreed, solemnly shaking his head.

"Maybe I could check out the casino," you pondered. "Maybe the pool."

"Oh, that's bullshit," Chris declared, putting down his fork and scowling at you. "That's cool."

"What?" you laughed, with an innocent rise in your shoulders.

"It's fahckin' hot as ball soup," he complained, "and you get to go lounge around the pool while we sweat it out under the camera lights."

"This weather is ridiculous," Mackie grumblingly chimed in.

"Hey," you shrugged, "I'm not here to work."

"You did tell her to do something fun during the interviews," Sebastian reminded him.

Chris pointed a finger across the table at him. "You're never on my side anymore," he noted, with a comically pained expression and disappointed tip of his head.

Sebastian put on a serious expression, nodding at you, as he chewed, saying, "Bear fight."

"Bear fight," you agreed, reaching over the table to meet and bump your fist with his.

"Bear fight?" Joe questioned, with a laugh.

"See," Sebastian started to explain, turning to Joe, "the thing is..."

You tuned out of the story when Chris warned you, "Whatever you do, don't wear yourself out. The guys want to go out after the carpet."

"After the carpet?" you parroted. "You're not watching the movie?"

"I gotta see his face all day, every day on this tour," Mackie told you. "I draw the line at seeing it twenty feet high every night." You snickered and Anthony nudged his elbow to yours with a smile. "Mr. Stan has a line on a karaoke bar. You in?"

All you had to hear was Sebastian Stan's name in the same sentence as 'karaoke bar'. "I'm in," you nodded.

"You sing?" Anthony checked.

"She does car karaoke. Sings the hell outta the radio," Chris winked.
"Yeah," Mackie smiled, "but do you karaoke?"

"Not really," you admitted. "At a DJ friend's house at parties, sometimes, but not out at a bar in front of a bunch of strangers."

"Are we talking about karaoke?" Sebastian brightly interrupted, apparently finished with 'the history of bear fight'. "Friend of mine recommended this place. It's not too far from here." Sebastian's brow pulled down in curiosity. "Will you sing?"

You floundered for a moment. "Well, I- I mean, I don't know. Maybe?"

"If you do car karaoke..." Anthony shrugged, leading you on. "And you do it at parties..."

"Oh, you gotta," Sebastian decided. "You're going with us, right?"

"Oh, I'm going," you promised. "I have to see you guys karaoke."

"I'm not doin' it," Chris quirked up an eyebrow and cocked his head, stabbing some salad onto his fork.

"Oh, yes you are," Mackie confidently assured him.

"I'm going so I can see you two idiots make asses of yourselves," Chris corrected, as he chewed, pointing his empty fork at Sebastian and then Anthony.

"You're going to sing," Anthony persisted, nodding to himself.

"You keep tellin' yourself that," Chris smiled, loading his fork again. "Naht gonna happen."

"That's okay," Sebastian shrugged. "[Y/n] I'll fill in for you."

Sebastian sent you a smile and a wink and beside you Chris agreed. "She can do it," he nodded. "Maybe she'll even do some of her choreography."

Mackie dropped his fork and put up his hand. "Hey now," he scowled. "What you all do in the privacy of your own room is your business. Don't bring it up at the table."

Everyone had a laugh and Chris waved his hand over the table to end the matter. "That's naht what I meant," he shook his head, closing his eyes over a mildly embarrassed smile.

"Dinner and a show?" Sebastian teased. "You dance with karaoke?"

You felt the heat coming back to your cheeks, planning a way to skirt around the topic, but Chris stepped in. "Fun fact: you play Jingle Bell Rock and she'll bust out into the Mean Girls choreography."

"Whaaa?" Sebastian gaped, curious and plainly intrigued.

"Aw, come on," you whined, giving him a push in the arm. "Really?"

"I think the better question is, really?" Mackie said, looking pointedly at you and with a raised eyebrow, mayyybe judging you.

"Gah," you groaned, rolling you eyes at Chris. "Yeah." You held up your finger to stipulate, "But only with my girlfriends. You can't just do that in the middle of the grocery store by yourself."
"Why not?" Sebastian asked, around a mouthful of his sandwich and looking surprisingly serious.

You weren't going to win this and decided to just shake your head. There was another nudge from Anthony, who insisted, "You're coming to the next Christmas party."

You managed to survive lunch. Questions about your karaoke career and life as a silver screen choreography enthusiast eventually became discussion about the rest of the day's events. You had pretty much decided to yourself on checking out the roof top pools while the guys went back to work. On your way out of the restaurant, you dismissed yourself from the group, getting off on your floor and sending them off with your best wishes for fast and fun interviews. You headed back to the room to change into a bathing suit. The pool was calling.

Life is hard...when you have to live it from the edge of an infinity pool, on the rooftop of one of the most expensive buildings in the world, drinking in the Singapore skyline, with a drink in your hand. Yes, life was, in fact, pretty rough. But you somehow managed to survive a couple hours on your own in this cruel world. The view was great and the water refreshing. You felt a little bad for Chris and the guys, who had to sit still, under lights, answering the same questions over and over again (well, probably). A little bad, but not enough to keep you from enjoying yourself.

After you were sufficiently relaxed, you caught the time, from a passing waiter, and headed back to your room to get ready for the rest of the day. You made sure you had your pass to get you in and went back to the convention center. With a flash of your all access badge and a few helpful points in the right direction, you found the conference rooms Team Cap was using for interview sets. A staff person outside the door told you they were still taping and, instead of trying to tiptoe in, you decided to wait in the hallway. The nice man, who was probably young enough to be some kind of intern, said it should only be a few more minutes until the current interview was over. To kill time, you wandered slowly down the hallway, looking absentmindedly at art on the walls and out windows. When you figured you'd meandered far enough, you turned your slow stroll around and went back to the conference rooms.

Perfect timing. Because, just as you were walking up, the interview crew was just walking out. The staffer opened the door for you and you found yourself on the back of a black cloth backdrop. After a quick look left and right, you took your chances to walk around the right end of the screen. On the other side was an oversized poster for the movie, some director's chairs spread around in front of and behind the cameras, and, most importantly, your favorite leading man, Chris. He was standing at the side of the set, holding a cup of coffee and talking to Megan. He did a double take, stopping mid-sentence to flash you an easy smile and pulling his hand from his pocket to give you a little wave. You didn't want to interrupt. The next journalist had come in and was setting up with her little crew. You did that weird set of tiny hand gestures people do that universally conveys to someone else that you'll be waiting somewhere over "there". He nodded and smiled again. You put your 'loafing around on set' skills to work and found an empty corner to stash yourself in.

After a minute, Megan pointed back to the set and Chris looked over his shoulder. It looked like they were ready to get started again. He took a quick drink of his coffee and walked back over. He shook hands with the interviewer, catching her as she half-stood out of her chair, waving with his coffee for her to sit. They exchanged a bit of causal banter, 'big fan' and 'thank you' type things, while a tech did something with the microphone Chris was wearing. You settled back into a comfortable lean on the wall and Chris looked over, squinting to see around the set lights. When he saw you, he smiled and mouthed "Last one". You nodded and smiled, your sign that you were in no rush. Megan set herself up behind the action, next to who you took to be a producer, switching her gaze from Chris down to the monitor in front of her. You listened in and grinned to yourself whenever Chris would
sneak in a sip of coffee between questions. Poor guys was gutting out these long days like a pro...and singlehandedly keeping the world's coffee growers in business.

There were handshakes all around, when the interview was over. Chris thanked everyone for their time and accepted their thanks for his. He was polite to everyone, but there was a subtle speed to the way he got out of the room. You fell in behind him and Megan. She gave a few notes on how the interviews went, while you walked back to the hotel. There was about an hour before the fan and premiere events started. Megan was off to see about a few things at the mall and left you and Chris to meet the rest of the gang for an early dinner at another restaurant. With his head down, staring at his phone, and standing just behind your shoulder, Chris managed to go unnoticed by the talkative business travelers you shared the ride upstairs with. When they got off the elevator and you two were alone, you snickered at the visible relief you saw come to Chris' face before he gave you a mildly disappointed frown.

"You went to the pool," he told you, as if you didn't know. You nodded and then so did he. "I can smell the chlorine."

You'd twisted up your hair to keep it dry and had rinsed off real quick before you got dressed again. You even used the lightly scented hand lotion in the bathroom and spritzed on some body spray before you left the room. Putting your forearm up to your nose to double check, you worried, "Can you?"

He hummed and nodded, bending his head down to kiss the curve of your neck as the elevator slowed to a stop. "Just a little," he said.

"Dammit," you grumbled.

Hotel pools always use so much chlorine. You should have just taken the extra couple minutes to take a real shower. Oh, well. Doesn't change the fact that the pool was a good idea. Stepping out of the car, as Chris led the way to dinner, you dug out your small bottle of body spray and gave yourself another pair of sprays. Chris noticed the freshly perfumed air and snuffled a laugh, with a small shake of his head, before checking in with the hostess.

You were the first ones there and were seated right away. The table was near the window and had a view overlooking the bay. Chris pointed out the spot below where there was going to be a fireworks display tomorrow night to wrap up the Singapore appearance. When you looked back up, Sebastian arrived at the table. While he looked over the menu, Chris excused himself to the restroom. When he was out of earshot, you grabbed Sebastian's forearm, giving his shirt sleeve a pull for his immediate attention. He peeked over the top of his menu.

"I need your help," you whispered.

You maybe didn't need to use such a hushed and dramatic tone, but you didn't know how long Chris might be gone. Sebastian set aside his menu and gave you his complete attention and a concerned look. You checked to make sure Chris was gone and Sebastian pried your fingers off his shirt. You hadn't realized how much you were stressing out about this, until that moment. But Sebastian would help. He'd help you figure it out, right? After all, bear fight.

"What'sa matter?" he worried.

"I have to take a picture with Chris wearing a HYDRA t-shirt," you told him.

Sebastian's eyes crinkled, with amusement, and he shook his head. "He won't do that."
"Noo," you waved your hand. "Not him. Me. I have to wear it, but Chris has to be in the picture."

That didn't help clarify anything and Sebastian asked, "Okay. Why would you do that?"

You sighed, resting your heavy head in your palm turned up from the table. "Frank's making me do it," you groaned.

"I don't follow," he admitted, leaning back in his seat and folding his arms across his chest.

"So, last year, at the comic con in NOLA," you began, speaking quickly and watching the room for Chris' return, "Frank and Mackie got me this HYDRA t-shirt to wear while I was working for Frank that weekend."

"Team Crossbones," he nodded along.

Exactly!" He got it. There was less to explain. "So, to get the okay from Frank to come along on the trip, you know, 'cause I wasn't going to skip on work just to-"

"Of course not," Sebastian understood.

This was going well. "So, that was the deal," you shrugged. "To get off the hook for work-"

"He wants you to poke Chris for him by wearing the shirt," he summed up.

"Yeah," you nodded. "Only I can't figure out how to do it without actually annoying Chris."

"Don't do it," he shrugged. "You're already here. Frank can't do anything about it."


"Okay," Sebastian nodded, taking up his menu again. He smirked up at Chris when he sat down, teasing, "Everything come out alright?"

Chris swatted his hand down into Sebastian's menu. "Ay, there's a lady present," Chris reminded him, with a smile.

"Two, if we're counting you, sweetheart," Mackie corrected, catching up to the table.

"Very funny," Chris sarcastically smiled, doing his and Anthony's secret handshake in greeting.

"Hey," Anthony began, as he took an empty seat across from Chris, "just talked to Joe. He'll be up in a few minutes." He picked up a menu, asking, "What looks good?"

"Just got here," you pointed out, opening your own menu to peruse.

"D'you take a nap today, or what?" Mackie wondered, glancing at you from around of his menu. "Big night tonight."

"Took a dip in the pool," you told him and the trio of muscly men at your table all whined their complaints in unison.

"Aw, come on."
"Rub it in why dont'cha."
"Must be nice."
"Bullshit. That's what it is."
You chuckled to yourself, ignoring them with a smile and an attentive gaze at your menu. "I have no regrets."

"Of course, you don't," Mackie grumbled, jutting his chin at you.

"It's rude," Sebastian added, with his face pinched unhappily.

"Oh, look," you excitedly pointed out. "They have a cheese tray you guys can enjoy with you whine."

The boys broke out into laughter and, under the table, Chris' hand gave your knee a squeeze. "Nice," he nodded, trying to reign in his amusement.
Chapter 42

You could tell Sebastian was intrigued by your problem. And by the way he kept side eying you, he was curious to know why you couldn't just back out of the whole HYDRA shirt situation. You wished you had been able to explain more before Chris made it back to the table. Now that you had opened that particular can of worms, it was just begging to be spilled. You were a little anxious, sitting next to Chris, chewing on the inside of your lip when he wasn't looking but Sebastian was. There had to be a way to pull this off and keep you in both Frank and Chris' good graces.

After your meal, you stuck with the team and followed along with the herd of security, organizers, and reps for the day to the next photocall. The sky was a little cloudy, dimming the background, but you had a good view of the platform set up over the water of one of the rooftop pools. You felt a little sorry for the guys in the humidity. Ohh, the irony of hating the heat and being inches from a refreshing pool they can't use. You had to admire them, in a way, though. They took like champs, although you couldn't fathom how Joe was wearing a fucking coat and didn't keel over right there.

Before he took his place on the stage, Sebastian tugged at your elbow, leaning in to your ear. "Hey, I got an idea. We'll talk," he winked, with a small nod.

"Oh, thank god. Bless Sebastian Stan."

You and Sebastian shared a couple looks in the elevator on the ride back downstairs. You were dying to hear his idea, because you had none of you own. On the walk over to the fan experience and blue carpet event, you dropped back to the rear of the group. Chris and Joe were absorbed in conversation and you used it as your distraction to fall into step with Sebastian. He watched Chris for a long minute before he tipped at the waist to speak to you quietly.

"So, it's like a t-shirt, right?" he checked. "Like, you can wear it under another shirt or something, and no one would notice?"

"Yeah," you confirmed, in your own hushed tone.

"Okay," he nodded. "So, put it on under a sweatshirt or something and meet me at the gym."

"The gym?" you questioned.

"Yeah," Sebastian shrugged. "You said he has to be in the picture, right? But you didn't say he has to know about it. There's a whole wall of mirrors. You take a selfie with him in the background and then cover back up and boom- your pic for Frank."

Your heart swelled and face lit up, as you grasped your hands at his elbow by your side. "Thank you," you gushed. "You're a genius."

Sebastian arrogantly scoffed, "Of course, I am." and bent his arm for your hand to find the crook of his elbow, as you praised him with a pet of his velvety soft jacket sleeve.

Chris looked back over his shoulder, sending a smile and quirking up a brow at Sebastian leading you with his arm. "What are you two up to?" he asked, seeming to suspect some kind of mischief, according to his tone.

Sebastian took his hand off the top of yours, throwing it up and looking completely offended. "Why are we always up to something?" he challenged, giving Chris a scathing once over. "You've got issues, man." Sebastian tutted, adding a shake of his head and a disapproving, "That's not right."
Anthony cackled like a hyena, dropping his shaking head as he walked and put a steadying hand for himself on Chris' shoulder. Chris just smiled, shaking his head, his eyes set on yours. You smiled back, with an innocent shrug. *Be cool.* Chris turned back around and picked up his conversation with Joe, who was chuckling as well. Sebastian patted his hand on yours at his elbow again.

"We just gotta get him to the gym," you whispered to Sebastian.

Sebastian softly assured you, "I'll take care of that."

You hung off Sebastian's arm until the mall entrance. He gave you a sneaky wink, before he let you go to stand with the rest of Team Cap and you parted off to stick close to Josh. Chris made a small wave and smiled to you, just before he was carted away by the event coordinators with Megan and the rest of the VIPs. You and Josh were directed into the midst of the frenzy that was the floor of the mall. All around and above you, the place was lined with fans. Packed in like sardines, they jockeyed for a better view and closer spot along the walkway and near the stage. *Holy cow.* This was...indescribable.

The excitement of the crowd was palpable. You watched from the press area near the stage, as introductions began. The fans went wild, when they started calling out Team Cap and, one by one, the stars made their ways slowly up along the crowd of fans and reporters to the stage. They damn near died of hysterics when Chris came out. The nerve he had, trying to kill all those poor, defenseless fangirls by flexing on his way across the front of the stage like a prize fighter. *This man has no shame.* All those poor ovaries, just utterly and completely destroyed. ...Just like yours. You shook your head, with a smirk. You couldn't blame anyone for their excited shrieks. After all, *damn.* You'd be lying if you said it didn't turn you on, too. It took you a minute to recognize the sting in your palms from the enthusiastic applause you added to the ruckus of the crowd, when everyone was on stage together.

The fan event was crazy. The presentations were great and you couldn't wait to get a closer look at the Team Cap art the guys were given. Like everyone else, you were amused with Chris' microphone twirling and tossing. You unashamedly laughed, when Chris dropped the microphone. To be fair, he was getting cocky about it. Of course, it was gonna happen. You goofed around with Sebastian from the side of the stage, dancing a little Axel Rose shuffle with him when he did a little shimmy during a quick pause in the action. For all the fun it was, you considered it might not be a bad idea to get your hearing checked. When the crowd got excited, you might as well have been standing in front of the speakers at a rock concert the way your poor ears rang. Damn, fangirls are mighty.

When the mall event was over and the movie was getting ready to start, Team Cap ducked out the side and headed back to the hotel. Sebastian was already talking about karaoke. He kept prodding you for a commitment to perform. The best you could promise was to revisit the issue after a couple of drinks. Joe could not be cajoled into going, raising his hands and, literally, backing away from the conversation. You all parted ways to change clothes, with a plan to regroup in Sebastian's room.

With a quick change into some comfortable shorts and t-shirts, you caught up with Anthony in the hall on the way to Sebastian's room. Outside the room, Mackie started pounding his fist on the door, loudly saying it was hotel security and ordering him to 'open up'. Thankfully, Sebastian got to the door quickly. Your embarrassed cheeks were probably as pink as they felt and Chris' stifled laughter and shushing of Anthony wasn't helping. *God, these idiots.*

Sebastian still needed to put shoes on and Anthony helped himself to a snack from the minibar, taking a seat on the couch with you, after Sebastian waved a hand and told everyone to make themselves at home. You admired his city view and Chris dropped down into an armchair by the window. From the next room, Sebastian hollered back his input on the topic of dinner. You all
decided to grab a quick bite to eat downstairs, before heading off to the karaoke bar. Once your bellies were filled, you all followed Mackie down a hall and slipped out a side door. You guys hailed a cab about a block down from the hotel and made your escape.

Ever the social creature that he is, Sebastian jumped into the front seat with the cabbie, twisting in his seat to chat with you, Chris, and Anthony after he gave the name and address of the bar. Sebastian and Anthony were already wondering about the music selection and talking about songs to sing. You piqued their curiosities when you mentioned a beer bar you'd heard about from a friend. Sandwiched between the guys, Chris held your hand on one side and Mackie smacked your leg on the other, telling you you had to sing or you two weren't going to be friends anymore. You laughed off the threat, giving him a solid 'maybe'.

The karaoke bar was everything Sebastian promised. It wasn't too busy and the colorful signs and lights in the place were fun. There was an open booth your group commandeered. A round of drinks were ordered and you scrunched into Anthony's side, and Sebastian did the same, to see the list of songs to choose from. There was all kinds of good things on the list and you were interested to hear what Sebastian was up for, telling him you'd heard about his karaoke kink and couldn't wait to see it for yourself. He dropped his shaking head, with the most adorable laugh, at your phrasing. It started off a whole animated conversation across the front of Mackie, about Green Day and other mutual attractions to 90's music you shared. One drink down and he had got you so interested in talking about your old CDs that he almost had you talked you into singing. You shook him off, assuring him you weren't there yet.

"Come on," Sebastian urged. "Don't be a stick in the mud, like Chris."

"A pussy's more like it," Mackie taunted.

You laughed, glancing over at Chris' head shaking. "Call me all the names you want," he invited. "I'm just here to watch."

"Do it," Anthony insisted, with a confident jut of his chin. "Show him up. Show him how to have fun."

"Come on," Sebastian tried again, grabbing the song list. "What do you wanna do? You wanna do some big hair, glam rock? We could do a best of the 90s."

"Oo," Mackie lit up, his brow peaking. "Throwback to the 80s."

You started to shake your head, waiting until you could stop laughing to try and weasel your way out, when Sebastian threw out, "I triple dog dare you."

"Oh, no, he did not."

You froze, mouth gaping that he would try such a underhanded move. "No," you told him, holding up a finger. "That doesn't work for you. That's a work thing."

"Fine," he shrugged, pulling out his phone. "I'll just get Fr."

"No, you will not," you said, reaching out to slap his hand, when he unlocked his screen.

Chris was laughing and you continued shaking your head at Sebastian. Like Chris, Anthony didn't know what was going on, but they both found it entertaining. Sebastian put away his phone, but pointed a finger back at you.

"There's no free rides at the karaoke bar," Sebastian warned.
"Hey, what about him?" you asked, jerking a thumb over at Chris.

Sebastian inclined his head at Chris. "He's buying."

Chris shrugged. "Fine by me," he consented.

"That is such bullshit," you noted, giving Chris a soft elbow in his side.

He leaned in, putting his hand around your shoulder to pull you over and dot a kiss on your temple. "I don't make the rules," he half-ass apologized, with a helpless raise of his free hand near his shoulder.

"Okay, fine," you decided, waving a hand to call the waitress over. "If that's the way we're gonna play it."

"That's what I'm talkin' about," Anthony proudly approved, when you ordered of a round of shots and beer chasers for the table. "It's on!"

What could be more fun than 80s karaoke with Sebastian Stan and Anthony Mackie? Well, okay. Really *any* karaoke with these guys would be more than acceptable. But tonight it was all about spikey mullet having, skin-tight leather pants wearing, neon colored, power ballad belting, fist pumping 80s rock. Sebastian fearlessly led the way, opening with Sister Christian. In a moment of 'now or never' courage, you played it safe with a little Tiffany. When you finished your rendition of I Think We're Alone Now, you hurried off stage, relieved to get that over with, only to return to your booth and an absolutely mortifying display of over the top praise for your song. All three of those dorks were on their feet and waiting outside of the booth to hug you, whooping and hollering. At least, no one else in the poorly lit room seemed to mind. They probably figured you guys came in already drunk.

It also probably looked like you guys were running the show, with how frequently you got up there, the crowd was light for so early in the night. Mackie did join in, singing a couple songs and owning the shit out of Word Up. He offered to sing Whitesnake's Here I Go Again, if you promised to roll around on the stage like a video vixen on a car hood. You politely declined. But it really turned into the '[y/n] and Sebastian Show'. He blew it out of the water, with a powerful cover of Living on A Prayer that had your table yelling along with the chorus. You channeled your inner bad ass for Joan Jett's I Hate Myself For Loving You- a song Chris pretended to be offended by. You made up for it, with a tribute to your favorite loser, belting out Don't Stop Believing and holding an embarrassing amount of eye contact with Chris when you did Jake Jenson's choreography to the song. You brought it home with Voices Carry and Sebastian went out with Come On Eileen, a song you all sang out the background vocals to, from your table off to the side. You didn't have a lot of time to play around if you were going to hit up the beer bar you'd gotten an incredible rec for.

You all bumbled out the door together, arms linked to each other and around waists, doing your best accented versions of Dexy's last verse, until you hooked the next cab. Your laughter subsided long enough to give the address of the bar a friend of yours insisted you had to go to for a drink. The driver pulled up to the Smith Street curb and, right away, the guys were grumbling. If it wasn't about how odd the complex was, it was about how too damned hot and humid it still was to be running around a place that had no AC. The hawker stalls of the Chinatown Complex did seem a little unusual, but you grabbed Chris' hand and Sebastian's wrist to pull them along, swearing to them that this was legit and they wouldn't be sorry, as you walked backwards. At least, you hoped your friend's recommendation wasn't going to make a liar out of you. *Gulp.*
"Alright," Anthony shrugged, cocking his head to his shoulder when he did. He stepped up, taking your arm in his, as he turned you around and pointed ahead. "I'm game. Show me."

You followed the signs to the sprawling food court upstairs. Making your way along the different storefronts and paths, you guys gaped at some of the offerings, gagging at the grey pile of sea prawns, pointing out some of the fish you'd never seen the likes of at your local markets, and giving serious debate to pooling some cash to buy some frogs to set free. You eventually got back on track and found your way to Smith Street Taps.

The stall wasn't too busy, they closed in less than an hour after all, and the overhead fluorescent tube lighting was a drastic change from the sexy atmosphere of the karaoke bar, but there were a few tables you could all fit at to choose from and an interesting selection of craft brews to sample. Falling in to line with the rest of the customers, Chris dropped back behind you, wrapping his arms around your waist and resting his chin on your shoulder when you layered your arms over his. His toes kicked the backs of your heels a few times, when you shuffled a few inches at a time to the front of the line. He gave up apologizing for it after the second time it happened. Instead, he took to just dotting a kiss in the side of your neck, whenever it happened again.

"Ah' you fahckin' kiddin' me?" Chris balked, lifting his head from his spot on your shoulder. "They got CBC here?"

"The fuck is CBC?" Sebastian snorted, eyeing over the chalkboard menus suspended at the top of the stall.

"Cambridge Brewing Company," Chris explained, still noticeably excited, and smacked the back of his hand into Sebastian's arm to emphasize something impressive was happening here. "That's Bahston bee'ah."

The accent was completely unbridled. You turned your head to look at Chris, but his focus was glued to the menus, seeming to search the small boards for any other taste of home. You couldn't help the snicker and the small noise from you pulled the attention of Chris' lips to the side of your hair for a drawn out moment and a squeeze of his arms around you. His eyes were still fixed on the menus.

When he had finished studying the multicolored chalk signs, Chris looked at you, wondering, "Did you know they had this here?"

You shook your head. "No. My friend says the menu changes, but they usually have stuff from US breweries, some European ones and other places."

"Guess we got lucky," Anthony mused.

With another tight squeeze, Chris decided, "That's it. You can't leave. You're my good luck charm."

You pressed your arms a little bit more over his, smiling shyly while Chris settled his chin back on your shoulder and Mackie questioned, "Is it any good?"

"Oh, it's good," Chris nodded, picking up his head. "I know what I'm getting."

"I don't know," Sebastian wavered. "Don't you wanna try new stuff you can't get at home?"

"Nope," Chris said, confidently. "I can't get that at home. I'd have to go back to Bahston to find that."

It didn't escape your notice that he just referred to Los Angeles, and not Boston, as his home.
Whaaa...? You had to take a gander, to see if he looked feverish, had been hit on the head, or anything else that would explain the slip. But when you glanced back over your shoulder, watching him go on with Sebastian about how he guaranteed no one would regret trying the Boston porter on the menu, he seemed completely sane and healthy.

At the front of the line, you caved, ordering your own Charles River Porter, after Chris wasted no time ordering his. You didn't usually go for darker beers, but there was something infectious about his excitement at the little touch of home. Sebastian took a stab at a German pilsner no one had ever heard of before, but came with a great recommendation from the staff. Anthony went with an Australian IPA.

Gathered around a table for four, near the open air overlook of the second floor to the street below, you all toasted to Singapore, the press tour, and good times with friends. You let Sebastian have a sample sip of your beer and you spent a few minutes debating the flavor. Chris didn't mind the heavy hoppy finish, while you enjoyed the hints of caramel and toffee you got more. Everyone was very happy with their selection. It was hard to say what kept the faint grin on Chris' lips, but you suspected even if the conversation at the table was miserable, the beer would make everything better.

Dinner wasn't holding anyone over anymore and you took Sebastian with you to scope out a few of the nearby food stalls for something to eat. You couldn't decide between several tasty looking offerings you came across. Instead, you returned to the table with your hands full of a few different dishes for everyone to split. Sebastian returned the favor of a free taste when he let you take a pinch of his bee hoon with your chopsticks. All of you picked at the popiah, hainanese chicken rice, pumpkin cakes, and butterfly pandan. You were all complaining for more time when the shops began to close and you were out of food and the second round of drafts was dry.

On the way out, you did manage to score a bag of the tiny orange pumpkin cakes to go. The lady behind the register didn't need much convincing from you and Sebastian, when you begged her to wait before she took the leftovers from the tray away from the display case. You swatted at grabby hands making plays for the petite pastries all the way back downstairs and onto the street. Three grown men whined like bratty children, when you told them, they were for the ride home.

In the cab, you doled out cakes, making sure everyone got an even share. Your driver was a happy man when you handed up the cash the guys had chipped in for the ride and left him your last treat in the bag. It was just after 11 o'clock when you slipped around the side of the hotel to find the side door you had snuck out. A quick flash of room keys and a selfie with the guys was all it took to get the Room Service waiter on his smoke break to let you in. Getting into an employee elevator, Sebastian poked his finger into your arm and spoke up.

"So, see everybody in the gym tomorrow morning?" he practically chirped.

"Pfft," Chris scoffed. "I don't think so. I just wanna sleep in, for once."

"I'll go," you casually agreed. "Gotta work off those pumpkin cakes, right?"


Mackie shook his head. "Naw, man, I'm with Chris on this one. I need to sleep!"

"You guys are a bunch of pussies," Stan decided, sounding quite disappointed in his friends. "[Y/n]'s going." You hummed and firmly nodded your commitment. "You gonna let a girl show you up?"

"Yup," Anthony nodded.
"Fine," Sebastian shrugged, pushing past Chris as the car slowed to a stop for his floor. He held out his fist for you to hit with yours, jutting his chin and saying, "Team Bear Fight it is."

You nodded, with a confident pout, and seconded, "Team Bear Fight."

Sebastian stepped out of the elevator and Chris put his arm around your waist, sending back his own chin jut to Sebastian, telling him, "8 o'clock."

Back in your room, you couldn't have been prouder of Sebastian for not letting you down. This was gonna work! You could feel it. The plan was perfect and you made a mental note to consult Sebastian for all complicated future schemings. Sebastian Stan is a gift.

And speaking of gifts, write down a tipsy Chris as one of them. Of course the booze at the karaoke bar helped, but it was the Boston pints that had him so enamored with you, you were sure of it. The Bean Town idiot practically hadn't stopped smiling since his first sip. All the points to Gryffindor, for Chris hooking his hands on your hips and pulling you back to him, surprising you when you were inside and the door was shut, to show you just how happy he was.

His hands dipped under the hem of your shirt, one wandering up your belly to caress your breasts, while the other belted around your middle and hugged you close. His lips lavished wet kisses down the side of your neck. You greedily soaked it up for a long minute, folding your arm over his across your waist and baring your neck to him. If it wasn't for the blatant hardon pressing against your ass, you'd have been content to keep on being selfish. But you're not completely heartless. You turned your face to his over your shoulder and reached behind you to tug on the belt loop at his hip for him to let you loose.

You got enough room to wiggle around to face him, his warm hands simply moving around from your front to your back under your shirt. His mouth collided eagerly with yours and your arms folded up behind his neck. You couldn't stop the startled laugh that came out, when the two of you stumbled into the corner of a chair on the way to the bedroom.

"Maybe we should watch where we're going, for a minute," you giggled, after Chris' flinch of a flex to keep you both upright.

"Good idea," he nodded, bending at the knees to put you over his shoulder.

You made a small shriek in surprise, that quickly turned to laughter when Chris turned around to make sure he had remembered to lock the door, before he carried you into the next room. You were able to make a swipe at the wall and turn off the living room lights on your way and Chris casually thanked you, as if there were nothing absurd about how you two were going about turning in for the night.

In the bedroom, Chris unfolded you from his shoulder and you gleefully smiled at the bounce you made falling into the springiness of the mattress. Chris immediately went to work, kicking his shoes aside and pulling off his shirt at the same time. You bit your lip in appreciation of the sight, a devilish smirk at the corner of your mouth at the memory of the tattoos you saw before you now that were peaking their way through his shirt earlier in the day. You were flipping your shoes off, when ever helpful Chris leaned down to give you a kiss and undo the button and fly on your cutoffs for you. So handy. So helpful.

You lifted your hips and Chris pulled off your shorts. You had barely bunched your shirt up under your arms, when his lips came back for yours and his forward move guided you back on the bed.
There's never anything wrong with a quickie, even if there's no place to go and not enough patience to undress. While he stretched out over you, Chris grabbed for one of the condoms packets left on the nightstand. Your fingertips traced the lines from one muscle to the other, will you two kissed like teenagers in the back of a theater and he worked his clothes off his hips.

There was no complaint about him tugging your panties away. You were so involved with savoring the sensation of his muscles' sinew under your fingertips to have cared if he had just ripped the damned things off altogether. You smiled into his deep kiss, when he pushed inside of you and his hand came up to squeeze your breast under your pushed up shirt. Sometimes there's nothing as satisfying as a good, old fashioned horny screw. And this was definitely one.

You were both so hot and heavy about it when you started, it didn't need to last long. The groping and kissing were just as fervent as the action from Chris' hips. Tonight it was the faster, the funner. Hell, that might be a good name for a sex tape. It was something that you considered, while you both fell limp and panting in each other's arms, skin a little sticky from the start of a good kind of sweat. You both took a moment to catch your breath, dotting lazy kisses wherever your lips reached bare skin on each other. When Chris finally moved, you both cleaned up and changed clothes for the night. Chris snapped off the lights before climbing back into bed.

Curl up to his side, Chris' fingertips brushed softly and lazily up and down your arm, while he half-wondered, half-complained, "Are we really going to the gym at 8 in the fahckin' morning?"

You nodded your head against his chest. "Yep."

"Why?" he groaned, and the rumble in your ear through his chest put a grin on your lips.

"Because we said we would," you reminded him. "Besides, people are expecting Captain America, not Skinny Steve."

"That's cool," he grumbled, giving your shoulder a squeeze. "Maybe you didn't see me flex today..."

"Oh, I saw," you assured him. "We all saw. Thank you for that."

"Yeah," he smugly agreed. "So, I think I'll be okay if I just sleep in tomorrow."

_Uh-oh._ You were losing him. Was he going to bail? Think fast!

"That's okay," you shrugged. "I'll probably just take it easy myself. Like, do some yoga or something. All this traveling the last few day has got my back and legs a little tight, anyway. Maybe Seb can help me stretch." You tilted your head back to see him and offered, "We can have breakfast when I come back."

Chris' eyes were tilted down at you already, when you looked up at him. There was a hint of a scowl in his expression, before he decided, "No, I'll go with you. I said I would, right?"

"Okay," you innocently shrugged, again. "If you want to."

_Sucker._

"Yeah," he distractedly said, grabbing his phone off the nightstand to set and alarm.
In the morning, you realized you didn't have the intestinal fortitude be a spy. Staring at the HYDRA t-shirt held up in front of you, you slowly shook your head at the anxiety twisting your gut. You knew Chris wouldn't be in the bathroom long. You quickly tugged on the shirt and layered your zippered hoodie overtop. Tidying up your suitcase, all you needed to do was put on your gym shoes by the time Chris reappeared in the bedroom.

"You all set?" he checked, looking at the time on his phone.

"Just a second," you promised, sitting down on the foot of the bed to put your shoes on.

Chris went on to the next room. When you caught up, he was waiting for you near the foyer of the door. He had a pair of water bottles under his arm, from the mini-fridge, and handed you one when you were close enough. You smiled your thanks and he gestured you out the door ahead of him. You fussed with your iPod, to find a good playlist to work out to, while you rode the elevator down.

Sebastian was already in the gym, although you were right on time. He finished the set of hammer curls he was on, replaced the weights in the rack, and met you halfway.

"Hey," he smiled, staring pointedly at Chris, "you made it. Thought you were gonna punk out after all those beers."

"Very funny," Chris nodded, adjusting the bill of his hat a few times up and down, as he looked over the mostly empty hotel gym.

Around you, there was a woman on one of the treadmills in the corner and a few guys dotted randomly around the room on different machines. Sebastian clapped Chris on the arm, coaxing him to catch up with him and pointing him over to a bench. You waved, with a polite grin, saying you were fine by yourself and making a joke about not wanting to get in the way of their manly workout.

Sebastian gave you a wink and subtle nod, as he followed Chris a half-step behind. You gave them a minute to get set up, pretending to untangle your earbuds and get situated.

While you turned to the mirror and reached an arm behind your head to stretch your tricep, Sebastian had Chris getting to work on a set of preacher curls. In the reflection of the room, you could see Sebastian facing you, standing beside Chris and shifting his gaze between you and down at Chris. He gave you a nod, signaling you that this was a perfect time. You slipped your phone out of your pocket and opened up the camera. You eyed the screen, making a quick judgement of how the picture would look and making a preemptive adjustment of the zoom.

The timing was ruined, when Chris finished his first set. Sebastian and Chris traded places. Chris looked around while Sebastian took his position in the seat and set his grip on the bar. Chris sent you a warm smile in the mirror, before turning his attention down to count Sebastian's reps. That was close. It's cool. Don't freak out. He didn't see anything. You still had your sweatshirt zipped. He doesn't know. You bent and stretched your other arm, to pass the time.

You watched the guys trade places again and Sebastian add a couple plates on the curling bar. He picked it up and set it into Chris' hands. Sebastian moved to his side and nodded to you again. You unlocked your phone and quickly pulled down the zipper on your hoodie. You lined up the shot, waited a second for the focus to readjust, and pressed the shutter button a few fast times. You pocketed your phone and hastily zipped up again. There was a hint of nervousness in your eyes, when you snapped your gaze back to the mirror. Chris was looking up at Sebastian and Sebastian frowned and shrugged, saying something you couldn't hear over your music.
Chris and Sebastian swapped again and you casually checked your phone. Opening up your photo album, you couldn't stop the, let's be honest, relieved smile that broke across your face. You managed to capture three photos; all of them framed well enough for their purpose and all in focus. You snuffed a laugh at the pics. With you and your official uniform of Team Crossbones in the foreground, Chris and Sebastian were just off to your right. Chris' head was slightly downturned, in concentration of his curls, and in the far side of his periphery, Sebastian stood with a stern scowl on his face and both fists held out in the HYDRA salute. Your middle finger was perfectly positioned in the corner of the picture.

You looked over your shoulder at Sebastian. Your smile told him you got what you were after and he flashed a proud grin, before he and Chris moved along to one of the cable machines. You knew it was getting late back home in Los Angeles, but you couldn't wait to get this over with. You opened up a new message and addressed it do Frank. Attaching one of the photos to send, you added the message [Done. Hail HYDRA]. You sent the message off and decided to do some lifting of your own. You sat down to get to work on your lats and your phone buzzed in your pocket.

Frank fucking Grillo: That's cheating

Okay, yes. Technically. But could he really expect better behavior when HYDRA was involved?

You: You said I had to wear the shirt and he had to be in the picture. {checkmark emoji}

The photo of Frank's mug sided up to yours from the Kingdom wrap party filled up your screen. When the call connected, he didn't even wait to hear you say hello and the nitpicky New Yorker came out of him, complaining, "No no no no no. That's not what I meant and you know it. That's a chicken shit move, right there."

You threw a glance Chris and Sebastian's way, to make sure they weren't in earshot and you argued, "You weren't anymore specific than I had to wear it and he had to be in the pic with me. Look again, because both A and B were accomplished."

"Unacceptable," he decided. "You cheated."

"Hello?! HYDRA, duh," you reminded him.

On the other end of the call, Frank chuckled. "You don't deserve for me to say this dare's been satisfied," he said. "But you got Stan in the back there giving the salute and you're flipping me off, so I'm gonna give it to you." He strongly added, "But only because you said Hail HYDRA."

"You're such an angel, Frank," you playfully groaned.

"God damn right I am," he agreed. "How's the trip going?"

"Now that this little fiasco is over with?" you teased. "It's great. Managed to sneak away for some karaoke last night and saw a couple sights."

"Good," you heard the smile in his voice. "Hey, listen. I gotta get some sleep here. Either when you get back in town or in New York, we need to sit down for a few minutes and talk about work. We've got our own New York trip coming in May and a couple other things that are starting to shape up. Okay?"

"Sounds good," you agreed.

"Alright, kiddo," Frank told you, "get back to that workout. I don't see any sweat yet."
"I just got here," you pointed out. "I'm on it."

Frank laughed, telling you, "Okay. I'll see ya later. Enjoy the rest of your trip."

You both said your goodbyes and you stashed your phone back in your pocket. Frank didn't have anything to worry about. Since you had to keep that damned hoodie on to hide your t-shirt, you managed to work up a decent sweat. On the ride back up the elevator, the three of you decided on taking quick showers and meeting back up for brunch. It wouldn't be too hard to BS through a meal and kill a little extra time with these two before they had to head off to a few more press engagements.

Filled up on food, you loafed around the table in the lobby restaurant. The morning had flown by and, in about a half hour, Team Cap was going to reunite and wrap up the last day of the Singapore leg of the press tour. Tomorrow, you would pack up and fly to London. But, for now, you were content to relax with a mimosa and listen to Chris and Sebastian talk about workout routines and enjoying their breaks from the rigors of the demanding physical training for the film. You didn't realize how much Sebastian had bulked up until you heard him talking about his weight. I mean, look at him. Obviously he added muscle, but the numbers really put it in context. Sebastian was excited to hear about the mud run you were doing with some friends coming up. You invited them both to join your team, but they didn't actually bite.

With a reminder of the time from Chris and the check paid, you finally left the restaurant to catch up with Megan and the others for the next round of work for the boys. You blended in to the background for some more interviews, but decided not to follow along when Team Cap did some Skype appearances with Chris Cantanda. You relished life in the rooftop pool one more time for an hour or so, instead. When you were done, you made sure to take a real shower this time, so Chris couldn't tell you still smelled like chlorine and, probably, be jealous. All cleaned up, you were folded up in an arm chair on the balcony, while you air dried your hair and flipped through the pages of a digital magazine you'd downloaded before you left California. When you leaned forward to grab your can of Coke from the table in front of you, you caught a peek of Chris near the dining table.

"Hello," you called, turning to face the cracked open balcony door so your voice would carry in.

You answered that you were outside, when he asked where you were, snickering to yourself at the confused prairie dog look he had from where you saw him in the bedroom doorway. His brow rose in clarity, when his panning gaze spotted you through the window. You smiled at him, as he came out to join you and sat in the chair opposite you. He squinted a bit, in the brightness of the outdoors, and looked across the view before turning his attention back to you.

"How can you sit out here?" he wandered. "This humidity is...ugh."

You shrugged, swiping to the next page on your phone. "The breeze is great up here. Dried my hair in no time."

"What'd you wash your hair for?" Chris asked.

_Dammit._ You almost got away with it. Seriously, think- then speak.

You wrinkled up your nose, anticipating the grief he'd give, when you admitted, "Went back to the pool while you were working."

His head fell to the side and his face dropped. "Again?" he all but whined and you nodded. "Fahck tha- That's bullshit."
"Sorry," you offered. Not like you actually regretted your refreshing dip in the pool.

You followed it up with a suggestion that he could sneak in a quick swim before dinner, but he shrugged it off, saying, "Nah. A hotel pool, in the middle of the day? I wouldn't even get a toe in the water before someone noticed. I had to do a selfie in the elevator on the way back up here."

"You did?" you giggled, until you saw the less than enthused pull in the side of his lips. "You don't have to, you know." His next expression asked if you believed what you had just said yourself and you rolled your eyes and put your drink back down on the table. "Okay, fine. Hopefully you smiled and didn't give them that sour puss to remember forever," you straight-faced teased, putting your feet down on the floor.

Chris snorted, with a smiling nod. "I smiled," he assured you.

"That's what you get for traveling without a hat and sunglasses on," you winked.

It was quiet for a minute, while Chris took in the scenery and you finished reading the article you were on. You cut into the quiet, asking, "So, what's next for today?"

"Actually," Chris began, straightening up a little in his chair, "I was kinda thinkin' about a nap."

You both snickered and you asked, "What's the matter? Too old for karaoke and beer bars?"

Chris wagged a warning finger at you, looking down the length of his forefinger at you from one eye. "Watch it, smartass."

"Just sayin'," you innocently shrugged.

He dropped his hand into his lap again, taking a lazy look around. "Nah. It's just this humidity and all this running around," he figured, gesturing broadly.

"You should go take a nap," you encouraged. "Enjoy the AC, before the fireworks tonight."

Chris nodded to himself and stood up. "You wanna come lay with me?" he asked, stopping at the open balcony door to look back at you.

"Like, in the biblical sense?" you laughed.

He caught the joke in the way he had phrased the invitation. Considering his quip about getting laid in every city on the press tour, it was too easy to go there. His head dropped, as he laughed and shook his head. "That's not what I meant," he chuckled, when his laugh wound down.

"I know," you smiled, picking up your soda to finish off your drink.

A nap did sound good. The more you worked to pay the bills and the older you got, you realized how much you missed naps and how wonderful they were when you were little. You got up from your chair and Chris slid the door shut when you were inside. You went to the other room to throw away your can and, when you came back, Chris was changing into a pair of shorts. You stepped out of your sandals and crawled down the bed to meet him, as he was just lying down. There was a contented sigh from Chris, when he was comfortable and you had nuzzled into that place on his shoulder. You watched as Chris added an alarm to his phone, so you didn't over sleep, and cuddled a little closer after he was done, his newly freed hand reaching across his chest to rest on your arm there. Yeah, naps are good.
Just because the alarm went off doesn't mean you sprang to life. You both groaned at the strumming ring tone from Chris' phone a half hour later. He fumbled for his phone on the nightstand to silence the alarm. When you asked if he turned it off or just hit 'snooze', he said it was off. You were sure you'd only just managed to fall asleep, before the alarm rang. Naps could also be a big rip off. Snuggled up to Chris' side, you would really enjoy another nine minutes of sleep.

Chris kissed your forehead and gave you a squeeze, before he sat up, tiredly saying, "Time to get up."

A slight shiver went through you, in the cool air conditioning with the absence of his warmth beside you, and you reached out to grab the edge of the covers. Pulling them around you and rolling over to wrap yourself up, you hummed plaintively, declaring, "I never should've taken the nap. Now all I want to do is sleep all day."

Chris chuckled and you heard him moving around the room. "Are you going to turn into a butterfly in that cocoon?" he joked. Peeping open an eye to find him in the room, you stuck your tongue out and complained you were cold. He noted, "You look like a burrito."

"You've got a hell of an imagination for things that end in O's," you told him. "Flamingos, burritos..."

"Just the two," he conceded. "It's not my fault you remind me of stuff, when you do your cute shit."

"I am cute," you arrogantly agreed.

"C'mon, burrito," Chris coaxed, heading into the bathroom. "You gotta get up if you want to come with me."

"Fine," you unhappily hollered, untwisting the blankets from you.

You rolled out of bed, sighing when your feet hit the floor. Digging around in your suitcase, you came up with a pale orange sundress with tiny embroidered flowers bunching up from the hem at your knees. You shared the mirror, taking up half for yourself to comb up your hair while he was washing his face. You offered to touch up his hair for him, seeing it needed a little straightening out after sleeping on it. He shrugged, silently handing over his comb and pomade and going over to sit on the toilet seat lid. It only took a minute of your skilled work to get him picture ready again and he rewarded your efforts with a kiss on the hand, as he stood up, and a soft smack on the butt, on his way back to the bedroom. You did your makeup, put away most of your things back into your toiletries kit, and snapped off the bathroom light on your way out.

Chris was already changed back into his t-shirt and jeans from earlier. He smiled, when he saw the "finished" you and told you looked pretty. You thanked him and gave him a smile in return. With your sandals on and a couple quick additions of a long necklace and some dangling earrings, you were set. You grabbed your purse and Chris grabbed your hand, taking you along with him to the door. He pinched the outside of his pockets, to make sure he had a copy of the key, and you were off for the last Singapore appearance of the trip.

A door behind you opened to the hallway and you and Chris simultaneously took back your hands from each other. You walked a little faster, hoping to get to the elevators before the voices you heard behind you caught up. Like you were running from the cops, you pressed the call button several fast times, stealing quick peeks around the corner as the other hotel guests were walking up. You heard the ding of the car's arrival and felt Chris' hand tug you along, pulling you into the elevator with him. You were both snickering, giddy, as Chris pressed the number for the top floor and held down the 'door close' button. The doors slid closed, but a brave hand darted in to stop them.
"Oh, shit," Chris whispered, his face and yours both straining into a wince.

You grabbed Chris' elbow, turning him to face you. He pressed his lips together, tightly, holding back his laughter and sending a shade of pink up his neck and cheeks. Being the public face, you tried to play it straight, pleasantly smiling at the small group outside the elevator. Chris palmed a hand over his brow, his shoulders starting to shake.

The people started to file into the elevator and a woman at the front asked, "Going down?"


The lady frowned, turning back to her friends. "It's just one stop. We can just take the ride. It has to come down eventually, right?"

There was some dissension in the ranks and you reached around Chris to press another a random pair of buttons beside each other on the control panel. "Silly goose," you chided Chris, giving him a soft smack on the arm. "You forgot to hit the other floors." You smiled at the others, with an innocent shrug. "We're picking up friends on the way."

A guy in the group held up his hand overhead, pointing back out, as the elevator buzzed its complaint at having its doors held open too long. "I'd rather take the stairs," the man declared, herding everyone out. "We'll take the next one."

"Sorry!" you offered to the strangers again, looking profoundly regretful, as the doors slid shut on you and Chris.

When you were alone again, Chris dropped his head with a shake, smothering you with a hug and his laughter. He picked his head up to see the lit up buttons behind him, wheezing, "Holy shit. I thought they were stayin'."

You were laughing to, your arms folded up along his back. "I know, right?"

Chris pressed a noisy kiss into the top of your head. "You're fahckin' brilliant."

"Yeah," you sarcastically agreed, taking back a hand to gesture it at the elevator control panel, "except now we've got extra stops to make."

"You think it'd work twice, if anyone else gets on?" he wondered.

"Doubtful," you snorted.

The car slowed to a stop at the first random floor you selected. You waited only a second, when the doors opened, to see if anyone was there, before you hit the 'door closed' button. You did the same at the floor above, both you and Chris holding your breath and waiting to see if anyone got on. When the car moved on to the roof, you two were particularly proud of yourselves. Chris gave you one last squeeze and kiss, before the door opened to the lively dinntime activities of the top floor. He swept a hand out for you to go first and followed you to the restaurant to meet everyone for dinner before the event. You hooked up with Josh and Megan and were shown to the group of tables lumped together for everyone.

Taking in the panoramic view at dinner, you were a little distracted, while itineraries were updated and appearance details rehashed for the umpteenth time. Thinking about how exotic and rich the foods were that you'd tried on the trip already, the sights you'd seen, and considering the company you were keeping, you were more than a little awed by it all. How were you supposed to go back to the rather predictable and mundane life in the hair department after an adventure like this?
Chris participation in the conversation had waned and his admiring stare and thin grin caught your attention, when you shifted your gaze back from the window. "What?" you tittered, unsure how long he’d been watching you.

He shook his head, his smile warming. "Nothing," he shrugged. "Just wondering what you’re up to."

"Nothing," you chuckled, a subtle shake of your own head clearing your thoughts. "Just thinking about the trip."

"Next stop, London," he said, as if you needed any reminding. "That’s when things get big again."

"Again?" you parroted. "Did you not see the mall yesterday?" You pointed behind you to reference the event.

Chris' hand found the top of your leg, under the table, his thumb sweeping side to side. "Almost everybody's back together in London," he explained. "Downey, Rudd, everyone. The whole thing's bigger, press wise and premier, like it was in L.A. And then New York'll be bigger than that."

"Ohh," you nodded. "Gotcha. But I don't think it'll beat the madness at the mall. My god, the screaming for you guys."

Chris ducked his head with a bashful smile. "Okay," he conceded. "You're probably right about that."

"I still think my ears are ringing from that," you quipped.

"Mine, too," he chuckled, tipping in his seat to dot a kiss behind your ear and give your leg a squeeze.

You felt the heat inch up to your cheeks and Anthony catching the quick moment and giving you and Chris a wag of his brow and playful, but quiet, "Oo". Chris jutted his chin and leveled his gaze at Mackie, before breaking into a smile that kind of suggested he was a bit embarrassed to be caught or, at least, by the teasing. You picked out a sugar packet from the tray on the table and winged it into the center Anthony's chest, when he wasn't looking. Chris laughed at Mackie's offended jaw drop and held up his fist for you to tap with your own. Team Cap.

The cast made the last scheduled photocall, before the fireworks began. You hung out in the corner of the "green room", while they were gone, scrolling through your social media feeds to see what your friends and family had been up to in your absence. You liked a couple posts on Frank's Insta feed and uploaded a scenic pic from your trip to the Forbidden City and one from your visit to the Temple of Heaven, so everyone knew you were still alive.

Waiting around for the closing event for the Singapore trip to begin, you kept your distance from everyone. Joe and his assistant were making another live video for the Russos' Facebook page. Chris wasn't within range of the camera lens, but you didn't want to show up either and be associated with the group. After all, not everyone you knew knew about you and Chris and you didn't want any more attention online than you were already getting since making random appearances in Frank's posts the last several months. Instead, you watched Chris from the end of the hall and he stole peeks at you through the crowd milling about before the presentation began.

There was a touch on your elbow and you looked down, smiling a greeting when your eye followed the hand back up to Joe's wife, Alicia. She smiled back, checking, "It's [y/n], right?"
"Yes," you nodded, pointing back at her to verify for yourself, "Alicia."

She nodded back and folded her hands to hang in front of her. "I know we met earlier," she noted, "but we haven't really said hello. Joe told me, you were with everyone in Atlanta."

"That's right," you grinned. "Yeah, last summer."

"He also told me about you and Chris," she smiled, giving a subtle tip of her head his way.

"Oh," you managed, unexplainably nervous.

Alicia patted her hand on your arm. "Oh, don't worry," she told you. "Nobody here's going to say anything. I was just going to say, how sweet you two are together."

"Thank you," you blushed, your eyes flitting for a moment over to Chris across the room.

"I think it's wonderful," Alicia went on. "What a fun story to tell people. Well, whenever you tell people, I mean. Is that why you're all the way over here by yourself?"

You both snickered and you nodded, pointing over at Joe and his assistant, as they started their way out onto the Helix Bridge when he was introduced. "Yeah, he's doing a live feed for Facebook," you confirmed. "I'm trying to avoid all of that still."

Alicia hummed her understanding. "Well, good luck. I hope you can hold it off as long as you can," she wished for you. "The press can be so nosy. People can be so unforgiving. I like Chris. He's a good guy." She turned to smile and gestured her hand at you. "And you, too," she added. "Joe's said some nice things about you and everyone here seems to like you, as well. You fit in very nicely, with all these personalities."

"Thanks," you humbly accepted.

The event emcee had called everyone out but Chris and he was standing back from the edge of the door, hands in his pockets and eyes fixed on the floor. The crowd was calming down, in anticipation of hearing his name. Chris looked up, a curious wrinkle in his brow, and panned his gaze across the people in the hall. He did a double take, his eyes skipping back to where he first caught sight of you. His shoulders straightened and his chin was held a little higher, as the apples of his cheeks rose above his warm grin at you and the line in his brow faded. They called his name, the crowd broke into wild screams of adoration, and he turned to head out onto the bridge.

Alicia hooked her hand onto your arm and took you with her, when the entourage began to gather to follow out the door for the show. "That boy's in love," she quietly told you, as the group began to cluster at the doorway. She winked, adding, "In case you didn't know."

"I've had a couple suspicions," you giggled, trying to catch a view through the people ahead of you to see Chris.

Alicia turned the conversation, with a compliment about your dress, and the two of you chatted about finding outfits to survive the 'Singapore swelter' as she called it. You huddled up with the rest of the VIP guests and had a semi-decent view of the low stage for Team Cap to stand on. You took a couple memento photos, holding your hands over the mix of family, friends, and fans packed in. You froze a few brilliant moments in time of the fireworks and projection on the giant lotus blossom. The display was pretty incredible and a hell of a way to put this part of the tour to bed.
The walk back into the hotel had everyone buzzing about the fireworks display. In the near capacity elevator, on the way up to the rooftop of the Marina Bay Sands, you shared the pictures you'd taken, with all of Team Cap huddled over your phone. Upstairs again, everyone spilled out into Ku Dé Ta, taking in the air and enjoying the rooftop wind as wait staff wove through the crowd with hors d'oeuvres and drinks for guests. You stuck close, but not conspicuously, to Chris and the boys, sipping champagne and enjoying the send off from Singapore.

You and Sebastian excused yourselves to the buffet set along the edge of the party, determined to find more of the unidentified tarts you had sampled from a waiter you had yet to reacquire in your sights. Handing you a small plate to fill for yourself, Sebastian reminded you, "You never did explain why you couldn't back out of your thing with Frank."

Your eyes widened at the realization and you put an apologetic hand on his arm. Picking out some finger foods to snack on, you explained the history of the triple dog dare on the Kingdom set. When you were finished, Sebastian took a moment to chew and swallow the shrimp in his mouth, nodding contemplatively and holding up a finger for you to wait for his response to it all.

"Frank is an evil son of a bitch, isn't he?" he decided, with a discerning squint in one eye.

"It's diabolical, isn't it?" you agreed, with a laugh. "So, you see why I couldn't say 'no'."

Sebastian nodded. "Did you send it to him yet?"

"I did," you nodded, picking up a pair of cocktail napkins and handing one off to him.

"Thanks," he smiled. "So, what'd he say?"

"He said, it was cheating," you told him, with a mischievous smirk. "But he said he'd accept it because I flipped him off in the pic and you did that HYDRA salute."

His face lit up, with excitement, as he told you, "I almost got busted doing that!"

"What?" you gaped. "No!"

"Yeah," he insisted. "Like, he must'a seen it from the side of his eye or something, 'cause he looked up and was like, 'What the hell are you doing?' And I'm like, 'Nothing, man. Just stretching.' And I made like I was, like, stretching out my arms over head."

"Holy shit," you marveled, clutching a hand to your stomach as you laughed. "Oh, my god."

Sebastian laughed with you for a moment. "But we got it," he smiled, holding up his hand for a high five.

"Hell yeah, we did," you confidently agreed, slapping your hand into his. He held on, giving your hand a little shake back and forth. "Bear fight!"

"Bear fight!" he laughed.

You got a couple of strange looks from people nearby, but you didn't care. "Here," you said, setting your plate down on an unoccupied high top table beside you, taking out your phone. You tapped open your texted conversation with Frank for Sebastian to inspect, telling him, "You should've heard
Frank complaining on the phone.”

"He called you to bitch?" Sebastian laughed, scrolling through the short exchange. "That's hilarious."

"What is?"

Oh, fuck my life. You literally froze, breath hitched and heart skipped, watching Chris appear over Sebastian's shoulder and look at your phone. God love Sebastian, he tried. He dropped his hand under his plate, but Chris dipped and made a grab for your phone, hooking his arm around Sebastian's shoulders to keep him from turning out and away. He let Sebastian go, snorting at whatever dirty string of words Sebastian muttered to or about Chris as they both straightened up. Chris cocked his head, turning your phone right side up in his hands, before quirking up a questioning eyebrow at you and watching you shrink into your shoulders.

"What the hell is this?" he complained, giving the picture a second, closer look.

"It- Well- You see-" You seemed completely incapable of forming a complete sentence.

Chris looked over at Sebastian, who shrugged his shoulders high up to his ears and puffed out his cheeks at a loss for words himself, asking, "The fuckin' 'hail HYDRA' salute?"

"Okay, yeah," Sebastian admitted, gesturing a hand out helplessly toward the phone in Chris' hand. "But, like, you know, ironically."

"Fucking fuck ironically," Chris scoffed, pointing a finger down at the screen. "She's wearing a HYDRA shirt-" He looked again. "and texting 'hail HYDRA' and you're doing 'Winter Soldier' an'-"

Chris stopped, turning his dumbfounded look to you. "What the hell? You guys are-"

"Hey," Sebastian piped up, holding up a finger to stop Chris. "It's not us. Frank made us do it."

"Frank ma-" Chris shook his head, looking at the pic again, before handing you your device back. "How the fuck does Frank make you do anything from 1500 miles away?"

"Okay," Sebastian conceded with a small shrug, "there's some joke in there about HYDRA being a worldwide organization, but I don't know exactly how it goes." He waved away the idea with his hand, going on to say, "But you don't understand. The pic might very well have saved her life."

All expression left Chris' face and he stared, for a silent moment, at his friend. "Literally nothing you're saying makes any sense," he decided, with a slow sweep of his head.

"Hear me out," Sebastian held up a hand.

Chris crossed his arms, listening and nodding along as Sebastian rehashed what you had previously explained about the rules of the triple dog dare. You stood by, sipping your drink and nodding emphatically at Sebastian's conclusion that, yes, he had hit all the finer points of the deal and consequences. At the end, Chris shifted his gaze between the two of you, his lips pushed to one side in thought.

"Two dozen chickens in the backyard, huh?" he considered, looking at you. "Over refusing a nasty ass shot?"

You nodded. "Yeah."

"What the hell was he gonna do if you didn't do it?" he wondered.
"I don't want to know," you shook your head.

Chris shook his head, for a few moments. He unfolded his arms, leaning over to pick a bitesized cake from your plate to eat. He nodded to himself, as he chewed, and you and Sebastian shared a look, not quite sure if you were in the clear yet or not.

"That is fucked up," Chris finally said, wagging his brow up and dusting some crumbs from his fingertips. He furrowed his brow, asking you, "Why didn't you just tell me?"

"I don't know," you petulantly admitted, waving a hand up him. "Because you already didn't care for the shirt in New Orleans or the stuff I wear to work, so..."

"I would'a helped with that," he told you, his tone implying you should've know. "You think I'd really let him get away with something like chickens in your yard, or whatever the hell he came up with?" You shrugged and Chris laughed at your lack of confidence in him. "C'ah mon," he scoffed, head ticking back and his face pinched with insult. "Where's the shirt?"

"In my suitcase," you stated the obvious.

"Go get it," he told you, with a confident jut of his chin.

"What?" you questioned, brow pulled down by confusion. "Why?"

"Just go get the fahckin' shirt, sweetheart," he nodded, putting his hand around on the small of your back to send you away.

At a loss for what else to do, you headed for the door. Behind you, you heard Chris ask Sebastian, "Now where the fuck is Mackie?" and you edged your way back inside to go to the elevator. You had no idea what he wanted with the shirt, but couldn't have been happier with how well that whole thing actually went. You still weren't 100% sure that you could have actually told him about the dare in the first place and gotten his cooperation, but that he even said it and took it all so well was enlightening.

Downstairs, you pulled out your t-shirt and folded it up small and tightly to fit in your hand. You rode back up to the roof and flashed your credentials at the door to get back in to the private Marvel party. You smiled some 'hellos' to people you'd gotten to know a bit on the trip so far, snaking your way through the crowd to try and find Chris again. When you spotted him, he was with Anthony and Sebastian by the pool. Anthony tutted at you, shaking his head at you when you came over.

"Polka Dot," he frowned, giving you a disappointed once over. "I. am. shocked."

"You bought me the shirt," you reminded him, with an accusing finger point. "It was your idea in New Orleans."

Mackie held up his open palms. "Hey, I didn't make you take that picture," he argued.

"Yeah," Chris began, quirking up an eyebrow at Anthony, "well, she wouldn't even be in this mess, if it weren't for you." Sebastian snickered and Chris turned his attention to him, adding, "And you're not helping keep her out of trouble, either."

"Me?" Sebastian balked. "Who came up with the idea for how to get her out of trouble?"

Chris' expression begged, really? and Sebastian seemed to resign himself, when Chris pointed out, "You two are always up to something when you get together."
"Fine," Sebastian grumbled, folding his arms across his chest.

"You got it?" Chris asked, nodding to the black cloth in your hand.

"Yeah," you acknowledged. Handing it over, when he held out his hand, and asking, "What do you want it for?"

"I'm gonna destroy it," he answered, decidedly.

"What?" you gaped, looking between the smirking faces of the trio in front of you.

"C'mere," Anthony insisted, holding your elbow to lead you with them to the unoccupied edge of the pool, away from the rest of the party.

Chris nodded to Mackie, who held out his tumbler at arm's length to Chris. Sebastian took out his phone and eyed the screen, as Chris dipped the end of your tee into Anthony's glass.

"What are you doing?" you worried, looking around to see who, if anyone, was watching.

Chris looked over at Sebastian, asking, "Ready?"

"Ready," he nodded, eyes set on his phone's display. "Go."

Looking into Sebastian's camera lens, Chris quirked up a brow, arrogantly questioning, "Really, Grillo? That's the best you got?"

Anthony nodded and hummed his affirmative backing of whatever Chris was up to, while Chris reached into his pocket. He flicked open the top of his lighter and lit it in one expert move. Chris set the flame under the the end of the t-shirt, right under the corner he had dipped in Mackie's drink. A flame lapped up from the low end of the shirt, in an instant. Chris let the shirt twist for a moment in the wind, watching the small flame grow.

"I got yah 'hail HYDRA," he scoffed, jutting his chin and dropping the burning shirt into the pool, before coming around Anthony to stand on the other side of you.

Sebastian filmed the whole thing, following the shirt's fall into the water and it's sizzling extinguishment by the pool. He tilted the phone back up to see Chris and Anthony flipping off the camera. Sebastian captured your hand clapped over your slacked jaw and your eyes wide with disbelief, sandwiched between the smug superheroes. He turned the phone back on himself, flipping off the lens and leveling a glare for the video, as he said, "Team Cap."

"Oh. my. God," you breathed, still hiding your shock behind your hands. You tiptoed to the edge of the pool to see your tattered shirt floating on the surface. "What did you dooo?!"

"Put a stop to that shit," Sebastian casually remarked, but with an air of cockiness, while tapping away on his screen.

Mackie crouched down by the pool's edge, reaching out to hook a finger into the shirt to drag it back. He held it up, laughing, as he gave it a small snap and water whipped and splashes fanned out. He set his glass down on the concrete, bunching up the defiled shirt to wring out over the pool. Still proudly chuckling, he let the material unfurl and handed it back to you. He walked around behind you, to join Chris and Sebastian and watch the video. You held up your former uniform shirt, inspecting the shredded and singed remnant against the lights.

"I should be a cinematographer," Sebastian considered, as the guys all beamed down at the glowing
device in Sebastian's hand.

Chris looped his wrist at you, blindly, telling you, "Babe, c'mere. You gotta see this."

You sighed, a little defeated, at your ruined shirt that, despite turning out to be a pain in your ass, was actually kinda cool considering its history. You wedged yourself between Sebastian's shoulder and Chris to see for yourself. Sebastian restarted the video and the guys started their snickering all over again, still quite pleased with themselves. Your phone chimed in your purse and Chris and Anthony reached into their pockets to stop the buzzing from theirs. Sebastian had sent out the video in a group message. Now you all had your own copy to relive the moment that Chris actually took some kind of retaliation on Frank.

You shook your head, tapping the screen to play the video, at Sebastian's request. He wanted to be sure it worked for everyone, so he knew it would work for Frank, too. And, yep. It sure did. You weren't surprised, and the guys burst into excited "Oo"s and "Oh"s when Frank joined the conversation.

Frank fucking Grillo: All of you can lick my balls

Frank fucking Grillo: Except you sweetheart. Just saw he sent this to you too. Sorry about that

Flip Cup Hero: Fuuuuuck youuuuu

"Chris!" you gasped, smacking the back of your hand into his arm.

"What?" he begged, rubbing the stung spot you left on his bicep.

Sebastian Stan: And fuck hydra!!! #teamcap

You slapped Sebastian's arm and he looked genuinely offended. "Both of you," you scolded. "You're terrible. Stop it."

You: Sorry, boss! I didn't know that was gonna happen

Flip Cup Hero: I'm not sorry

unknown number: I sure as hell am not sorry. Fuck HYDRA

"Anthony!" you chided, sending him a disapproving scowl, while he looked relieved to be out of reach.

Sebastian Stan: Nope. Not one one bit.

"Okay!" you barked. "All of you, just stahhhhp."

They all snickered together, shoulders high and shaking, as they tried to look sincere during their overlapping apologies. You didn't buy it.

Frank fucking Grillo: I'm not mad at you kiddo. But the rest of you little bitches- my balls. Lick em.

The sniggering turned into all out guffaws. Chris and Anthony actually leaned into each other for support. You shook your head, unlocking your timed out phone to reply to everyone.

You: I'm surrounded by idiots

Frank fucking Grillo: You can say that again
"Christopher Robert!" You sent him a scathing look and he shrugged, pretending to be clueless.

Frank fucking Grillo: You're the only morons there to surround her, hero boy

You: You're all officially terrible people

unknown number: Don't be like that Polka Dot

"Anthony," you sighed, sweeping a hand down the front of you to reference yourself, "I am literally right here. Just talk to me. Everyone, just- stop texting and picking on Frank."

"He started it," Sebastian reminded you all.

"A looong time ago," Chris seconded. "We've been good, this whole time."

"Hardly," you pointed a knowing finger at Chris. You held up and waved the still dripping t-shirt in your hand. "And, I think it's safe to say, you finished it. Okay? Come on, guys. He's my boss, remember?"

"He's not mad at you," Sebastian dismissed your worry. "We're all just fuckin' around. He knows it's a joke."

Sebastian Stan: Frank- tell [y/n] she's not in trouble

"What did I just say?" you complained, wincing at Sebastian.

Frank fucking Grillo: You're not in trouble. You know better

Frank fucking Grillo: You're the daughter I never had

"See?" Sebastian proudly smiled, showing his phone to you, as if you didn't see the messages previewing on your own screen, while they ignored your request to stop egging each other on via text.

Frank fucking Grillo: But the rest of you fuckers better watch your backs in NY

unknown number: Bring it old man

Frank fucking Grillo: This old man is gonna kick all your asses and not even break a sweat

Flip Cup Hero: We'll be sure to schedule the fight before the early bird special at Denny's

"Chris!" you snapped.

"What?" he begged, trying not to laugh and holding up his hands in surrender. "That's it. I swear. I'm done."

You shook your head, huffing as you typed.

You: All of you are off my Christmas card list

"What?!" Mackie yelled, clearly insulted. "Don't you ruin Christmas," he warned, as you walked back to the party and waved goodbye with your hand over your head.

Frank fucking Grillo: Now you did it. You mopes ruined Christmas. You assholes happy now?
You were just finishing updating your contact list to save Mackie's number, when you flipped back to the group text to catch up with the conversation. You laughed, shaking your head to yourself, as you read. Craning your neck to see through the crowd, you spotted the guys, still lumped together by the pool. Apparently the Christmas card list threat was a powerful one. Not that you were actually responsible enough to get cards out to more than your parents and brother when you couldn't get home for the holidays, anyway, but still-powerful.

Anthony Mackie: Polka Dot-we're all very sorry. Not the Christmas card list:(

Anthony Mackie: Anything but the Christmas card list

Frank fucking Grillo: Don't listen to them. Save the stamp and scratch them off the list. They don't mean it

Sebastian Stan: I want a Christmas card!!

Flip Cup Hero: Shut your hole grillo. You've caused enough problems

Frank fucking Grillo: Hehehe that's what you get for trying to turn my girl on me #AlveysAngel bitches

"Oh, Frank," you softly tutted, cringing at the return of the hashtag.

It'd been weeks since he'd used it. It's like he was saving it for a special occasion. You looked up from your phone, turning your attention back toward your favorite shit stirrers. Did you really just hear Chris yell, "mother fucker" from over there? They were all fixated on their phones and your eyes flitted back to your screen at the chime of a new message.

Flip Cup Hero: She's just using you for the paycheck #capsgirl

Anthony Mackie: Ha! Suck it!

Sebastian Stan: You want some aloe for that burn?

By the time you saw Sebastian's message light up your screen, you had made it back to where Chris and the guys were up to no good. Without warning, you plucked the phone's from Chris and Anthony's hands. Sebastian clenched his fists around his, twisting away from you to save his phone. Not that you had a free hand to take his, anyway. Chris and Anthony complained in unison, with a pair of "hey"s in perfect sync.

"No," you shut them down, folding an arm behind you to hide their devices and holding up a finger on your free hand. "You guys are getting out of hand."

"Sorry," Mackie resigned. He held out his open hand. "Can I have my phone back, please?"

"When I think you can handle the responsibility," you snarked.

"Babe," Chris smiled, taking a small step forward, "come on."

"I swear to god," you said, putting their stolen phones on display, "I will throw them in the pool."
"You wouldn't," Anthony scoffed, folding his arms.

"Try me," you dared, quirking up a brow and smirking, mischievously.

"Don't try her," Chris assured him, holding out his arm in front of Anthony. "I'm sorry, babe. We maybe got a little out 'a hand."

"Nope," you shook your head, not buying it. You tucked their phones in your purse, promising Mackie, "I'll let you know if your wife calls." Turning to Chris, you assured him, "And I'll let you know if your mom calls."

"Your mom," Sebastian chuckled.

As you walked away again, Anthony called after you, "Hey. Hey, Polka Dot? Don't tell my wife why you took my phone. Okay? Polka Dot?"

Your phone chimed and you were back to giggling.

Sebastian Stan: She took their phones! [Y/n] took their phones and has them in her purse! Lmao!!!

Frank fucking Grillo: Better hide your shit Stan. She'll get you when you're not looking

You: Damn right

Frank fucking Grillo: Don't let these morons ruin your night, kiddo

Sebastian Stan: Not me. I'm a quick learner

You: Oh, I've got this under control;) 

Frank fucking Grillo: That's my girl! Haha! See you all in New York. Safe travels sweetheart

You: Thanks! <3

It wasn't long before Chris came sniffing around for the phones. With puppy dog eyes and an obvious pout, he sided up next to you at one of the high top tables and slid you another glass of champagne. "Peace offering?"

You laughed, shaking your head at his sad face. "You just can't stop yourself, can you?"

"Come on," Chris grimaced, "Seb's right. Frank started it. He always starts it."

"You're incorrigible," you told him. "I just can't decide if you're the bad influence on the others or if they're the bad influence on you."

"It's them," he said confidently. "I used to go to church and everything, before they came along." He put his hand over his head, drawing an imaginary circle. "I had this halo, right here, and everything."

"Held up by your horns, I bet," you teased.

Chris shrugged, knocking back a drink of his fresh beer. "How else is the fahckin' thing s'pose to stay on?" he deadpanned.

You fished the phones out of your purse and set them in a stack next to Chris' drink. "At least tell him, you had to put up a fight to get them back," you smiled.
He picked out his phone and slipped it in his pocket, pecking a kiss into the side of your hair. "Thank you, baby." Chris grabbed his drink and Mackie's phone to return. He only got a few feet away before he stopped and turned back, asking, "Were you serious about the whole Christmas card thing? Seb's kinda worried."

You laughed and shook your head, steepling your fingers into your chest. "My god, no. That sweet boy. No. I could never keep him off the list."

Chris flashed a smile. "He'll be glad to hear it."

You flipped your hand, shooing him away to give Anthony back his phone and assure Sebastian that Christmas was saved. Now you just had to remember to actually buy Christmas cards this year to send out to Team Cap. You sipped the drink Chris brought you. A quick check of your phone showed you there was no new activity in the group message and you were relieved that that was finally over. That or they started a new thread without you. At least they learned not to be little shits when you could see, if that were true. Either way, there was a garbage can peaking out from the end of the bar and you dropped the ruined t-shirt into the trash.

"Farewell, HYDRA," you shrugged.
Chapter 45

You partied into the wee hours with Chris and the others. You caught up with Joe's wife again, an absolute delight to talk to, by the way, and chatted with her about how you were both enjoying the trip so far. Drinks were flowing and everyone was having a good time. The boys managed to behave themselves, for the most part, for the rest of the night. There were some animated stories and jokes, followed by boisterous laughter and a few selfies to remember the night by.

Just before 2 a.m., you were tucked under Chris' arm, leaning on each other a little, as Chris tried the room key upside down. You giggled and he groaned, in frustration. You grabbed his hand with yours and twisted it over for the card to face the right way. He sputtered, unhappily, his head ticking back as he gave the door a shove to swing open and sent you in ahead of him. Dropping your purse on the dining table, you shuffled into the bedroom and fumbled around the wall for the light switch. Behind you, you heard the rattle of loose change, and other things from Chris' pockets, settling on the tabletop. He joined you, a moment later, and crashed down into the mattress on his shoulder.

"Ffahhhck," he groaned.

You toed off your shoes and laid down beside him, stretching your arms out ahead of you to slide into the bed on your belly. Chris flopped an arm over the back of your waist and dragged you close, tucking his hand underneath you. He let out a loud and tired breath and nuzzled into the pillow of your outstretched arm under his cheek. You stuffed your left hand beneath you to lay between his and the mattress, with your own contented, albeit, more demure sigh.

"D'you have a good time, babe?" Chris mumbled into your shoulder, his breathing warm and damp on your skin.

"Mhm," you nodded.

"Good," he said, brushing a kiss on your neck.

"We should get up and change," you suggested and Chris nodded.

Except neither of you budged. Almost as soon as he was still again, you heard the soft sounds of Chris sleeping. A minute later, you fell asleep.

You woke up to the sound of insistent thumping on the suite door. Still hugged against Chris, he petulantly moaned and loosed his grip of you. He rolled away, from where he had cuddled across you, and turned onto his back. You buried your face into the fluffy bedding, rubbing your forehead against the covers, as if it could dull the pounding in your head. Why, Alcohol? Why were you not friends anymore?

The knock came again and, from the living room, you heard Chris' cell phone ring. Chris slapped his hand into the mattress with a thud and an aggravated growl, as he kicked himself off the bed.

"Ah, shit," he complained.

You gave an inquisitive hum, the closest you could muster to actually verbalizing a question. It didn’t get an answer. Instead, you heard Chris' heavy footsteps toward the door and the scrape of something across the table.

"Yeah," he groaned, at the same time the ringing stopped. "Hold on." You heard the distinct clicking of the door's locks being opened and Chris go on, "Yeah, I know."
"The hell, man?" It took you a second to place Josh's voice. "You've got, like, ten minutes."

"I know," Chris griped.

"What can I do?"

"No. Nothing," Chris sighed. "I got it. [Y/n]'s still asleep. Hey, can you maybe get some coffee or something?"

"Sure," Josh agreed. "No problem."

The door shut and Chris came back into the room, sitting on the side of the bed. Rubbing a hand in small circles on your lower back, he gently said, "[Y/n]? Sweetie, wake up. We overslept. We gotta go."

It finally registered and you picked your head up to see the alarm clock by the bed. "Shit," you gasped.

You pushed yourself up to your elbows and looked around the room. Chris stood back up, pulling his shirt off and wadding it up on his way to grab his suitcase, telling you, "We've got ten minutes before we have to be downstairs for our ride to the airport."

"FUCKFUCKFUCKFUCK," you chanted, climbing off the bed and scurrying to the bathroom.

You caught a look at yourself in the mirror and stopped. *Yeesh.* You hissed in a breath, as you pulled a face. Your hair was mussed and your makeup smudged under your eyes. You grabbed a tissue to wipe your lower lids clean and combed out your hair. Your dress was wrinkled from sleeping in it. You frowned at the mess, while you put a glob of toothpaste on your toothbrush and Chris came in to do the same. This would not do.

You would have paid money for a shower, but made due with a hasty washing of your face in the sink. Gathering up everything from the vanity, you stuffed your toiletries kit into the side of your suitcase and grabbed the first shirt you saw. Tugging off your dress, you haphazardly folded it to go back in the suitcase and fished out a clean pair of panties and your jeans. You were just smoothing the elastic of your underwear around your hips, when Chris came back to the bedroom.

He leaned in, putting his hand on your belly, as he quickly kissed your cheek, and said, "Sorry."

"What for?" you wondered, stepping one leg into your jeans, as he pulled on a fresh t-shirt overhead.

"For oversleeping," he said, with a quick move of his hand out, as if the answer were obvious.

"It's not your fault," you assured him, with a light bounce on your toes to hike your jeans up to zip. "It's not like I was any help last night."

Chris snorted, shaking his head, as he flipped the lid of his suitcase closed and panned his gaze around the room. "I have got a splitting headache," he sighed, pulling the zipper round on his luggage.

"Same," you seconded, with your own unhappy sigh.

"I asked Josh to try and get some coffee. Maybe that'll help," Chris hoped, grabbing his suitcase by the handle and carrying it out of the room.

Dressed again, you went around the suite, double checking countertops and drawers. You hated
leaving in a rush and prayed you hadn’t overlooked anything. Or, at least, nothing important. Chris
scooped the change off the dining table and handed you your purse when you took your luggage to
the foyer to put with his. With your thanks and a quick peek into your handbag for your passport and
such, you nodded your answer when he looked up from his phone and asked if you were all set.

"Josh is down in the lobby," Chris said. With a small smile, he added, "With coffee."

"Thank god," you grinned back.

Chris shouldered his backpack and you draped his garment bag over your arm, as you grabbed the
handle of your suitcase and he opened the hotel room door. You started out into the hall and looked
over your shoulder to see Chris pulling his luggage behind him, when you heard the door shut. You
power walked to the elevators, still a little anxious that you might miss your flight.

In the elevator, Chris hid under his Leafs hat and you kept to yourself, pretending not to notice him
and hoping to not draw any attention to him. In the lobby, you spotted Josh right away. You met him
in the plush seating area just before the hotel entrance and he picked up a pair of large paper cups of
coffee from a small end table, handing one to each of you. Josh took the grament bag off your hands
and told you guys to follow him to the car to the airport. Once you were on the way, and had a few
sips of coffee in you, you began to feel a little better.

All checked in at the airport, you grabbed a quick breakfast at Starbucks. Relief finally found you,
when you took a seat outside your gate and still had about twenty minutes before they began
boarding. With your carryon stowed, you buckled up and put in your earbuds, as was your preflight
ritual. Chris messed around on his phone until the plane backed away from the gate.

The first leg of your trip wasn't too bad. The few hours went by well enough. During your layover in
Sri Lanka, you, Chris, and Josh hung out in the lounge. You tucked your feet under you, curled into
the back of a leather arm chair, with a small plate of sample sized desserts balanced on the arm of
your chair and a magazine on your knee. Treat yourself. You can make up for any indulgences with
Frank and the gym later. Chris and Josh chatted about the Red Sox and you tuned them out. A
couple hours passed and you were back in the air and London-bound.

Eleven and a half hours stuck on a plane sucks. Yes, even if your seat mate is Chris Evans. Yes,
even if you snuggle up on your ridiculously hot seat mate Chris Evans' shoulder to sleep through a
few hours of the flight. It. sucks.

By the time you taxied to the gate at Heathrow and the pilot had turned off the seatbelt sign, you
were ready to run, not walk, off the plane. Your stiff-backed stretch and tired groan said as much.
Chris rubbed a hand up and down the back of your arm, with a sympathetic groan of his own, when
it seemed to take forever for the flight attendant to open the door of the plane. When you were finally
freed from the cabin, it was just after 8 o’clock. When your trio arrived at the baggage claim, your
day went from loooong to

You waited until the belt on the baggage carousel stopped, before you threw your hands up in the air
and gaped, "Are you kidding me?!"

Your bag wasn't there. Chris and Josh looked around. Maybe someone had grabbed your suitcase by
mistake and set it aside instead of putting it back on the belt. But, no such luck. You went to the
airline's counter and got in line. If it weren't for Chris’ arm behind you, holding you to his side, and
his dotting a kiss into your hair everytime you made a low growl in frustration, you probably would
have taken hostages. By the time you got to the counter, you could have cried when you didn't get an
answer to where your suitcase had wandered off to.
You did all you could at the airport, before Chris finally turned you toward the terminal exit to catch a taxi. You guys missed your scheduled ride, with the hold up of trying to find your missing luggage. Instead of going to the hassle of rearranging your ride, you all agreed a cab ride would probably be faster. By the time you pulled up to the curb outside the hotel, it was almost 11 p.m. You had no shame throwing back the glass of champagne offered at your arrival. Check-in was a breeze thanks to Megan's earlier appearance. All you had to do was pick up keys. *Thank god.*

Upstairs in the suite, you fell into the velvety couch in the living room, while Chris rolled his suitcase into the bedroom. You slumped down into the cushions, until your ass nearly hung over the edge of your seat, exhausted and sulking. A couple minutes later, Chris came back in, stopping beside your end of the couch and holding his hand down for you. When you didn't take it right away, he flicked his fingers into his palm and threw up his brow, with an expectant tick of his head down at you. You begrudgingly slapped your hand into his and he dragged you along, shuffling your feet behind him, to the next room.

"Here," he offered, with a wave of his hand toward a t-shirt and pair of shorts piled up on the corner of the bed. "You can sleep in those, till your bag shows up tomorrow."

"*If* it shows up tomorrow," you mumbled.

Chris tutted, taking his luggage off the bed and setting it aside. He moved over to where you were moping at the end of the bed, poking a finger around at his offered clothes. He stopped behind you, belting his arms around you and pressing a long kiss into the curve of your neck.

"I know, baby," he commiserated, sympathetically. "You're having a bad day."

"I don't even have a toothbrush," you complained, with a defeated rise and slap of your hand at your side.

"It's okay," Chris assured you, giving you a squeeze before he let you go and took his toiletries kit into the bathroom.

You picked up the t-shirt and held it out in front of you. "Thank you," you called after him.

"No problem, babe," he replied.

You traded your shirt for his, enjoying a therapeutic sniff of the faint scent of his detergent stuck to the material. Sitting down on the edge of the bed, you took off your shoes and set them aside. Your jeans you folded and laid over the arm of a chair in the room with your shirt and purse. You folded down the duvet from the pillows on both sides of the bed, ready to give up on the day.

There was a knock at the door and, from the bathroom, Chris announced, "It's for you."

You gave a quizzical look to the bathroom doorway and shook your head with a shrug. *Whatever.* Going to the door, you checked the peephole to see Josh outside in the hall. Undoing the locks, you opened the door enough to hide behind but wide enough for him to come in. Thankfully, it made an adequate mini-dress on you and didn't give away too much.

Inside the threshold of the suite, Josh turned and held out a white shopping bag to you. "I could probably do better, if it weren't so late," he excused himself.

You peeked in the top of the bag. Reaching in, you saw a new toothbrush, toothpaste, a package of face wipes, some lip balm, a comb, some hair ties, and other miscellaneous travel-sized styling items you might need. Rooting around to the bottom of the bag, there was a souvenir t-shirt with the Union Jack on the front, in what Josh hoped was your size in the European sizing.
You could have cried. You clutched the bag to your chest and threw your arms around Josh's neck, gushing, "Oh, my god. Thank you, sooo much." With a laugh, he hugged you back and you went on, "You're amazing! Bless you."

From where he leaned into the living doorway from the bedroom, Chris chuckled. Hiding his amusement behind his hand that rubbed over his mouth and beard. You let go of Josh and hugged your bag of goodies again. You gave Josh another appreciative smile, offering a hand up for a high five instead of blathering on about how awesome he was again. Josh slapped his hand to yours and Chris came in.

"Thanks, bro," Chris smiled, shaking Josh's hand and clapping him on the shoulder. "I appreciate it."

"No trouble," Josh shook his head. He turned after you, saying, "Let me know if you need anything else. I can do better in the morning."

You turned on your heel, assuring him, "No. This is perfect. Thank you. Really, you didn't have to."

Josh gave you a smile and a wave, as you went on your way and Chris walked him back to the door. In the bathroom, you dumped your loot out on the vanity and organized a corner of the counter for yourself. After such a long day, it was a treat to brush your teeth before bed. By the time you'd combed out and tied up your hair to go back to the bedroom, Chris was already in bed. Sitting cross legged on top of the sheets, he was hunched onto his elbows on his knees and scrolling through his phone.

Seeing you come in, he gave you a warm smile and held out his arm to you. You stepped over and he curled his arm behind you, when you were close enough to grab. You pirouetted, as he pulled you in to fall into his lap. He hugged you to him, rolling to his side to gently bring you down to the mattress. He smothered over you, nibbling kisses at the bit of your shoulder exposed by the larger collar of his shirt. You giggled at the soft bristles of his beard scratching along your skin.

Picking his head up to see you, Chris frowned, "Sorry about today."

"It didn't turn out so bad," you shrugged. "Josh is the shit."

"Yeah, he is," Chris chuckled, his eyes crinkling and dropping his head to shake at your frank assessment. He kissed your forehead, unwrapping himself from you to twist back and turn off the light. "We'll figure out something tomorrow."

You pushed your feet under the blankets and pulled the sheet up to your chest. When Chris settled back into his pillow, you cuddled up to his side. He wrapped his arm around you and you nuzzled your cheek on his chest, draping your leg over his thighs. He gave the top of your head a kiss and you both said your goodnights.

You woke up alone. Chris' side of the bed was empty and the sheets were cool under your palm sweeping over them to find him. Rubbing your eyes, you stretched and looked out the window to the blue sky. Folding aside the sheet, you stood up and tugged down the back of Chris' t-shirt to cover yourself. Padding around the end of the bed and out to the living room, you spied Chris, already dressed and sitting at the table in the dining area, phone to his ear and pen in his hand over a small tablet of hotel stationary. He winked at you, shouldering the phone against his cheek and holding up his finger to wordlessly ask for your patience.

You smiled and went to the bathroom. When you came back, he was still on the phone. While Chris
hummed affirmatively to whomever he was listening to, you pulled your heels up to your butt and wedged yourself into the corner of the couch. There was a menu for Room Service on the table and you snatched it up, feeling a small rumble in your belly. Chris thanked whoever he was speaking to, as he got up, his chair scooting back from the table as he stood.

Disconnecting the call, he crossed the room, holding the phone out in his fingertips. You looked up, realizing it was yours, and held out your hand for him to lay the device in. You wrinkled your brow, curiously, as you hit the home button on the phone to see your lock screen of Archie on the beach to double check it was yours.

"Airline called," he answered, before you had to ask. "They found your bag."

You lit up. "Really?"

"Yeah," Chris nodded, going back to the table and pulling his phone out of his pocket. Taking a picture of his notes, he tapped away on his phone and went on, saying, "Josh is on his way back to get it for you. I just sent him the details of where to go and stuff."

"Oh, no," you shook your head. "He doesn't have-"

"He already is," he told you, putting his phone away.

"I thought they would deliver it, if they found it," you frowned.

"They would have," he agreed, with a single nod, and coming to join you on the couch. "But it would have been later today. I didn't want you to wait."

"I could have-"

"Babe," he spoke up, taking the menu out of your hands to see for himself, "it's already taken care of." Chris reached out a blind hand to rest on your leg, his thumb smoothing back and forth as he perused the menu. "You hungry? I'm starved."

Your mouth hung open a little, as you stared blankly at him. It wasn't that you weren't overwhelmingly relieved your luggage was located and incredibly appreciative of Josh for going out to get it for you, but you weren't exactly comfortable with the situation. Josh was on the trip to help Chris. He was his assistant. Josh had already gone above and beyond for you last night and you kinda felt like you were taking advantage of having him on hand. You closed your jaw and Chris read a couple interesting item descriptions aloud to you.

"What sounds good?" Chris asked, turning his head to see you.

You didn't want to admit you hadn't been paying attention, so you shrugged. "Everything?" you giggled. "I'm famished."

Chris smiled. "Why don't you go get cleaned up," he offered, "an I'll order."

"Sounds like a plan," you said, giving him a thumbs up, as you stood.

He spurred you on your way, with a gentle swat on the behind. You grabbed the bottom of his too-big-on-you shirt and held it against you, as if it offered some kind of defense, as you skipped away. In the middle of brushing your teeth, Chris poked his head in the open bathroom door to tell you breakfast would be there in about a half hour. With a little extra time, you ran a hot bath, adding a squeeze of a sweet smelling bath gel to bubble the water. Waiting for the water to rise, you clicked through the channels of the tv on the resessed shelf at the foot of the tub, but didn't find anything that
caught your fancy. You slipped into the steamy tub, with an extra towel rolled up and set between your head and the cool marble. Ahhh. This is the life.

When Chris knocked on the door, to tell you breakfast had arrived, you inspected your fingertips. They were sufficiently pruned and you called out that you'd be there in a few minutes. Giving yourself a quick lather, you pulled the plug on the drain and towed off. Wrapped up in a snuggly hotel bathrobe, you knelt down and quickly washed your hair. Twisting your hair up into a towel, you stepped into a pair of hotel slippers and scooted out to the far room to join Chris.

He was already seated at the table, chewing on what looked like a mouthful of eggs Benedict, as you approached. The corner of your chair pushed out from under the table, with the aid of the side of Chris' foot, and he picked up the silver cover from your place beside him. You sat down, grinning at the powdered sugar covered waffles, speckled with blueberries in the pockets, waiting for you.

"S'that okay?" Chris asked, around his mouthful.

Picking out a piece of strawberry from a bowl of fruit salad in the middle of the table, you nodded. "I swear to god," you said, popping the red slice in your mouth, "I feel like Julia Roberts."

Chris' eyes crinkled with his smile. "You kinda look like her, in that getup," he snorted.

"I'll take it," you approved, cutting off a piece of waffle for yourself. Your eyes widened and you hummed happily at the taste. "This is sooo good," you mumbled, as you ate.

"How are you holding up from all the flying yesterday?" he checked.

You nodded, until you could swallow your food. "Not bad, all things considered."

"Got the day off," he noted. "Nothing to do till tomorrow." He stabbed another bite onto his fork, looking up at you through his lashes. "Anything you wanna do in London?"

"Besides put another pin in the map with you?" you playfully wondered, quirking up a brow.

Chris almost sputtered out his food, but caught himself, his cheeks taking on a subtle shade of red as he tried not to choke. You covered your own mouth to hide your smile and any bits of food it may contain. He grabbed the napkin from beside his plate and wiped at his mouth, while he recovered, nodding as he chewed and swallowed.

"Besides that," he chuckled, making a sweep of his head.

"Hadn't really thought about it," you admitted, still grinning. "It's been pretty fun doing this shoot from the hip kind of thing." You cut another bite, remembering, "You've been here before, right? What do you like to do, when you're here?"

His brow rising, as he cut his food again, Chris admitted, "Don't usually travel with a girlfriend. Usually just would go out and hit the bars or clubs, when I wasn't doing the work." He put a smaller bite in his mouth and continued. "But it's been a while, for all of that here. I'd rather do something with you."

You smiled, turning your attention to your plate, feeling a soft heat pass through your cheeks at his sweetness. "Oh, yeah?" you innocently mused.

"Yeah," he nodded. It was quiet for a minute as you both ate, before Chris spoke up again. "We could thumb a cab and see where it takes us. Buckingham Palace is just over there," he noted, with a blind jab of his empty fork toward the window behind him. "See if you can get a guard to crack?"
He chuckled at his own idea. "There's the Eye on the river, the Tower of London; all kinds of stuff to see. We could try and steal some crown jewels..."

"I'm down for any of it," you agreed, with a chuckle. "I could use some new bling."

"We need a plan of attack," Chris decided. "But we have to be back in time for dinner."

Chris piqued your curiosity. "Is there a plan for dinner?"

He hummed, as he sipped his coffee. "It's late, though," he noted, "so, it's not like we have to rush, but yeah, we have plans."

"Who's all going?" you asked.

He shook his head this time, as you caught him mid-bite again. Chris pushed aside the food in his mouth to say, "Just you 'n me."

"Just you 'n me, huh?" you parroted, unable to help the shy smile that spread across your lips.

"Where we going?"

"Someplace nice," he winked, obviously not willing to give you any further details.

"That's all I get?" you pressed, poking your fork prong into a blueberry.

"That's all you get," he confirmed, with a shrewd smirk, taking up his coffee again.

You cleaned your plate of your waffles and helped Chris finish the fruit salad. Your belly was more than happy, as you went back to the bathroom to hang up the towel from your head and comb out your hair. With your hair air-drying the rest of the way, you sat down on the bed, your feet kicked out in front of you. Looking up the time difference between Ohio and London, you frowned to see it was only 5 hours, but it was still too early to message any of your family. You were going to kill time waiting for your luggage by updating them on the whole disaster. Oh, well. Instead, you scrolled through your social media to see who, if anyone, was missing you online.

Chris came in, his own phone in hand, and sat down at the end of the bed beside your feet. "So what did you want to do today?"

With a shrug, you admitted, "I don't know. There's a lot to choose from."

"Well," he decided, "I planned tonight. You have to plan today."

"Is that really fair?" you lightheartedly protested. "You make a dinner reservation and I have to plan a whole day?"

You pulled back your feet, when Chris swatted at them. Laying on his side across the bed, he propped his head up in his hand, reminding you, "I planned the Asian leg adventures."

"Wrong," you told him, holding up a finger. "You did the Temple of Heaven. I did Forbidden City."

"Yeah," he agreed. "And you did the beer bar and I'm doing dinner. It's your turn."

"That's not in chronological order," you noted.

"No, it's by category," Chris explained.
You put the nail in the argument that, "You can't take credit for something that hasn't happened yet. It goes," you began counting points on your fingers, "Forbidden City, Temple of Heaven, beer bar, today, and then dinner. It's clearly your turn."

"Then I'm doing two in a row," he countered, poking a finger under your bare foot to make you squeak and jump at the unexpected tickle.

"If I plan today, then I'm doing two in a row," you pointed out.

Chris opened his mouth to say something, but stopped. "Fahck."

"Uh-huh," you smugly nodded.

"Alright, fine," he said, tickling your foot again. "I pick something, then you pick something. That way it's fair to both of us."

"Deal," you nodded, firmly, shaking his hand to seal the agreement.
After a little checking around on your phones for things to do in London, you guys each picked a little adventure. You looked into a few things that you were too late to get in to, like some preplanned tours, but you weren't disappointed. Chris' idea to see the changing of the guard ceremony at the palace was highly agreeable. Your hotel was close enough to walk and your inner-girlie girl couldn't resist seeing Buckingham Palace in person, even if it was just from the outside. You kinda crushed a little on Prince William and, like everyone else in the world, romanticized the royals. You and some friends even got up to watch the Prince's royal wedding to Kate, having a little pajama party complete with rhinestone tiaras and locks and bagels.

Your suitcase was still en route, but you were more than adequately prepared for a little touristing, thanks to Josh. You paired your new, souvenir flag tee with your jeans and gym shoes. You didn't need to fuss with makeup when you're seeing the local sights, so you were combed up in a ponytail and ready to go in no time.

It wasn't hard to find your way around to the palace. The crowd, you expected. You moved around to snap a few pics of the impressive structure and grounds. It was a little exciting to be there, seeing what you'd only seen on tv, up close and in person. But then again, didn't every girl spend at least a few minutes wishing she was a princess or the handsome prince chose her when she was little?

You managed to inch your way into the mass of spectators and get a partial view relatively near the front, perched at the Victoria Memorial. It wasn't too disappointing of a view, for getting there just before 11. With a stretch of your arm or Chris', you were able to grab some decent photos and some video during the marching and ceremony. When it was over, you bummed around to let the crowd thin a little. You got a better look at the palace and your inner-princess was satisfied.

"Next time, we need to plan this better," Chris decided, while you reviewed your latest picture. "Plan ahead, so we have tickets and stuff for the tours or whatever," he nodded at his thought, looking over the front gates and the other tourists posing around you. "This was cool, but, ya know."

You hummed your agreement. A small grin lifted the corners of your mouth, while you zoomed in to take a pic of one of the bearskin hatted guards nearby. It gave you a warm, fuzzy feeling, hearing him talk about you coming back to London with him. He smiled at the picture you showed him and you guys took a leisurely stroll around. You wandered in with a small group to look at one of the royal guards. You told Chris you were gonna send your mom a selfie and the two of you hung off to the side, waiting your turn while other visitors admired from a small distance. You were the last ones there, after a few minutes, and you started your way up to the guard.

Chris had his phone up and, sounding a tad apprehensive, asked, "Can you just walk up to him like that?"

"Yeah," you casually said. "I think you just can't touch him."

You didn't get right up on him, leaving a respectable space between you and the soldier, but gave an exaggerated, open mouth smile and a thumbs up for your selfie. You giggled at the otherwise uneffected expression of the uniformed man and thanked him, even though you knew you wouldn't get an answer. You did hold up the phone for him to see your photo, though.

"I'm gonna send it to my mom," you explained. "She'll be sorry she missed you."

"She'll be sorry?" Chris chuckled. "You know this guy, or somethin'?"
"Who, him?" you checked, jerking a thumb at your picture buddy. "Oh, yeah. We go way back."

"Oh, yeah?" he mused. "How long you known him?"

"Oh, pfft," you scoffed, with a dismissive wave of your hand. "Like 30 years. We went to school together."

"You went to school together?" Chris laughed. "Where?"

"Hogwarts," you answered, as if he should have known.

"You went to Hogwarts with him?" he doubted.

"Obviously, he went and did his own thing," you noted, gesturing to his uniform. "He's got this cool sword now, but, yeah, we were best friends. We took karate together and he used to let me practice on him while I was studying to be a stylist. It's a shame he cut his hair," you tutted. Turning to the guard, you added, "You had the shiniest, longest hair I ever saw, for a guy."

"This guy let you do his hair?" Chris snickered.

You nodded. "Of course. All the time. He always liked the Princess Leia buns best. We'd stay up all night, watching movies, braiding hair, and then his mom would come pick him up from my house. He's that type of guy. Until he was 20, his mom took him everywhere."

Beside you, the guard broke. He couldn't fight the smile any longer. You saw a faint red pass his cheeks, as he tried to hold on, and he closed his eyes and bowed his head for a quick shake. His shoulders stopped shaking, but the tight-lipped grin was slow to dissolve.

In front of you, Chris lost his shit, folded over, clutching his chest, and his own face reddening from his boisterous laughter. "Holy shi- I can't believe you-" He couldn't finish.

You covered your mouth, in surprise. You had to laugh yourself. Bouncing excitedly on your toes, you never thought in a million years you'd ever see someone get one of these guys to crack. And here you were, seeing it with your own two eyes, and it was all your fault.

"Oh my god," you laughed, nearly in tears, as you pressed your hand over your chest and tried to compose yourself. "You have such a great smile," you told the guard, reaching out a hand you would normally put on a friend's arm, in such a fit of amusement, but stopping inches away from actually touching him. "You're awesome! This was the best thing ever. I could kiss you. Can I?" The guard, still struggling to maintain his decorum at your giddiness, gave one nod, so subtle it could almost be missed. You leapt at the chance and gave his cheek a quick kiss, telling him, "I love you."

You went back to Chris, who was just coming under control himself. He shook his head at you and offered, "Thanks, man." to the guard. "That was the best thing ever. I'm sorry about her. Really, I'm very sorry."

The guard had found his center again and, as you and Chris started away, he began one of his marches across his post. You stopped, watching the pacing with Chris, while he still wheezed with a bit of laughter in his chest. You realized Chris was still making a video with his phone and you were dying to see it for yourself. After your "old friend" stopped at his post and came to attention again, face sobered and back to business, you and Chris left.

On your walk back down Spur Road, you and Chris huddled together to watch his video. "Oh, my god," you smiled, clutching his arm, still so excited and proud of yourself. "I can't believe that happened."
"I can't believe you kissed him," Chris balked, ticking his head backward in disbelief. "I can't believe he let me," you seconded. "I'm sorry. I don't even know why, I just- I was so excited!"

"That was hilarious," he agreed, hooking an arm around your neck to pull you over so he could kiss the side of your head. "Stan's gonna be so jealous."

"Whoa," you realized, still under Chris' arm as you walked, your arm around his waist and your palm on his chest. "Can you imagine the two of us with that guy?"

"Poor bastard wouldn't stand a chance," Chris laughed, giving your shoulder a small squeeze. "He'd probably piss himself laughing."

"Send me a copy of that later," you told him. "My mom'll die. How much of it did you get?"

"All of it," he proudly said.

You held up your hand for a high-five. "You're the man," you praised.

"Team Cap," he humbly shrugged. Chris checked his watch and suggested, "Okay, how about we find a cab and head over to the Tower and we can find someplace to eat?"

You liked the idea, but, then again, when is lunch ever a bad idea. Mm. Foooood. It took a few minutes, but you flagged down a taxi and asked the driver for a recommendation for a good place to eat near the next attraction. He chauffeured you to The Liberty Bounds, just a short walk to the Tower of London. You noticed the driver checking his mirror a few times, and, while Chris was paying for the ride, he spoke up, "My boy would never forgive me if I didn't ask, but you're Captain America, ar-

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The man didn't even have to finish, before Chris smiled and nodded. "Yeah," he admitted. "Just trying to see some sights while I'm in town."

Getting back his change from the driver, he added, "I could sign something for you, if you've got a piece of paper, or something."

Your driver rummaged around and found a marker and pulled a pocket sized notebook from his jacket folded on the seat beside him. Chris happily signed the page, even asking for the kid's name to address the autograph to. The man was appreciative, shaking Chris' hand and leaving with a wave.

"Aw, that was sweet of you," you beamed.

Chris shrugged, with a humble smile. "Ah, he was a nice enough guy about it," he said, pulling the door open for you to go inside ahea of him.

Tucked away near the bar, with the extra elbow room of a table for four, you had gotten some recommendations from your driver to try the battered cod and chips and the beef pie. You took the fish and Chris ordered the British beef and Doom Bar ale pie with mash and peas. To wash it down you picked an English cider, while Chris went for a staff recommended lager. It didn't really matter who ordered what, because you guys reached over to take bites of each other's meals while they lasted. You split a warm chocolate fudge cake with ice cream, before heading over to enjoy your second adventure for the day.

You had purchased tickets online, before leaving the hotel earlier in the morning. Once you got into the main entrance, you poked around for a few minutes and found your way to join the start of the next Yeoman Warder tour. Wandering around, listening to the stories and history of the Tower, you
took photos here and there. You snuck a fast selfie with Chris, on the way in to see the Crown Jewels. It was disappointing to not be able to take photographs of the jewels, but it didn't stop you from practically drooling over some of the crowns and stones on display. Besides, you planned on picking up a souvenir book and a couple postcards on the way out, anyway.

You didn't get too close, but you got a decent enough picture to prove you'd seen one of the ravens near the Wakefield Tower. Making your way around the rest of the grounds, you toured through the White Tower and marveled at the armor and weapons of the great kings. On the way out of the Chapel Royal of St. John, you figured you probably could have spent all day there, there were so many interesting features to take in.

As it was, most of the afternoon would have to suffice. After all, there was a dinner reservation to make. You tracked down a taxi to get you back to the hotel, telling the driver to take the scenic route. Hey, why not? You only had a little free time in London. Might as well sneak in what you can.

Getting back to the hotel just after 5:30 gave you about an hour to get ready. Walking into the bedroom, you were excited to see your suitcase stood up at the foot of the bed. You'd never been happier to see a piece of luggage in your life. Honestly, if Chris hadn't walked in after you, you just might have hugged the damned thing.

"Oh, thank god," you breathed out, putting your suitcase up on the end of the bed.

"Sweet," Chris agreed, going over to the closet for his own things.

"Josh is an angel," you declared, unzipping your bag for a quick inspection.

Chris snickered, moving around on the other side of the room. "Careful," he teased. "It'll go to his head."

"He deserves it," you nodded, judging everything to still be in your bag. "Give him a raise."

The snicker became a bark of a laugh. "He does just fine," he told you. "Trust me."

Setting your pajamas and toiletries kit out, you pointed at Chris to warn, "He better."

"He does," Chris assured you, checking his watch. "We need to be downstairs by 6:40. You want the shower first? I need to check in with Megan real quick about tomorrow, anyway."

"Sure," you chirped, tucking your toiletries kit under your arm to head to the bathroom. You stopped in your tracks, turning on your heel to catch Chris before he got out of the bedroom, wondering, "What should I wear?"

"Something nice," he shrugged, from the doorway to the living area.

"Could you be a little more specific?" you laughed, gesturing back to your suitcase on the bed. "Not exactly working with a full closet of choices here."

He shook his head with a chuckle. "A dress works," he said. "Nice, but you don't have to be real fancy."

"Huh," you quietly mused, looking up to the ceiling and mulling it over for a moment. "Okay."

You went to the bathroom to get ready. After a quick shower, you gave your teeth another brushing and combed out your hair. While the collar of your hotel robe pulled some of the water from your hair, you put your hands on your hips, examining the possibilities for your dinner outfit from the
clothes you had brought along. The dress from the fireworks and after party was still a rumpled mess, but could be salvaged with an iron and a few patient minutes. You put it back in the suitcase, thinking it was too early to recycle it so soon. That left you with two options: your blue maxi dress from Beijing or the navy blue a-line you’d brought along for the London premier.

It hadn’t occurred to you to pack an extra outfit for a nice dinner beyond the events in the itinerary. The sleeveless dress, with its strips of mesh at the crew neckline and hem, was definitely dressier than the other. It would do for now and you could debate re-wearing it for the premier later on. You held it up to inspect it for wrinkles and were satisfied that this was the one.

While Chris showered, you gave yourself a quick blow out and got to work on your makeup. By the time you got back into the bedroom to step into your dress, Chris was adding his wallet and phone to his pockets, dressed and looking ready to go. Zipped up, you closed the tiny buckles on your ankle strap heels and found your little bag of jewelry to finish off your look with a long, thin gold chain, hoop earrings, and a trio of gold bangle bracelets. Standing up from the side of the bed and twisting around to look over and smooth the back of your dress, Chris let out a slow, long whistle. You looked up, with a bashful smile.

"We should go to dinner more often," he smiled.

"We have dinner all the time," you reminded him, patting a hand on the lapel of his tan suit, as you made your way to the next room.

"Yeah," he almost agreed, "but, like, in jeans and shit." Tucking your phone into your purse, you waited by the door as he followed behind you and gestured a hand up and down you. "Not like this," Chris admired, brushing a kiss to your cheek.

"You won't hear me complain," you winked, tugging on the tail of his suit coat, as Chris opened the door for you to step out.

Chris led you along the hall by the hand. The elevator door opened just in time for you and Chris to step out and make your way across the lobby, before a curious passenger in the car could place the bearded face next to you. You’d caught the squinting double take from the side of your eye and thought for sure you were about to get held up while Chris signed autographs. Whew! What a relief.

There was a car waiting for you near the valet stand. Chris verified the destination with your chauffeur, but the name meant nothing to you. It wasn’t a long drive and the Sunday evening traffic didn’t get in the way. About ten minutes later, you pulled up to the curb of a restaurant with red awnings over the building’s front. A uniformed doorman, complete with top hat and white gloves welcomed you to Rules, holding the door open for you to pass, with a kindly smile. Inside, the hostess greeted you with a pleasant smile and an immediate apology.

"I'm sorry, sir," she began, looking at the reservation book and notes in front of her, "but your table isn't ready yet. The party before you ran a little long. If you'd like to wait at the bar, we should be ready for you shortly."

Even if the accent wasn't enough to charm you, you could hardly be mad at her sincerity and worried smile. Chris told the hostess it was no trouble to wait and she invited you to follow her upstairs to the cocktail bar. On the way, you took in the warm atmosphere of the red velvet booths, the soft lights, and the walls filled with frames and game heads. Upstairs, the understated glamor continued with red leather bar chairs, dark wood bar and walls, and the chaises and tables around the lounge.

The bow tied bartender mixed up a Pimm's No. 1, garnished with cucumbers and strawberry, for you and Chris tried the bar's namesake cocktail. You were only a few sips in when the maitre d’ came to
take you to your table. Or, at least, that's what you thought, until you were shown to a private dining room. The room was most definitely meant for a group of several or more, but there was a wide table set just for two instead.

A centerpiece of gorgeous red roses bloomed, with a silver three branch candelabra aglow beside it. The maitre d' assisted you with your chair, advising your waiter would be with you momentarily and apologizing again for your wait. You were too busy admiring the formal silverware and glass settings on the white linen covered table to hear the exact words, but you got the gist of the sentiment. Besides, Chris replied for the both of you.

You watched as the door shut behind the tuxedoed man and you gaped at Chris. "Nice, but you don't have to be real fancy?" you reminded him. "Are you kidding me?"

He snuffled a laugh, his eyes crinkled above his grin. "I said 'nice'," he pointed out.

"What is your definition of 'fancy'?" you wondered, sweeping a hand around the room. "A man in a tuxedo showed us to our table...in a private dining room. There were better words to use than 'nice' to describe it."


"I'm not- I-" You stopped, a little caught off guard by the slipped in compliment. "Thank you," you smiled and shook your head. "I'm just saying, I'm glad I picked this dress."

"I like it," he smiled, ahead of a sip of his drink. "I thought, it's been awhile since we had a nice evening out together. We've both been so busy- Well," he reconsidered, with a shrug of one shoulder and cock of his head, "you've been busier than I have, actually. I just thought you deserved a night out."

Your smile puckered a little, trying to keep it from going too wide, as your waiter came in through a swinging door in the corner of the room. You wagged up your brow and gave a subtle tip of your head to the waiter wearing a black jacket and bow tie over the long white apron at his hips, mouthing the word 'fancy' before you could be seen. Chris snickered and somehow managed to straighten his face before looking up as the waiter introduced himself. He presented you with menus, assured you he'd be happy to answer any questions, and left the room for you to look over the selections.

"I'd just like to point out the penguin suit...on the waiter," you casually mentioned, as your eyes ran over the menu.

Across from you, Chris playfully groaned, "Alright, smartass."

You giggled and kept to the business at hand. You volleyed a couple of tasty options back and forth. When your server returned, the two of you asked for an order of dressed crab and toast to start. For your entrees, you selected the lamb while Chris ventured into the game section for his dinner of wild duck. Chris ordered a bottle of wine for you, as well. Left to your own devices again, Chris gave you a little backstory to the oldest restaurant in London. He'd looked it up when one of the execs from Marvel had mentioned the place awhile ago. You had to admit, even before the food arrived, you were impressed. Good job, Chris.

When your appetizer arrived, you had to ask, "So, why the private room? Why not one of the tables in the dining room?"

Chris tilted his head back, in a sort of nod at your question, as he chewed. Swallowing, he explained, "Thought it'd be a nice change." He shrugged. "All these busy hotel restaurants and bars we've been
going to, all the people. I guess, I thought we could use a break from the fishbowl."

"Good idea," you smiled and it seemed to brighten his grin.

"Figured we'd take advantage," he offered. "You can't get a private dinner like this back home without renting out the whole place."

"Do I want to know what it takes to finagle a private dining room at a place like this?" you mused, quirking up a brow.

"Not as much trouble as you’d think," Chris promised.

"Not with a name like Chris Evans, you mean," you chuckled.

"It doesn't hurt," he agreed. "Do you like it?"

You nodded, sweeping your gaze around the room again. "I do," you approved. "The decor, the flowers and candles. It's all very romantic."

"Good," Chris beamed.

"Almost a little cliché," you winked.

"What?" he smiled. "Girls all of a sudden don't go for candlelit dinners for two anymore?"

"They do," you conceded. "But the private room in London is next level shit."

"What can I say?" Chris innocently shrugged, with a humble smile. "I've got game."

"Yes," you laughed. "This time, you do."

You both went back to enjoying your appetizer. It didn't escape your memory about what you'd overheard, when you were convalescing your foot at Chris' house. Scott had told him to take you out to a romantic dinner, when he was worried about you two reconnecting after your short spilt. Part of you wanted to ask if this dinner had been part of the plan all along. The other part of you knew bringing it up would out you for eavesdropping and ruin the mood.

It didn't really matter, did it? You lost track of how many times you and Chris have fooled around, and had sex, since then. Clearly, everything was back on track. You decided to take dinner for what it was- a lovely change of pace.

Your dinner was as impeccable as everything else around you. The food was beautifully presented, absolutely delicious, and your waiter was spot on for keeping your glasses full. With empty plates and the volume of your bottle of rosé running low, you each ordered a cappuccino and a sticky toffee pudding to split. You barely found room for your portion of the dessert. The satisfied hum from Chris told you he was in the same boat.

The whole dinner was wonderful. From the doorman to your driver, everyone had been incredibly courteous. The food was divine and the restaurant was beautiful. You couldn't find a better romantic dinner out, unless you were in a movie. Go ahead. Pinch yourself, just to double check. No one would blame you. Just being on this press tour was enough to make you think you were in some kind of dream. Because, honestly, what are the odds? For a girl from the hair department to be part of all of this? Yeah. You're lucky.

London at night was magical, from outside your window on the drive back to the hotel. The long
day of travel before, coupled with a full stomach from a rich dinner, had you cuddled under Chris’ arm in the backseat. He pressed a lingering kiss into the top of your hair, before the driver stepped back to open the car door for you. Chris slipped the man a tip and followed you through the lobby to the elevator to go up to your shared suite. The older couple in the car with you for the ride up wouldn't have been the type to know who Chris was, when they smiled and said their good evenings to you. But the way the gray haired man led his wife to the hallway on their floor by the hand made your heart flutter. Old couples still in love are the cutest.

Maybe it was the combination of the cliché roses and candlelight, the old couple in love, and the bottle of wine with dinner, but you were feeling especially enamored with Chris. In your suite again, you bit your lip, admiring the breadth of his shoulders as he shrugged off his suit jacket and hung it in the closet, while you took off your shoes. You tiptoed over, catching him in his turn to put his phone and wallet on the nightstand. You smiled at his grin of the surprise of you interrupting his path.

You smiled back, your eyes following his reach to set his things down by the bed. He straightened up and you both stared into each other's eyes, as your fingertips loosed the tie from his neck and undid the knot. An amused smiled ticked up the corner of his mouth, when you pulled the tie slowly from behind his collar and dropped it to pool in a pile on the bedside table. He waited patiently, hands casually in his pockets, as you undid each button of his shirt. When you reached the last button above his belt, you tugged his shirt out to finish your work, pushing the halves aside to expose his chest and abs. You had no shame in taking a quick look at the lines his muscles shaded in the lamplight by the bed. One hand slipped past his side and the other held back his collar, as you dotted soft kisses at his neck, across his collarbone, and over the tattoo there.

Beside your head, you heard a contented sigh from Chris and felt the backs of his fingers sweep the hair away from your neck. The new coolness you felt on your skin was replaced by the warmth of his breath behind your ear. Chris' free hand smoothed around to your back, while his lips trailed kisses down to your throat.

"Did I tell you how beautiful you look tonight?" he murmured to your ear, nuzzling his nose into you hair.

"Yeah," you softly reminded him. "Something like that."

He cupped his hand to your neck and turned your face to meet his for a lingering kiss. "I'm glad you came on this trip," Chris told you, bowing his forehead to yours.

"Me, too," you smiled, closing your eyes with a giggle at his kiss on the tip of your nose.

Chris straightened up, moving back a half step to pull his shirt off and down his arms. He tossed it out to fall on the bed, while you gathered up your hair to one side and gestured to ask for his help with the zipper of your dress. You felt his fingertips undo the closure at the nape of your neck and smiled at the achingly slow pull of the zipper down to your waist. Before you needed to, Chris' hands curled over the tops of your shoulders to slide the material down your arms. You slipped out an arm at a time, stepping out of the blue puddle the material made at your feet. Chris' hand on your forearm turned you back to face him.

You went to work on undoing his belt buckle and pants, while he kissed you deeply and toed off his shoes. With his pants open, you pushed them down from his hips, along with his boxer briefs. You reached down and gave him a few pumps of your hand. With an extra kiss, you inched away from his lips to kneel in front of him. Chris looked down at you, as you took him into your mouth and hand. You warmed him up, lavishing licks and kisses at his tip, giving a little teasing attention to his balls when you finally took him in. Above you, Chris let our a groaning sigh and the fingers of his
right hand carded into your hair. He let you work your magic for a short while, before twisting his fingers in your hair and giving a short jerk of his hips to fuck into your mouth. You hummed and sucked on his length, hearing a hiss escape him above you.

His hand in your hair gave you a gentle pull and his free hand came under your chin to bring you back up to him. Chris kissed you deeply and he walked you back a step to lay on the bed. He stepped out of the last of his clothes, climbing over you and fumbling a hand around the nightstand for a condom. As you shared a kiss and curled your fingers behind his neck, he rolled on the condom. He cradled your head with his hand, the thumb of his left hand stroking soothingly at your temple. With his right hand, Chris reached down between your legs, nudging them further apart with his knee. While your tongues danced, his fingers played in your folds, sliding in and out of your center to be sure you were ready, too.

When he hit the spot and you hummed against his mouth, Chris traded his fingers for his cock, coming into you with a teasingly slow push. You pulled at the back of his neck to bring him down against you, kissing him deeply, while he was still and you clenched yourself around him. You both savored the sensation for a long moment, before Chris withdrew and teased you again. You whined into the kiss, hooking an arm over his shoulders to keep him close. He ground his hips to yours, with each thrust, his right hand skimming up your side to cup and squeeze your breast. You synchronized your movements to his, tilting your hips and bucking when he drove into you at just the right angle.

Your legs wrapped around his and your fingertips pressed into his shoulders. Chris nibbled and sucked at your neck, keeping a fervent pace encouraged by your breathy whines turning to panting gasps. When he seemed to know you were close, he changed his rhythm, drawing out your climax with slow withdrawals and quick crashes back into you. Each thrust was its own pleasure and you cried out when you could remember how to speak, dragging your nails over his skin and biting his shoulder into your mouth, as he came with his own shudder and groan into your neck.

You laid there for a long minute, reveling in the feeling of him still twitching inside you, as you both found your breath again. Chris licked and sucked kisses at your throat. You scratched your fingernails through the short hairs at the back of his head, running the fingertips of your other hand up and down the length of his tricep. You dotted kisses to his shoulder and collarbone, when they could be reached, and exhaled, contentedly, when they couldn't.

It always has to end. It doesn't mean you couldn't make a petulant pout when he climbed off of you and disappeared to the bathroom to clean up. After a luxurious, arm-reaching, toe-pointing stretch, you wiggled under the covers. Chris came back into the bedroom and snapped off the lights, before taking the lazy route and crawling over you to get to his side of the bed. You giggled, giving him a playful swat on the arm. He settled into his pillow and pulled the sheets over him.

"Do we need an alarm set for the morning?" you checked.

He gave an affirmative hum, reaching over to pull your hand and turn you into his side. "Already set," he assured you, ahead of a lingering kiss into your hair. "G'night baby. I love you."

"I love you, too," you grinned, nuzzling your cheek against his chest.
Monday morning was all back to business. You were both showered by the time Room Service arrived with breakfast. Over your meal, you listened in while Chris ate with Megan on speakerphone. There were a few interviews rescheduled that affected the timing of his day. It was another day jam packed for these guys.

To pal around with Chris for the day, you kept it comfy. You looped a gray cotton and lace scarf around your neck, over your white v-neck tee, letting the ends, with their twisted strips of material, hang loose. Your belt matched the brown leather sandals with the thin straps that crisscrossed to behind your ankle. You pocketed some cash and change into your cutoffs and were on your way.

On the ride over to the Corinthia Hotel with Chris, Megan, and Josh, you took a moment to thank Josh for all his help, again. He accepted your praise graciously, saying he was just happy it all worked out. Josh gave you a pass to wear to get past the event staff and a copy of the intinerary to help you keep track of the day.

There was a crowd gathered outside the hotel lobby. The people were packed tightly onto the sidewalk. The fans had made signs and were loaded down with memorabilia to sign. Once again, Chris and Megan stepped out to meet the crowd. While security gathered to move with Chris, Josh took your hand to pull you along past the screaming Marvel fanatics. You followed along as Josh asked about your sightseeing yesterday and navigated the hotel halls to arrive at a green room to wait in before the press conference began.

The room was bustling. Walking in, you began spotting famous faces. Milling around and mostly involved in conversations with each other or their handlers, you saw Paul Bettany leaning his shoulder into a wall and talking with Mackie, Daniel Brühl, Emily VanCamp, and Paul Rudd. And that's just who you could pick out in the crowd. The Russos were off to one side, talking with Kevin Fiege and a few people you didn't recognize. Joe gave you a small wave when he saw you come in and you waved back. Moving into the room, you stood on the edge of the action, hoping to keep an eye on the door and see Chris when he came in. Twisting the cap off a bottle of water from a refreshments table nearby, you turned at the hand on your elbow.

"I can't keep up with you," Renner quipped. "Blonde, purple, now red? Who are you?"

You laughed with him, as Jeremy leaned in for a half-hug. "I'm trying to keep everyone on their toes," you winked.

"It's working," Sebastian chimed in, from behind you. "Nobody knows what she'll do next. Good morning, [y/n]."

"It looks good though," Jeremy nodded. "How long is this one gonna last?"

"What time is it?" you joked, playing at checking your watch.

The guys chuckled along with you before Jeremy frowned, looking over the room, and asked, "Where's Evans?"

"We left him outside, working the crowd," you explained. "Shouldn't be too much longer."

Sebastian listened, sipping on a cup of coffee, while you and Renner discussed your hair. You had to admit, it was about time for a change. You could touch up the red roots easy enough, but it was getting a bit long for the coming summer. They jokingly ran down a list of colors that were fun to
say, offering them as suggestions for a new look. Somewhere around periwinkle, Chris showed up.

The men greeted each other with firm handshakes and slapping hugs. You took note of Elizabeth Olsen just coming in with her small entourage and noticed Robert Downey Jr. at the end of the room. From what you’d been able to keep track of for appearances being made in London, the gang was all here. People passed by, saying hello to Chris, or anyone else they hadn’t spoken to yet. About fifteen minutes later, guests were called away to be taken to their seats for the event, if they were watching. Chris gave you a wink as you left the green room with Megan and Josh.

You found a seat in the back of the ballroom set up for the press conference. The journalists and cameramen chatted and worked on their equipment. A tech meandered across the stage, fussing with the spacing of chairs and other fine details. A woman climbed up to the corner of the stage and looked over some pages set up on a stand. Your suspicions of her being the emcee were confirmed when she introduced herself and welcomed everyone.

The next half hour or so rolled by rather quickly, with questions coming from your hostess and the crowd. The cast was almost a handful together. It didn't seem like anyone really got away with answering a question without someone else chiming in or a couple of them teaming up to tease another. You almost teared up, trying not to laugh to loudly, at Mackie's comments about his workouts. You almost died when Chris took the hair off of Sebastian's face. It was almost as good as when the spider was crawling on Sebastian's leg. You shook your head when Chris said he kind of wanted to be on Team Iron Man. Seeing Downey doing press in person was a sight to behold. Is that man never not on?

You hung around, with everyone else, for the photocall that followed. You snuck a couple pictures of your own of the group all together. When the cast was led off stage, you filed out of the ballroom and back to the green room. Wading through the crowd, you caught up with Chris talking to Downey and Elizabeth. He gave you an easy smile when you sided up next to him.

He gestured a hand out, checking, "You guys remember, [y/n], right?"

Elizabeth's eyes widened, as she looked you over. She threw up her arms and stepped up to hug you, saying, "Oh, my goodness! [Y/n]." She stepped back and scrunched a fistful of your hair, letting it tumble from her palm. "I didn't recognize you. This is amazing, by the way."

"Thank you," you giggled, a bit shied by her bubbly reaction to seeing you again. It's not like you hung out in Atlanta or anything, but, when she was on set, she was always friendly and chatted with you and Karen in the trailer.

"I'm sorry," Robert shook his head. He tipped his head down to stare at you over the top of his glasses. "Do I know you?"

"This is [y/n]," Elizabeth insisted, sweeping a hand down you. She pointed over to Chris, adding, "She was on principle hair for the movie. In Atlanta?"

Downey's brow shot up and he gave an exaggerated shake of his head, before holding out his hand to you. "[Y/n]. From Atlanta. Right," he said, holding your hand in both of his.

"You don't remember her, do you?" Elizabeth frowned, disapprovingly.

"To be fair," you explained, "I was a blonde then and you obviously had your own stylist. We didn't really meet."

"No no no," Robert persisted, giving your hand a pat. "There was you and the other girl..." He
snapped his fingers, trying to jog his memory. "The one who always had the Red Vines."

"Karen," you filled in.

"Right! Karen," he smiled, proudly. "You were the blonde Evans abused like his assistant."

The three of you laughed, while Chris' head dropped and shook, with an awkward chuckle. "I did not," he said.

"Yes, you did," Downey insisted. "You were always giving this poor girl all your shit to hold. We all saw it."

"Maybe once or twice," Chris conceded.

"Once or twice?" Elizabeth challenged, folding her arms. "You were always throwing things at her."

"She was closer," Chris petulantly argued, his shoulders rising a bit as he held out his hands to reference you.

"What's he got you holding now?" Robert wondered, looking you over and tipping his head back.

"Nothing," you laughed, showing your empty palms like a card dealer.

"My hand," Chris answered, with a slight air of possessiveness in his confidence.

"Your- Do what now?" Downey did a double take. You could almost hear the scratch of the record, as Robert looked down to see Chris take your hand. He pouted thoughtfully, letting out a quiet, "Huh." He looked at you, noting, "That's a hell of a promotion."

The loud gasp Elizabeth made was cut off by the hand she slapped over her mouth. But her eyes gave away the rest of her surprise. You laughed, feeling a definite heat in your cheeks. You tucked your hair back behind your ear, with your free hand, for a distraction.

"Be nice," Chris groaned, with a half-roll of his eyes.

"I am," Downey assured him. He looked back to you and cocked his head to the side, stretching out his arms, reaching for you, and wiggling he fingers. He took a long step forward and hugged you, tightly. "Oh, you poor thing," he tutted, adding a gentle sway to the hug.

You couldn't help but laugh, while Chris clapped a hand on Robert's shoulder, telling him, "Alright. That's enough."

"You smell lovely," Downey told you, completely sober, as he moved back to his spot in the conversation.

"Thank you," you giggled, again.

To be fair, the whole press tour, world travel thing was incredible in and of itself. But getting a pity hug from Robert Downey Jr. for the apparent misfortune of dating Chris and him telling you you smelled good was bordering on surreal. When Elizabeth put a hand on your shoulder and told you congratulations, that it was wonderful news, you bashfully bit your lip. What do you even say to all of this?

"Thanks," you grinned, shyly, looking over to see Chris smiling back at you.

Someone grabbed you from behind, belting their arms around your waist and picking you up from
the floor. You let out a small shriek at the surprise, before you were set back down from the foot or so up you'd just flown. Everyone was laughing at you, when you turned around to see Mackie standing there, with a shit eating grin on his face.

"Gotcha!" he beamed.

You smacked his arm, trying your best to actually be mad, but failing, as Sebastian came over, asking between you and Elizabeth, "Did one of you just scream?"

"She did," Anthony called you out, pointing a finger in your face.

"I did not," you scowled, swatting his hand away, while he chuckled.

"Yes, you did," Mackie maintained.

"You're back off the list," you promised, pointing your finger in his face now.

"Worth it," he shrugged.

"What list?" Downey innocently chimed in.

"Her Christmas card list," Sebastian elaborated, jerking a thumb your way. "Every time we misbehave, she takes us back off the list."

"Every time?" Robert repeated. He turned to Chris, tipping a finger back and forth from you to Chris, asking, "How long has this been going on?"

"These idiots getting kicked off the list?" Chris checked. "Or me and [y/n]?"

"I think the answer to my one question answers both of yours," Downey decided, with a discerning squint in his eye.

"About seven months," Chris said, looking to you to see if you had any argument. You nodded and he added, "A little while after Atlanta."

It was a fair assessment. It was the best answer. What you were doing between Atlanta and when you met again in New England could hardly be called dating, let alone a serious relationship.

"Am I the last one to hear about this?" Downey gaped, looking thoroughly offended, shifting his gaze, accusingly, between you and Chris.

"I'm just hearing about this," Elizabeth reminded him.

"Not everybody knows," Chris admitted. "We're trying to keep things to ourselves as long as we can."

"Good idea," Anthony agreed, with an emphatic nod.

"Keep this gorgeous creature all to yourself," Robert tutted, giving a scathing look to Chris. "How dare you?"

Chris chuckled, shaking his head. "I'm sorry. I didn't know I needed your blessing."

"Of course, you do," Downey chirped. "I'm The Godfather of this ragtag bunch."

"That's pretty accurate," Sebastian agreed.
Robert stepped close again, cupping your cheeks in his hands and bowing your head for him to plant a kiss on your forehead. He tilted your chin back up, somberly telling you, "Welcome, my child."

Downey flashed a million dollar smile and, before you could die of absolute embarrassment, Megan and a couple other PR types came to start picking off the talent to move on to the interviews. You followed at the back of Chris' little group, going outside to a waiting car to take you to the BBC studios. On the ride, Megan and Chris discussed the interviews. You and Josh decided to go to lunch, while Chris worked. You had a quick back and forth about what kind of food to eat, deciding on Italian, just before the car came to a stop at the curb in front of the Western House studios door. You gave Chris a smile and wave, before he got out of the car with Megan and was greeted by the excited screams of the fans on the sidewalk begging for his attention.

The driver took you to the first Italian restaurant he could think of. It wasn't too far of a drive. While Chris was shilling the movie for the umpteenth time, you and Josh were reviewing your veal scaloppini and his ravioli with lamb with each other. You indulged in the white chocolate and fig brownie, with surprisingly little second thought. Besides, it came with frozen yogurt. That's healthy, right? Of course it is. It's yogurt.

After lunch, you took your chauffeured car back to the BBC studios. You didn't have long to wait. Chris' interview was finished a few minutes after you arrived and it was about ten minutes later that he and Megan reemerged on the sidewalk. The screaming crowd let you know he was back, their noise drawing your attention up from your phone. You scooted aside when the door opened and Chris and Megan climbed inside. You and Josh told Chris about lunch, when he asked how it was. He whined about you not bringing him a gelato or anything else and you offered to ask the driver to stop at a McDonald's or something.

"Oh, 'cause that's the same thing," he sarcastically huffed, before laughing at you flipping him off for his, quote, "shitting on your hospitality".

Chris had another round of journalists to see. You were back at the Corinthia, standing in the corner of the room, watching Chris sit through another string of on camera interviews. He stole a couple looks your way, when the interviewers swapped out. He'd give a small roll of his eyes or noticeable sigh and "check" the watch he wasn't actually wearing, obviously telling you his was over it for the day. You would send back a helpless shrug and an encouraging smile. That's when he would smile back, his eyes crinkling at the corners, and you saw him find a little bit more energy to go on.

When it was finally over, you straightened up from where you had been leaning your shoulder into the corner. It was another couple of minutes, before Chris was done shaking hands and trading 'thank you's with the last interview team and the crew who was standing by to strike the background. He nodded along, listening to, you figured, some notes from Megan, before he was officially released. He pulled his hands out of his pockets and, on his way to your little piece of the room, cracked his neck from one shoulder to the other.

"Come here often?" he smiled, running his eyes down your smiling face.

"Actually," you started, tilting your head and batting your lashes, "I'm here with my boyfriend."

Chris pocketed his hands again and twisted at the waist, looking around over his shoulders, like he was looking for someone. "And he just left you, all alone in the corner?"

"Well," you excused, "he's working."

"Well, seeing as he's not here right now," he noted, "what do you say you and me get outta here?"
"With you?" you playfully checked.

"Yeah," Chris nodded. "I don't wanna brag, or anything, but, uh," he shrugged, with the worst fake humility ever, "I'm kind of a big deal. I've got a suite down by the Palace; bed big enough for two..."

He wagged up his eyebrows, rocking back on his heels, waiting, and you cracked. Laughing and swatting the back of your hand into his chest, you told him, "You're terrible." You parroted, "You're kind of a big deal? Does that line actually work?"

"I don't know," he smiled. "Does it?"

You groaned out a sigh, rolling your eyes up when you smiled, a little disappointed to admit, "Yeah, I guess it does."

"You're so weak," Chris teased.

"I am," you agreed, in defeat, raising a hand in ownership.

Chris snickered, with a nod. "Cah'mon," he smiled. "I'm starved."

With a small snort, you fell into step behind Chris and the others out of the room. Back at the hotel, you were greeted by the door man, welcoming you back by name. Megan and Josh took the chauffeured car back to their own hotel. Upstairs in your room, Chris emptied his pockets out onto the dining table and you fell into the couch with a loud sigh of relaxation.

"My god," you grumbled. "That was a long day."

"You're telling me?" Chris smirked, shaking his head, checking his phone.

"What do you want to do about dinner?" you asked. "Wanna go downstairs? Someplace you want to go?"

Chris shrugged, typing with his thumbs on his phone, with a distracted hum. "I don't want to go far," he told you, looking up to give you an apologetic grin. "I'm kinda tired."

You frowned, your lips pouting out in sympathy. You sat up, scooting up to the edge of your seat. "Poor guy," you tutted.

Chris snorted, shaking his head, reading the message that just buzzed in. "Thanks."

"I mean it," you promised, the sincerity not undercut but the soft laugh it rode on. "Why don't we just order in tonight?"

"Really?" he doubted, giving you a scrutinizing squint from the side of his eye.

"I mean it," you promised, the sincerity not undercut but the soft laugh it rode on. "Why don't we just order in tonight?"

"Really?" he doubted, giving you a scrutinizing squint from the side of his eye.

"Yeah," you shrugged. You got up, walking around him to grab the Room Service menu from the table. Laying the booklet against his chest, you told him, "We'll do Room Service and just relax, maybe find a movie on tv or something."

Chris put up his hand to take the menu, when you let go. "You sure? We could-"

"I'm sure," you smiled. You stepped back to peck a kiss to his cheek. "We just went out for dinner last night," you reminded him, on your way toward the bedroom. "We've had all those meals out with the guys, all the traveling." From the other room, you continued, a little louder to still be heard, "We can just bum around here. You deserve a night off."
You kicked off your sandals, changing into a soft tee and your sleep shorts. In the bathroom, you combed through your hair and twisted it up into a knot, looping a hair tie around it. Yeah. Comfy. When you came out, Chris was finishing changing his own clothes. You spotted the menu on the end of the bed and moved around him, crawling over the mattress on your knees to pick up the booklet. Falling back on your heels, you flipped open the book and asked if he knew what he wanted.

Chris pulled a fresh t-shirt over his head and rattled off what he was debating between for dinner. You hummed, contemplatively, as you skimmed over the offerings for yourself. You shifted around, stretching out for the hotel phone by the bed to order. You smiled, when the phone was answered by a cheerful man, answering, "Good evening, Mr. Evans. How may I help you?"

"Good evening. I'd like to order dinner," you said.

"Ah, Ms. [y/l/n]," the man corrected. "What would you like to order?"

You shook your head, tickled by the personalized service the hotel seemed to constantly excel at. With a questioning look to Chris, as you listed what you'd like for your meal, Chris whispered his decision to you and you relayed it for him. You were told dinner would arrive in 30 minutes and gave the man your thanks.

Curled up on the couch, you enjoyed a short phone call with your mom and dad. You skimmed over your trip for the last couple of days, summing up your encounter with the giggling guard at Buckingham Palace and promising, "Just wait for the video. You'll die." Beside you, Chris grinned, shaking his head, as he scrolled through his phone. At the knock on the door, Chris snapped up, waving for you to finish your call while he answered the door.

You were just excusing yourself on the phone for dinner, as the waiter came into the room. With a wide silver tray carried in front of him, the man greeted Chris with a smiling 'good evening' and nodded to you, seeing the phone to your ear. The covered dishes were arranged at the table for you and the recommended bottle of wine for the meal was uncorked. By the time you hung up with your parents, the waiter dismissed himself with a polite wish to enjoy dinner, after he checked that there was nothing else he could do for you. The room was already filling with the delicious scents of your meals.

Pulling a chair back from the table, you put a knee into the cushion, picking up and setting aside the metal lids over your plates. "Mm," you hummed, looking over the prime cuts of steak that were delivered.

Chris joined you at the table, tucking his phone into his pocket before sitting down. You settled into your chair, folding your leg underneath you and laying your napkin out over your lap. Chris poured the wine, while you traded your side plate of vegetables for his, correcting the insignificant mistake of your server. Over dinner, you chatted about the interviews you watched him do and he told you about the one you missed when, according to him, "you ditched" him to have lunch with Josh. You had to laugh and he did, too.

After dinner, you and Chris went back to the couch. Clicking through the channels on the television, you didn't find much to watch. You caught a joke you both liked on some sitcom you didn't know what it was and settled on that. In his pocket, Chris' phone buzzed, announcing a new message. You had to sit up from his side for him to reach and took advantage of the moment to stand up and get the...
last of the wine from the table. Topping off both of your glasses on the coffee table, you asked who it was, when Chris seemed to be seriously contemplating his reply.

"Downey," he distractedly answered, scratching at his chin. "He sent out this group message to everybody."

"Oh, yeah?" you mused, leading him on for more info.

"Yeah," Chris said, looking up and watching you put the empty bottle back on the dining table. "He invited everybody over to his place for breakfast." He looked back at his phone and shrugged. "Well, brunch, I guess."

"That's nice of him," you noted. "What'd you tell him?"

"Meh," he shrugged again. "I haven't responded yet."

"Why not?" you gently pressed, looking between him and his phone he was staring at again.

He rubbed at the back of his neck, almost complaining, "M'm'I don't know. I'm just- I'm fahckin' exhausted just thinking about getting up tomorrow."

You frowned, watching him bring his hand back down and his thumbs start to type a message back. You heard the buzzes of other people interacting in the message, but it seemed to you like he hadn't actually gotten into the conversation himself. Poor guy. You knew from your own experience how tiring the travel and tour could be and you were just a tourist to it all. It's not like you were working, like he was. Imagining the drain on him, between the flights and time changes, the appearances and parties- uh, yeah. He was allowed to be tired, so close to the end of the busy trip. And he still wouldn't be done when you got home.

"Now Renner wants people to go out tonight," he informed you. "Are you in the mood for that?"

"Think I could show up in my jammies?" you quipped, but he didn't bite.

He probably didn't think you heard his quiet sigh, as he kept reading the messages going around on his screen. But you did. You stood up again, putting his glass of wine in his hand. Chris looked up at you, with a lost wrinkle in his brow, following you with his eyes as you put a foot on the cushion and stepped up on the couch beside him. With a hand at the wall to steady yourself, you carefully picked up your foot to move over his shoulders and set down to straddle sides of him. You sat down on the top of the back of the couch, with your knees splayed his sides, giving him a nudge to face forward again, when he tried to turn around to see you.

"What are you doing?" he barely finished, before you curled your hands over his shoulders.

Pressing your fingertips down, you pulled your hands back to you, from his clavicle to the tops of his shoulders. You rubbed deep circles into his shoulder blades with your thumbs. You shouldn't have been surprised by how tight his muscles felt. You kicked yourself for not thinking of it sooner, the way you'd seen him rub at and crack his neck through the afternoon and how drained he looked in the interview chair.

He didn't say anything. After a just a minute's worth of your work, he was already putty in your hands. Chris sipped at his drink and you kneaded your fingers into his shoulders for awhile longer. He'd put his phone aside, its ongoing buzzing muffled by the plush cushion of the couch. With his empty hand, Chris wrapped his arm around the back of your leg, his hand folding around your ankle and his thumb sweeping lazily up and down the side of your shin. When his glass was empty, you stopped, scrunching down to hug your arms around him. Chris tucked his chin down to plant a kiss
"Thank you, baby," he quietly offered.
"You're welcome," you said, nuzzling the side of your head to his. "Feel better?"
"I do," Chris nodded.
"Decide what you want to do about brunch tomorrow?" you wondered.
"We'll go," he decided, before tilting his head away to try and see you. "If you want to. He always does something good."
"Sounds fun," you smiled, your gaze shifting to track his hand from your leg to take up his phone again. "What about running around with Renner?"

Chris chuckled, cocking his head, as he typed with one thumb. "I don't think I can keep up with him tonight," he told you, shaking his head.
"Aw," you cooed. "It's hell gettin' old, ain't it, baby?"
"You know what, smartass?" he began, turning over his shoulder to give you an incredulous look. "We oughta go, just to see if you survive."

"Mm, I'm okay," you decided, cinching your arms a little tighter. "I kinda like it here."

Chris gave your arm a squeeze, with one hand, and put aside his phone again. He reached up behind him to curl his arm across you. Leaning forward, Chris pulled you with him, pulling you around over his shoulder to fall across his lap. With your arms still looped around his neck, you cuddled up to him, nuzzling your forehead into the curve of his throat, while he wrapped his arms around you.

"I kinda like it here, too," Chris agreed, dotting a kiss into your hair and resting his chin on your head.

You and Chris had turned in early. Sure, you were going to bed like old people, but sometimes a good night's sleep is worth its weight in gold. Totally worth it. You stretched into the morning with, surprisingly, little complaint, listening to the alarm clock on Chris' side of the bed beep. Chris wasn't as quick to rise and you twisted and reached over him to slap the alarm into silent submission.

Instead of withdrawing to your spot in the bed beside him, you went limp, draping yourself over his chest, as if you'd fallen there from somewhere above. Chris let out an unintelligible grumble and you nuzzled your cheek on his chest. Hearing the deep breath pulled into his lungs through the sheet between him and your ear, you smiled. When his arm folded up from behind you to lay across your back, his thumb lazily dragging back and forth over your tshirt, you pulled your arms in to hug him. You could stay like that all day. ...If not for the gurgling growl from your belly breaking the picturesque peace of the sunlit London hotel room.

Beneath you, Chris' body shook with suppressed laughter. "Was that your stomach?" he asked.
"Yes," you groaned, in mild embarrassment, turning your face down into the sheet across him.

Chris gave you a squeeze, with a snigger. "You gonna survive 'til we get to Downey's?" he teased.
"Yes," you repeated, although notably more sarcastic, and gave the part of his arm peeking out from
under his pillow a pinch.

"Ow!" he complained, jerking his arm away to bury further under the pillow. Chris returned the favor, reaching down to pinch your ass.

You yelped, with a kick of your feet in surprise. Chris laughed at your admittedly girly shriek and you scolded him with a thumb on the chest, propping yourself on your elbow to frown down at him. He flashed you a toothy smile, his brow peaked in innocence and his chest shaking with a stifled laugh. Not being one to sit idly by and not defend yourself, you dug a finger into his side. Chris jumped, clearly surprised by the attack and laughingly letting out a profanity. He twisted, pulling his arm back from you and the other out from under the pillow to shy away from your tickling hand. But it didn't last long.

Hey, you tried, but he's bigger than you. It's physics. It's the law of the jungle. It was inevitable that he would easily escape your clutches and turn back on you. And he was merciless.

You balled up on you side, screaming out with laughter and pleading for him to stop, as he folded over you, keeping you from getting away, and tickling your side. You tried to swat him away; tried to wriggle free, but it was useless. Your legs were tangled up in the sheets and he had somehow managed to hook his other arm underneath you and across your shoulders. When you got a hold of the offending hand at your belly, you had barely a second's worth of reprieve before his other hand came off your shoulder to start tickling under your arm. Your laughter was reaching critical levels. You could feel the tears gather in the corner of your eye and the heat in your cheeks from your stunted breathing.

"Okay! Okay!" you cried out. "Stop! I give!"

Chris snorted proudly, the sound louder than usual, with his face turned down into your neck. "You promise?" he doubted, nibbling a kiss at your shoulder, while you gulped down a breath. "You learned your lesson?"

"I'm done," you groaned, inarguably defeated, and slapping his hand on your belly in displeasure of losing so quickly.

"Say it like you mean it," Chris insisted, before a playful bite on your shoulder and another tickle at your side to remind you who was in charge.

"I'm done," you all but yelled.

"That's better," he told you, smiling a kiss to your cheek, as he gave you a parting pat on your butt and scooted off his side of the bed. "Come on. We're gonna be late."

"Cheating bastard," you muttered, under your breath, throwing the sheets aside.

Just as you and Chris were headed for the door, the front desk called up to say your car was waiting downstairs. Perfect timing. It wasn't a long drive to Downey's hotel in Kensington. You were still getting used to pulling up to 5-star hotels, or anywhere else for that matter, and having a uniformed doorman offer you a hand to assist you from the car when Chris wasn't out first. Looking over the brick façade of the mansion style hotel, you let out a low whistle. You glanced back at the gardens across the street on your way up the steps to the lobby doors. Inside, you made your way to the front desk to inquire about which room Robert was in.

You'd barely come to a stop in front of the desk, when the concierge looked up from his computer
and greeted you, saying, "Good morning, Mr. and Mrs. Evans. Welcome to The Milestone Hotel." He was already walking around the counter, holding up his hand to beckon you to come with him, as he told you, "Follow me, please, to Mr. Downey's apartment."

You looked at Chris, your smile tight over your teeth to keep your sputtering laughter to yourself. Chris wagged up his eyebrows in amusement, sweeping his hand ahead of him for you to follow the concierge, and telling you, "This way, dear."

Elbowing Chris, you shook your head. Props to the staff for their warm and personalized welcome, but you had to laugh at their mistaking you for his wife. Not that you were complaining. And not that you'd rush anything, but 'Mrs. Evans' did have a lovely ring to it.

"Was he serious when he said 'apartment'?'" you whispered to Chris, as you stepped off the elevator.

He shrugged and quietly answered, he wouldn't be surprised. The concierge delivered you to the door of the suite, leaving you with his pleasant wish for you to enjoy your visit and a slight bow to dismiss himself. Chris knocked on the door and you could already hear the murmur of people on the other side. You checked your watch, wondering if you were late. The door opened a moment later, answered by Daniel. He held the door back with his foot. His left hand was occupied by a cloth napkin and a plate of food. He smiled, telling you to come in and waving you on with his free hand. Chris shook his hand as you both passed and Daniel put a friendly hand on your shoulder, saying how nice it was to see you again.

There was a small chorus of "hey"s in the living room, as you entered. It looked like most everyone was there already. And, yep. The concierge wasn't kidding when he called Downey's room an apartment. People were split between the living and dining rooms, seated and standing as they ate. There were covered trays and serving dishes on a long table lined along one wall. There was a large silver coffee maker on a cart with cups and saucers set out beside the creams and sugar. Another cart top was filled with ice, cooling milk and juices in glass pitchers. A chef was just walking out a tray of piping hot crepes from the kitchen to set beside a large fruit tray, just as Downey himself came to meet you.

"Hope you don't mind," he began, shaking Chris' hand with his right and gesturing over the spread of food with his left, "we started without you." Robert paused to take your hand in his and kiss your knuckles. "Everything just came out. It's hot. It's fresh. Have at it."

You and Chris chuckled at Downey's enthusiasm, as he shooed you along. On your way across the room to the buffet, you smiled and waved your 'hellos' and 'good mornings'. Chris handed you a warm plate and you turned to look behind you when you heard a knock at the door. Daniel opened the door again, letting in the Russos, who ushered Elizabeth and Joe's wife, Alicia, in ahead of them. Everyone was here now.

Your mouth watered, looking over the food on display. The chef brought out a pair of berry syrups to add to the table and you decided, there was officially more food than everyone combined could finish. And it just kept coming. Oh, you were definitely going to be able to silence your growling stomach, once and for all.

You mingled for a few minutes, saying hello to people individually. While you and Chris stood by, listening to Mackie and Renner recount the fun you missed out on last night, you cut and ate bites of your strawberries and crepes. Of course, you two were shamed for missing out on the bars. Anthony seemed particularly disappointed you didn't go, saying they had seen you karaoke, now you had to show off your "choreography". Chris got an extra elbow in his side for ever mentioning that in the first place. Chris' brow creased down in offense, shrugging his shoulders up in innocence. You just rolled your eyes.
Helping yourself to a glass of juice, and filling in a vacant space on your plate with a small cinnamon roll, your attention was turned when you heard someone call your name. Looking over to the seating in the living room, you spied Alicia’s waving hand. She patted the empty cushion beside her on the end of the couch to invite you over. You grabbed your drink and joined her and Elizabeth.

"Come sit down," she insisted. "It's easier to eat."

Smiling your thanks, you sat down, putting your drink on the coffee table in front of you. There were a few hushed comments between the three of you, about the size of the suite Downey had booked. You shouldn't have been surprised to hear about the study upstairs, but you still had to look for yourself, when Lizzie pointed out the staircase upstairs to you. You all pretty much shook your head in synchronous and laughed. It's not like he was even traveling with the whole family to justify the use of an apartment for a few nights.

"We missed you guys last night," Elizabeth shifted the conversation.

"Oh, yeah," you frowned. "Kind of a long day. All the traveling just seemed to catch up at once. I'm not going to lie, going to bed a little early was heavenly."

"I hear that," Alicia nodded, punctuating her agreement with a raise of her coffee cup. She turned to Elizabeth. "I don't know how you managed to look so fresh this morning."

"She looks like that every morning," you noted, when Lizzie tried to brush away her subtle compliment. "Seriously, every morning in Atlanta, her coming into the trailer, it was like sunshine walked in."

"It's 'cause you guys were so much fun," she insisted. "Ohh, my god. Karen was a riot. You never knew what she was going to say next."

"I know," you laughed.

Chris came over, for nothing more than to deliver you a cup of coffee. He was kind enough to offer if the other ladies needed their own coffees warmed up, before he went back to his plate, at the end of the dining table, where the Russo brothers, Daniel, Sebastian, and Emily had taken up residency. It was quiet for a moment, as your trio watched Chris walk away.

"That man is so whipped," Elizabeth decided, shaking her head, slowly.

"That bad, huh?" you winced a little.

"He brought you coffee," she reminded you, pointing to the drink on the table. "You didn't even ask. You didn't wave your hand in the air or point. He just..." She gestured to you cup and saucer, with a look of loss at the absurdity. "brought you coffee."

You shrugged. "He was probably just getting some for himself."

She looked over, nodding to the dining room table. "He doesn't have a coffee," Lizzie informed you and you peeked around her to see she was correct.

"Okay, so-"

"For the record," she interrupted, holding up a finger for you to wait, "he left his breakfast and his friends to...bring you coffee." Lizzie looked down at your drink and back up to you. "Taste it. Did he get it right?"
Shaking your head with a grin, you took up your cup of coffee for a sip. You nodded, reluctantly admitting, "It's right."

"You two are disgusting," Elizabeth deadpanned, in Wanda's accent, with a sour and judgmental look on her face, while Alicia sputtered beside her.

"I'm not even going to apologize," you chuckled.

"Don't," Alicia assured you, with a smile. "It's wonderful. You two are so perfect together."

"You are," Lizzie agreed. "And that's why you're disgusting." Her shoulders rose with her hands in a helpless gesture. "How does that even happen? That man," she literally pointed out at Chris, "bringing you coffee like that."

"I have no idea," you laughed. "If you figure it out, let me know, please."

You all laughed together and Alicia wondered, "How did you two get together?"

You tittered an awkward laugh, shaking your head, as you set down your fork on the plate in your lap. "It's kind of ridiculous," you offered, as a waiver to the shy retelling of the flip cup story. But Alicia and Elizabeth were hooked, listening with small smiles tugging back the sides of their mouths, when they weren't eating or asking a question, all the way through to the two of you reconnecting in New England.

"Now that sounds like Chris," Liz decided, with a firm nod.

"That's a very sweet story," Alicia chimed in. "It's not ridiculous. It's unique. No one will ever have a charming story like that."

"Thanks," you blushed, ahead of a sip of your juice.

"I can't believe you've kept it under wraps for so long," Elizabeth noted. "Living in Los Angeles, how much time he's stayed out there..."

You blew an exasperated breath out your puffed cheeks, your eyes wide at your own disbelief. "I know, right? We had a talk about me coming along for this trip," you told them. "We were a little worried about it; about someone noticing." You straightened up a little, trying to come off as more confident. "But I've been pretty mindful about when to stay away when cameras are around."

"That's all you can do, I suppose," Alicia shrugged, with a hint of a frown. "That's such a shame though."

"What's the alternative, though?" you half-wondered, half-agreed.

"Flip everyone off and smile," Liz decided, pulling the end off a croissant from her plate.

You all laughed, none louder than you. "Are you kidding?" you smiled, shaking your head. "My god, the PR nightmare that'd be."

"For who?" she asked, popping the flakey piece of bread in her mouth. Chewing as she spoke, she went on, "For his team? Pfft." Elizabeth swatted a hand through the air. "That's their job. Privacy is one thing, but you shouldn't have to hide yourself like some pariah." Her eyes widened with a thought and she stretched out a hand across Alicia to touch your knee. "I don't mean that he's hiding you," she hurriedly explained. "I just mean, you two should be able to do what you want without worrying what people think. They'll never know you the way he does. It's not up to them."
You smiled, kindly. "No, I know what you mean," you told her. "It's just going to be weird is all, when it finally happens." You shrugged it off and shook your head. "You know what? It's not a big deal. We're just going out, having fun. I don't even know where we'll be next month. It just is what it is. I shouldn't be worrying about things that haven't happened. We should just enjoy what we have now, right?"

"Right," Alicia and Elizabeth agreed, in near unison.

Liz waved both her hands in the air, as if she was shooting something away. "Enough of this," she decided. "Let's get back to brighter things. What is everyone wearing tonight?"

Alicia giggled and you snickered. "I have no idea," you admitted.

"You're going," Liz reminded you, "you're here. You must have packed a dress."

"I did," you nodded, with a laugh, before explaining the limited dresses you'd brought on the trip and how you'd already worn them and for what. "I was thinking about the blue one I wore to dinner the other night."

"We should go shopping," Elizabeth exhaled, her face lit up at the idea and hand going to Alicia's shoulder for her support.

"That sounds like fun," Alicia seconded.

"Oh, no," you shook your head. "Are you kidding?" You checked your watch. "It's almost 11. I know you guys have things on the schedule before the premier."

Shaking her head, Liz corrected, "Not me. Some of the boys do. All I need is to be back at my hotel by 3 for hair and makeup."

"Nobody's interviewing me for anything," Alicia quipped.

"It'll be fun," Elizabeth insisted, plainly excited by the prospect.

"Where do you even go to shop in London?" you laughed.

Alicia's brow rose with excitement. "I've always wanted to go to Harrods," she said.

"Perfect," Liz seconded.
Chapter 49

You didn't rush through your meals, but you were mindful of the time. To get to Harrods, shop, try on outfits, and get back to the hotel in time for the premier events to begin, you didn't have a lot of time to dilly dally. Chris was a little caught off guard, surprised when you went over to tell him that you were leaving to go shopping with Elizabeth and Alicia. He barely recovered quickly enough, puckering a kiss at your cheek when you dotted one to his, before hurrying to catch up to Liz on her way to the door.

"Oh, okay," he stammered, looking a little confused. "Uh, have fun."

You waved your goodbyes, as Alicia grabbed her purse from the back of Joe's chair. On the ride down the elevator, the three of you started talking about clothes, trying to come up with some ideas for what you might be looking for in a new dress. Downstairs, a car was waiting. Liz had used one of the phones in Downey's apartment to call down to the front desk and inquire about a taxi. Turns out the hotel concierge was as helpful with travel assistance as they were polite. Waiting for you at the curb was the hotel's Bentley and driver.

It didn't seem to faze Elizabeth, but you and Alicia stuttered for a step and giggled, clutching each other's arms in stifled giddiness. The suited chauffeur shut the door behind you and Elizabeth asked him to take you to Harrods, in case he didn't already know. You stretched out your legs in the spacious backseat, tilting your head to take in the view from the large sunroof above. Damn. This is a nice car. Beside you, Alicia's grin told you she was just as wowed by the experience in the luxury automobile.

Alicia nudged your arm, looking at her phone in her hand, quietly telling you, "The car has wifi."

You glanced between her and her phone, seeing her point out the signal while she skimmed through the Harrods website. "Are you kidding?" you whispered back.

Pressing her lips together, in a tight smile, Alicia nodded. "The car."

Snickering, you shook your head. At least you weren't the only one surprised by the some of the seemingly extravagant things happening on this trip.

"This is literally the nicest car ride I will ever have in my life," you decided.

"And you're, basically, just going to the mall," Alicia laughed.

"I know, right?" you laughed.

"It's a bit much?" Liz wondered, with a small wrinkle in her brow. "They said they had a car we could use, instead of calling a cab."

"It's fine," you assured her. "It's just..." You waved a hand around. "Not really used to...all...of this." You made a small gesture toward Liz, adding, with a giggle, "Probably not you, though."

"It is weird," Elizabeth thoughtfully nodded. "Now and then, I still stop and think, 'wow'. I mean, this is not normal!" She laughed. "Even for me, considering, you know, my sisters and all. But it can be loads of fun."

"This is definitely in the 'fun' category," Alicia decided and you all giggled.
Pulling up to Harrods, you knew it was a large store, but- *Holy shit.* Your inner monologue probably wouldn't have been too out of place. Beside you, Alicia beamed with anticipation, when you both looked up the facade of the multistory building out the top of the sunroof. With words of thanks for the driver from you all, Liz had the car door open before he even had a chance to try and do it for you. Maybe she was excited, too, or maybe it was just a time saver and a way to draw less attention. Either way, she'd been there before and waved you along, telling you and Alicia to follow her.

You were glad to have Elizabeth as a guide. The place was massive. So many floors. So many stores. One look around and you regretted not hiring a Sherpa and a pair of mules to help you navigate every window display that caught your eye and carry all the trinkets that tugged at your wallet. But you had a mission. *Stay focused.*

Making your way upstairs and around shoppers, the names of tags were familiar and extravagant. Wandering in and out of racks, your fingers brushed along silk tops and leather purse straps. But it was the dresses that made you salivate. Dolce & Gabbana, Alexander McQueen, Oscar de la Renta, Valentino. You could swoon at some of the gorgeous designs at your fingertips.

Elizabeth spoke up, when the cheerful sales clerk approached your trio and asked if she could help you with anything. You answered with your size when asked and gave a few details about some style ideas you were considering. Liz noted you needed something semi-formal for an "event this evening". The sales woman gave you a thoughtful nod, considering your figure a moment, before inviting you all to follow her. She waved over another associate and it didn't take a genius to see she'd recognized Ms. Olsen or, at least, had a sneaking suspicion about her.

Liz and Alicia grabbed a couple items off the racks for you to try. The two workers brought over more selections for you to see, while you popped in and out of the dressing room in a little fashion show of each style.

Floral appliqué overlay mini dress, an off the shoulder lace cocktail dress, ruched satin, floral lace slip, a cutout side maxi dress, and cashmere midi. Flounced hem, pencil, ruffled. Sleeveless, cap sleeve, spaghetti strap. The selection was endless. Except when it came to the price tag. You had to draw a line. It's not like you had an AmEx black card. You may be on a worldwide press tour for one of the biggest projected box office successes this year, but it was on comparitively few of your actual dimes and you still had bills to pay when it was over. But nobody said you couldn't enjoy trying on that £3,500 Dolce & Gabbana that looked like it was painted on you by one of the masters. You put it aside, though, with a heartfelt sigh. On to the next!

"What do you think?" you wondered, rising up on your toes and twisting to look over your shoulder at your back in the mirror.

Alicia stopped sorting through the dresses on the rack nearby to look. Elizabeth made her way back over to the tri-paneled mirror in the fitting area. You smoothed your hands down your hips and over your butt to smooth the dress, while you contorted to see all the angles. Your lips pouted, contemplatively, looking over the navy embroidered floral lace pencil skirt with a wrap front. The shorter peaked hem in the front showed off a tasteful bit of sexy leg, balanced out by the demure rounded neckline.

Elizabeth's eyes widened, with approval, as she inhaled. "I love it," she gaped.

Alicia nodded her agreement, seconding, "It's beautiful. And with that red hair..."

"You think?" you double checked, flattening out your feet again and facing your reflection.

Of course, the sales girls on hand thought everything you tried on was perfect for you. Especially the
bigger name, higher priced dresses. But, with Alicia and Liz's support you were feeling pretty confident. You lifted your arm to take a peek at the price tag under your arm. You did a little quick math, trying to ballpark the total for the dress and sales tax. You figured it out to be just over $300 in the end and bit your lip.

Come on. You were shopping in Harrods, for god's sake. You didn’t expect to get away with bargain basement pricing, but still. The most expensive dress you'd ever bought was a bridesmaid's dress three years ago for a friend's wedding. And, even then, that was about a hundred bucks. At least, with something like this, you could hope to wear it more than once.

The sales staff was on point, one quickly disappearing and returning with a few boxes of shoes to pair with the dress and the other with some accessories. You eyed the dress for a moment, debating if any of the shoes and jewelry you had with you on the trip would work with this outfit. Elizabeth stepped up, looking over the shoes that were selected for you, humming thoughtfully to herself while Alicia came up to the mirror for a closer look at the floral pattern in the lace.

Liz, literally, waved the shoes away, coming over to tell you, "I have a pair of black Jimmy Choo's that would be perfect for that dress. Open toe, with a crisscross strap behind the ankle." She held her thumb and forefinger close together to demonstrate the width of the strap. "Do you mind suede?"

Do you mind suede? *Pfft.* She had you at Jimmy Choo's.

"No," you said, trying not to sound too eager. "But, how will I get them back to you?"

Elizabeth shrugged, with a dismissive flip of her hand. "Just send them back when we get back to LA."

"What size?" you checked

"8 and a half," she answered. "Does that work?"

"It should," you hoped, running your hands down the dress once more, with a final twirl in the mirror. You nodded to yourself. "Yeah. I think this is the one." You turned to the closest associate, saying, "I'll take it."

*Ah, what the hell. You only live once, right?*

While the sale was rang up and your dress hung in a bag, you were just as pleased as the girls to see you still had time to run around and see a little more of Harrods. You stopped to drool over the Leonidas counters, picking out an assortment of chocolates for later. You picked out a Harrods souvenir bear dressed as a palace guardsman to snuggle with on your flight back to the States tomorrow and stopped for a quick treat at the Ice Cream Parlour, ordering capucinnos all around and a Harrods Special to split.

A few people caught on while you finished your coffees in the busy shop, snapping pics on their phones of Liz. Luckily, it was time to head back to the hotels. The car from Downey's place was waiting for you, taking you to drop off Alicia and Liz at their hotel and waiting for you to come back down with the shoes Elizabeth promised you. The driver left with a tip of his cap to you, after delivering you back to your hotel.

It was just after three. You didn't need a whole shower again. You figured you could give yourself a few minutes to relax and just wash your hair. Chris was already back in your suite, when you walked in the door. Laid out along the couch, with one arm folded behind his head and scrolling through his phone with his free hand, he smiled at you, when you turned into the room from shutting the door.
behind you.

"Mission accomplished, I see," Chris chuckled, noting the garment bag over your arm and strappy heels dangling from your curled fingertips, as you dropped your small bags, with your souvenir and chocolates, on the table. "Just tell me you paid for the shoes and didn't just steal them off some poor lady."

"Better," you laughed. "They're borrowed."

"Damn," he mused, with a thoughtful wrinkle in his brow and pout on his lips. "I mean, they say Brits are nice people, but that?"

"From Elizabeth," you corrected him, walking on to put your items in the bedroom.

"You're borrowing shoes?" Chris asked, speaking loud enough for you to still hear him from his spot on the couch. "You guys sure bonded fast."

You sniggered, hanging your dress on the rod in the closet. Going back to the other room, you simply explained, "Girl code."

"Girl code?" he questioned, with a look of curiosity on his face.

"Yeah," you shrugged, swatting at his knee for him to straighten his leg.

When he moved, you tucked a knee between his and the back of the couch, lowering yourself to lay down with him. Chris picked up his head, bringing his arm back down to fold across your shoulders, as you nuzzled into the space under his chin. He pecked a kiss to the top of your head and asked, "How does that get you shoes?"

"A girl in need..." you smiled.

"Ahh," he accepted, the noise rumbling, soothingly, under your ear on his chest. "I see."

"When did you get home?" you wondered, closing your eyes, relaxing to the sound of his heart beat.

Chris chuckled, giving you a small squeeze. "This is a hotel, babe," he reminded you. "We don't live here."

You opened your eyes, looking over the room, and shook your head. "Wow," you realized. "I did say that, didn't I?" Chris snuffled another laugh and you considered, "I guess it's just feels so familiar with everybody welcoming me back and calling me Ms. [y/l/n] every time we come and go."

"It's nice, huh?" Chris noted.

"It really is," you considered. "It's so charming with the decor and it's lil fireplace and stuff. This whole place is soo...homey."

"And private," he added. "It's small; only so many guests and not hundreds. It's quiet."

"Good find," you praised, blindly holding up your hand over your shoulder.

Chris connected the high five, with an enthusiastic smack, in spite of the awkward angle you presented him with. "True." His arm came back to rest across your shoulders and he pointed out, "We need to start getting ready."

"Shhhhh," you insisted, fumbling your hand up over his face to cover his lips. "Five minutes. I'm
"comfy."

Laughing and turning away from your no-look shushing, Chris took hold of your wrist to pull it back down to his chest. "We're going to be late," he assured you.

"It's called *Captain America: Civil War,*" you grumbled. "Pretty sure they won't start without you."

"You wanna try that line on Fiege and the rest of 'em?" he challenged, reaching down to give you a motivating smack on the ass.

"Noo," you grumbled, scooting back to set up on your knees and maneuver off the couch. "Fine. Let's go see your silly little movie."

Chris got up, grabbing your wrist on your way past him. He let go, after he caught up to plant a kiss in the side of your hair, and promised you, "We're almost done."

"Are we watching it this time?" you checked, following him to the bedroom.

"We are," he nodded. "Damn near everybody's here for this one. Can't get out of it, tonight."

Stopping on front of the closet to pull his suit out of his garment bag, he remembered, "We'll have to watch the one in New York, too."

"I don't mind," you admitted, stepping out of your shoes. You smiled, innocently adding, "It's fun seeing my name in the credits, while we wait for the post-credit scenes."

"Ugh," he complained, rolling his eyes over, hard. "You're so conceited."

You gaped, your jaw falling open in exaggerated offense. "Excuse you?"

"This whole tour," Chris playfully grumbled, rolling his hand in the air as he looked over his tie options on a small hanger and continued. "It's just 'me, me, me', all the time; dragging me around like some handbag sitting next to you."

"I don't have to listen to this," you tried to frown.

As you went by him, on your way into the bathroom, he went on, raising the pitch of his voice and mockingly whining, "Why can't we see the movie every night? I wanna see my name in the credits."

"I do not sound like that," you laughingly insisted, digging through your toiletries kit for some cosmetics.

"Look, honey!" Chris carried on, with the ridiculous amount of stereotyped femininity in his tone. "There I am! 'Hairstylist for Mr. Evans'. That's me!"

"When have I ever?" you dared, trying not to laugh.

"Oh, that Chris Evans," he swooned, his own stifled laughter threatening to ruin his comically girly charade. "Isn't he just the dreamiest?"

You couldn't listen to him anymore, leaning out from the bathroom doorway to see him taking his suit from the closet and point out, rather matter of factly, "I have never said that."

"Maybe you should, once in awhile," he suggested, with a playful smirk. "Goes a long way for putting up with your diva-ish behavior."

"I'm telling your mother," you warned.
"Pfft," he scoffed, his brow creasing down, as he gave you a cocky once over. "You don't have the balls."

"Ohh, okay, tough guy," you nodded, tightly. "We'll see."

"What does that mean?" Chris asked after you, when you spun around to go back to the vanity. A fiendish smirk curled up the corner of your mouth, when you didn't answer and he called out again, sounding a little worried this time. "Hey, what does that mean? ...[Y/n]?"

"Nuh-thiiing," you angelically sang, stretching out for your fingertips to push the door shut.

Through the door, you heard Chris' muffled voice come from the next room, "That's cool."

About fifteen minutes later, your rewashed hair was up in a towel and there was a knock on the door, with Chris' inquisitive voice from the other side. "You 'bout done in there? Some of us other stars of the show need to get ready, too, ya know."

You smirked, tucking your makeup back into your case and turning your head to eye your work. "Don't get your panties in a bunch," you told him, grabbing your brush and the hairdryer to take with you.

When you opened the door, Chris was standing there, amused smile on his face and his eyebrow cocked up. "My panties in a bunch?" he repeated.

With a pat on his chest, you slipped by him, saying, "If the shoe fits..."

"Keep it up smartass," he dared, from the bathroom, "and you won't be getting into these panties anytime soon."

You stopped, looking up from your suitcase to turn over your shoulder and stare at the empty bathroom doorway. "Really?" you begged.

"Uh-huh," Chris affirmed.

"Ha!" you sarcastically barked. "You'd crack before I would."

"Doubt it," he casually disagreed.

"How do you figure?" you chuckled, sorting through your clothes for a bra to wear with your new dress.

"Guys figured out a long time ago how to survive being single. There's always Rosie Plamer and her sisters," Chris explained. "Trust me, I'ma be alright."

Oh, my god! You laughed, literally, holding your stomach. From the next room, you heard him laughing, too, as you scolded, "You're terrible!"

"I'm a guy," he proudly reminded you.

"I'm adding that to the list of things to tell your mother," you assured him.

"She wouldn't be surprised," he dismissed the warning, an indifferent shrug in his voice.

You shook your heard, a wide grin still firmly stuck on your lips. You needed the scissors from your travel manicure kit, to cut off the tag on your dress. Going back into the bathroom, Chris was just putting his toothbrush to work and his reflection smiled at yours in the mirror. You gave his hip a
bump with yours, to get him to step aside. The sound of his quiet chuckle was almost masked by the sound of brush on tooth. Retrieving your tiny kit, you flashed him a cheesy smile and skipped out of the bathroom. A minute later, you heard the faucet turn on and Chris spitting to rinse his mouth.

When the water shut back off, he said from the bathroom, "I love you."

You straightened up from your work of snipping off your dress tags and smiled back toward the bathroom door. You couldn't see him, but you happily answered back, "I love you, too."

"You need back in here, or something?" Chris asked.

"No," you said. "Just needed scissors. It's all yours."

Another minute later, you heard the taps on the shower open up. You snapped a picture of your pricey new dress hanging on the closet door to send to your sister-in-law. Checking the clock on the bedside table, you pulled off your shirt and set about styling your hair. Using the full length mirror in the room, you let your hair down from its towel and spritzed on your primer to start drying your hair. Splitting your locks into wide sections, you dried, pinned, and repeated, until you were satisfied with the blownout loose curls. You bundled the hairdryer and your brush on the bed and finished changing clothes, tossing your shorts into your suitcase, trading one bra for the other, and putting on a matching pair of panties for your strapless bra.

You stepped into your new dress, fussing for a second with the closure at the top of the zipper. Elizabeth's shoes fit perfectly, and you turned your foot on your toe to admire them in the mirror. You smoothed down a fold in the lace overlay of your dress and gave your reflection an approving pout. Not too shabby, girl. Turning back to the bed, you picked out a short necklace, earrings, and your gold bracelets to finish off your look. While you waited for Chris, you went out to the living room, rustling through you shopping bags to get your chocolates. You plopped down on the couch, one leg crossed over the other, sampling your sweets and scrolling through your phone to kill time.

The foot that distractedly swung stopped, when Chris leaned into the living room doorway and whistled. You froze, lips wrapped around a truffle in your fingertips and the phone in your hand chiming a reply from your sister-in-law about the picture you'd sent. You finished biting through your candy, an embarrassed flush passing quickly through your cheeks, as you tittered and used the free fingers of your chocolate holding hand to hide your chewing. You hurriedly put aside your phone and closed the lid on your treats.

"Sorry," you mumbled, around the melting richness in your mouth. In that aghast second, you weren't sure what was sweeter: the truffle or the sight of Chris standing there, with an open waistcoat, jacket over his arm, and an adoring grin on his face, like he'd just come home from a long day at the office.

Chris snickered at your passing embarrassment, pulling his hands from his pockets, as he straightened up from the doorway. He held up his phone, informing you, "Car'll be downstairs in about ten minutes to meet us, with Megan and Josh. You 'bout ready to go, or did you want to finish your dinner first?"

You stuck out your tongue and flipped him off, setting your box of candies back on the dining table. "Well, I was going to share..."

"Aw, baby," he pouted, the high lines in his brow showing his exaggerated sadness and his shoulders dropping with his spirits. "Come on."

"Nope," you stubbornly shook your head, crossing your arms, when Chris crossed the room to stand..."
in front of you.

He stuck out his lower lip, with the most tragic puppy dog eyes he had. "Just a little bit of sweetness?" he begged, draping his jacket over the back of a chair and wrapping his arms around you.

You hugged him back, folding your arms behind his neck, while he nibbled at yours. That is, until you realized he only had one hand on you. Your head snapped over your shoulder to see his left hand reaching out for the box of chocolates on the table behind you.

"Christopher Robert!" you complained, twisting out of his half-hug to smack his hand.

Already caught, he abandoned stealth, with an unconcerned shrug, and snatched the box off the dining room table. He spun away from you, as you grabbed for the box, clutching it to his chest and twisting his shoulder away from you, just a stiff arm away from the perfect Heisman.

"Give it back," you demanded, still trying to maneuver around to get a hand on the box.

"Nah-ah," Chris declined, flipping up the box lid and popping a whole truffle in his mouth.

"Nooo!" you whined. "Was that the white chocolate hazelnut?!"

"Mmhm," he proudly nodded, mumbling around the large mouthful of melting candy goodness in his mouth, "And it'sh sh'ohh good."

"Bastard!" you cried, smacking the back of his shoulder, as he continued to chew, beaming, and humming his exaggerated satisfaction at the taste. Chris handed you back the box and you decided, "You suck. That was the last one of those."

"You had more?!" he balked, looking thoroughly offended. Chris pointed an accusing finger at you, chiding, "You had more than one in there, and you weren't going to share?"

"Well...no," you fumbled and frowned, more than a little guilty, lifting the lid to peek at what was left inside. "Not that one, anyway."

"And I'm the bastard," he sarcastically nodded. Chris pointed at you again. "Yeah, okay. That's cool. I got your number." He started to step backward toward the bedroom. "You know what? When we get home, it's on. I'm having Ma overnight me a box 'a cannoli from home and you're gonna watch me eat 'em all."

A scandalized gasp came from your slacked jaw. "You wouldn't dare!" you challenged.

From the other room he answered, "What did you say before? Oh, yeah. 'We'll see'."

You had a finger ready to point at him, when he came back into the living room, tightening up the knot of his tie. "Don't you do it," you warned, with a tilt of your chin to show you meant business. "You do...and..." You needed something, fast. Time to pull out the big guns. "and I'll call Frank and he'll get me cannoli from New York."

"Oh, yeah?" Chris dared, with his smile opening with a cocky smirk. "You gonna fight Bahstin with Frank?"

"Maybe..." you shrugged, folding your arms.

"Mmhm," Chris hummed, nodding, as he pulled on the jacket for his three piece suit. His eyes
flicked down, watching you step forward to button up his vest, from top to bottom. "You don't fight fair," he decided. "Playing the Grillo card?"

You finished closing the last button, with a small tug at the bottom points of the waistcoat's hem and an innocent grin. "I'm a girl. We don't have to fight fair."

With a smile, he nodded and you turned away to drop your phone into your purse. "You wanna go see a movie with me?" he asked, with a boyish grin in the corner of his mouth.

"Who me?" you feigned a blush. "With you?"

"Yeah," he shrugged. Chris wagged up his eyebrows enticing you, "Buy you a soda, share some popcorn..."

You gave the knot of his tie a tiny adjustment, wondering, "Can we sit in the back row and make out, if the movie sucks?"

Chris broke, bending back at his knees buckling with a grimacing hiss. "Gah! Noo," he groaned. "Not this time."

"Fine," you reluctantly accepted, as he slipped his arms around your waist and pulled you close. "But next time, I get to pick the movie."

"Deal," Chris agreed, dotting a kiss to your forehead.
Chapter 50

Riding along in the back of the limousine, you got the impression that Chris had tuned out the sound of Megan’s voice. There didn’t seem to be much behind his intermittent nodding, as she glossed over notes for the event that she was reading from her phone. When what she said required an answer, his response was a humming nod/“yeah” combo. When she wasn’t looking, Chris’ head lolled to the side to look at you, his eyes rolling and parted lips letting out a soft, snarling breath. You snickered behind your hand, making a play at scratching the tip of your nose, to disguise your subtle laughter. You gave his hand a sympathetic squeeze to remind him, it’s almost over.

Pulling up to the premier location, the crowd was everything you’d come to expect. People lined every available inch of real estate allowed in front of the Vue Westfield entrance. As the limo came to a stop, Chris leaned over, reaching his arm across to cradle your neck and guide your cheek to his lips.

Before he sat back, he smiled at you, his face a few inches from yours. "Did I tell you, you look amazing tonight?"

You felt a soft heat rise in your cheeks. The man's timing was impeccable and the compliment, purred to your ear, stirred up an excited flutter in your belly. "Something like that," you smiled back. "Right before you stole my truffle."

Chris flashed you a devilish smile, while Megan maneuvered to exit the far side of the limo on her own. "Stealing candy from my baby," he reworked a phrase, as he popped the handle on his door to get out.

"Terrible human being," you said after him.

Before the door shut behind him, you heard he say back, "Sassy."

The car pulled away, moving down the arrivals cue to let you and Josh out with the other, ahem, common folk. You were getting the hang of palling around with Josh. He was good company and you had come to depend on his knowledge of all the behind the scenes workings at these events. It gave you a little more confidence each time.

The inside of the mall was packed, like every other venue had been. You navigated the edge of the crowd with Josh, passing by a few checkpoints of security and people with clipboards speaking into headset microphones. There was a place for you, and other VIPs, to watch the introductions and photocall. It would be a little bit of a wait for the cast to finish the red carpet walk and interviews further down the mall, but you occupied yourself by chatting with Josh and mingling around with some, at least, semi-familiar faces.

In hindsight, you wished you’d popped a few preemptive aspirin or thought to drop a small bottle in your purse. The excited screams from the crowd only seemed to get louder and louder. By the time the cast and the rest of the Marvel team were on stage together, the thundering noise echoing around the multistory mall started a soft ringing in your ears. My god. If this is the London premier, god save your eardrums in New York. You rolled your eyes in relief, when Josh put his hand on your elbow and leaned in to tell you to follow him backstage and to the theater.

Behind the curtain, you spotted Chris through the crowd. The area was packed with the Marvel cast and execs and many of the other VIPs and guests. You wove through the sea of celebrity and event staff, following in Josh's wake and politely smiling and excusing yourself as you brushed past.
people. You stopped, halted by a hand on your wrist, and looked over your shoulder to see Sebastian. He looked like a kid at Christmas, his wide eyes with the hint of a sparkle in them.

Leaning to you, he sounded a little awestruck, when he told you, "I just met...Mark Hamill."

Your own eyes bugged, taking your wrist from his grasp to grab at his forearm in your own excitement, questioning, "Mark Hamill?!"

Sebastian's enthusiastic nod and grin removed any doubt about his sincerity. After all, why would he lie? Your jaw slacked. Mark Hamill was only a legend. The young Jedi was, legit, your first Hollywood crush. Star Wars had been your first foray into fandom, even though you were too small to realize what fandoms were or would become. The thought that you were in the same room as one of your all-time fav heroes had your stomach doing somersaults. You almost missed Sebastian asking, "Wanna meet him?"

"Is the Pope a Catholic?" you scoffed, as if it were even a question. Of course, never miss a chance to meet Luke Skywalker!

Sebastian brought you along with him, with his arm across your shoulders. And, honestly, you didn't know if your shy feet would have carried you across the way without his help. Dude, come on. Hamill is Luke Skywalker, undeniable master of voice acting, and a pop culture king. Mark frickin' Hamill. You swallowed down the fear that he could be a prick, the moment Sebastian touched Hamill's shoulder and he spun around with a warm smile for Sebastian and a kindly curious one to you.

"My son has returned," Mark joked and you gaped. Did he know how much Sebastian looked like young Luke? Did they both? "And with a lady friend." He wagged his brow up and turned to you, asking, "Are you my daughter?"

You coughed out a laugh, in pure disbelief of your current situation—meeting Mark Hamill, who thinks you might just be dating, or better, Sebastian Stan. Not a bad way to go. Having a bit of trouble finding the Earth under your feet, you recovered, while Sebastian happily corrected, "No no no. No, she's my friend. She's a fan and, I hope it's alright, I brought her over to say hello."

"Of course," Hamill emphatically assured you both, as you realized you had already been shaking Mark's hand for a couple of seconds. "Any friend of my son is a friend of mine," he chuckled and you died, as a "friend" of Mark Hamill's. Some one put that on your tombstone. -Here lies [y/n]~friend of Mark Hamill.-

"Wow," you began, with a small shake in your head, trying to fathom the odds of meeting your childhood hero. "Mr. Hamill, it's so-"

"Please," he grimaced, waving a dismissive hand, as his head tipped backward. "Call me Mark. We're all friends and fans here. And you are, my dear?"

The reverb that ran through his question was reminiscent of his Joker and you felt a little weak. "I'm [y/n]," you managaed, adding, as a fangirl, "Can I just say, your Joker is the best thing ever. I don't know how many afternoons I put off doing homework because Batman: the Animated Series came on. Even now, if I read even one comic panel with the Joker in it, it's your voice I hear in my head. When you were at the Star Wars Celebration and did the reading of the eulogy from-"

"From 'The Man Who Killed Batman,'" he nodded, humbly, closing his eyes.

"I almost cried," you admitted. "It was like being a kid again. And when I heard they were doing
The Killing Joke, and you'd be working with Kevin Conroy and Tara Strong, I got so excited. I mean, Arleen Sorkin is my favorite Harley, but-

"Well, you can never go wrong with an original, can we kiddies?" Mark purred, in his trademark Joker voice.

And that's when your dead fangirl ass ascended to the heavens. Was there anything left in your life that could top Mark Hamill winking at you as the Joker? Probably not. You were flush with giddiness and, beside you, Sebastian laughed. God bless Sebastian Stan for making a childhood dream come true. When the laughter subsided, Sebastian asked if you had seen the photoshopped pic floating around the internet of his face on young Mark Hamill's promo still from Star Wars and it started a lively discussion about how, in your humble opinion, there needs to be a Young Luke or Son of Skywalker movie with Sebastian cast in the lead, because, seriously, it is beyond uncanny.

You could have talked for hours. In fact, it kind of felt that way, with how you had all so excitedly chimed in together as the conversation rolled on about your shared love of the Marvel movies and Mark's interest in Civil War. You knew better than to try and needle any details about anything Star Wars related, although you almost couldn't help yourself. Surprisingly, it had only been a few minutes, before Josh had figured out where he lost you and found you to show you your seat in the theater. You were too shy to ask for one yourself, but when Hamill suggested you mark the occasion with a selfie or two, you did not argue. After getting his own hand shook, Josh offered to take the photos. He shuffled between Sebastian and your phones, while a photographer managed to get a few snaps for themselves. You left with your most gracious thanks for the photos and memories from Mr. Hamill and promised to see Sebastian later, as Josh and you went on your way. You gushed to Josh, about how unreal today was, wondering how you'd ever be able to leave London. It was such a magical place to be a geek.

The atmosphere in the theater was much quieter. You found your reserved seats near the front. While you waited for the seating to fill out and the Stars of the night make their entrance, your eyes wondered over the crowd, catching glimpses of famous faces. Alicia caught up with you, side stepping through the row in front of yours to meet you. She flattered you with a few compliments about you in your new dress and gave your hand a squeeze before she made her way back to her own seat to enjoy the show.

You looked through your phone, beaming at your prized pics with you and Mark Hamill in one and him sandwiched between you and Sebastian, arms around you both, in another to pass the last few minutes before the others came in. Chris took the empty seat beside you, feigning aggravation with himself at forgetting the popcorn, when the lights went down and the crowd hushed. You elbowed him, whispering that he owes you. Chris picked up your hand and moved it to rest with his on his leg, snuffling a laugh behind a small grin, as the speakers came to life and screen glowed.

It was somewhere in the middle of the airport scene that you actually wished there was popcorn. There was a tiny tremor in your stomach, reminding you that chocolates and truffles do not a meal make. You shifted a little in your seat, hoping your stomach didn't let out a growl during a quiet scene in the movie.

You leaned over to Chris and he tipped over to meet you over the armrest between you. "I'm starving," you whispered.

Chris sat up, patting his hand over his jacket pockets. He shook his head, as he bent back to your ear, and softly told you, "Sorry, I think I left the truffles in my other jacket."
You silently gasped, pinching the back of his arm next to yours. "Ass," you said, under you breath.

His shoulders shook with laughter and he stretched his neck to speak a little closer to your ear and remind you, "There'll be food after this."

"Not soon enough," you muttered, squaring up in your seat again.

Chris patted his hand over yours, turning his eyes back up to the screen, with a small grin still on his face. You sat back and hoped the food at the reception to follow was actual food and not just hors d'oeuvres. Aw, who are you kidding? You'd crush a few plates of bite sized snacks, if you had to. No shame when you're hangry.

You should have expected the elbow from Chris during the credits, when your name crawled up the screen. Looking over at him, giggling like an idiot next to you, you held up your finger for him to wait. His curiosity sobered him up enough to quiet him, but not to wipe the smile off his face. He intently watched, as you opened your purse to reach inside. When you pulled your hand back, you were flipping him off.

His face fell, his head cocking slightly to the side and his lips pulling into a frown. With his eyebrow arched, his look said really? and you smiled, proudly. Chris shook his head at you, with a disgusted click of his tongue. He mouthed, "Shame on you." You innocently raised your hands to your shoulders and sent back, "Whaat?" His lips broke into his smile and his attention went back to the screen.

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The after party was in a ballroom of a hotel you missed the name of. It's not your fault. The limousine dropped you off at a side entrance and you weren't exactly taking notes on where you were going. All that mattered was the buffet. The life sized, need a fork and plate to eat fooood buffet. And it smelled delicious. You tried not to let your impatience show, while you floated around for a quick pass around the room as part of Chris' small entourage. After all, this was his job. But when someone walked by you with a small plate of jumbo shrimp, it took all your will power not to snatch one and devour it there.

"Ready?"

"Huh?" you blinked, coming to as you recognized the source of the question and pulled your longing gaze from the plate of prime rib that went by.

"Wanna get something to eat?" Chris rephrased, incline his head toward the buffet.

"Yes," you agreed, with an awkward smile at his amused grin.

The servers at each station fed everyone well. You decided on the chicken over the beef options, figuring it's healthiness would cancel out all the carb heavy sides you were eyeballing down the line. Waiters took care of serving beverages to the tables and you took a seat with Chris and Josh at one of the large round tables to join Joe and Alicia with Kevin Fiege. You and Josh were introduced to Fiege's wife, Caitlin, by name, but not by association. Maybe it wasn't appropriate to mention Captain America brought a date to the premier, in front of the messiah of Marvel Studios. You didn't let it bother you. Instead, you listened to the shop talk at the table about early profit estimates for the foreign openings of Civil War and tried to figure out that extra flavor in your mashed potatoes. Is that rosemary? Nice.

Empty plates were cleared and drinks refreshed by the waitstaff. As people finished their meals, they began to mix and mingle at other tables and take their conversations and cocktails to their feet. Panning your gaze around, you noted friendly faces around the room. You spied Sebastian and
Elizabeth standing beside the chairs of Renner and a few men you didn't recognize. You caught glimpses of Mackie and Daniel as the crowd moved about. Like a small moon, Downey had a group of people in orbit around his seat at his table with both Pauls. It was hard to keep track of everyone as people milled about, but it was a good distraction from the business talk going on about Marvel and the movie. You couldn't blame them. You figured there was a lot to talk about and catch Fiege up on from the press tour.

You didn't feel too guilty about politely dismissing yourself from the table to answer Elizabeth's beckoning hand in the air. Smiling on your approach to her and Sebastian, you reached to meet Elizabeth's extended hand held out to guide you in the last few steps. She held up your hand with hers, giving you a wide eyed once over.

"Wow!" she gushed. "Oh, it looks even better all put together."

"Well," Sebastian prompted, flicking his hand at you, "give us a spin."

Liz tugged your hand up a little higher and you twirled underneath. When you had turned around, you flapped your hands by your side, with the side of your lower lip held between your teeth, bashfully waiting for the verdict. Putting his glass down on the nearby table, Sebastian applauded.

"Oh!" he said, his brow pulling down in all seriousness, as he gave you a once over. "My god, woman."

You halfheartedly waved a dismissal for his exaggeration. "Stop."

"No, really," Sebastian insisted, his brow unfurling to a worried rise that you might not believe him. He bumped his left hand past Elizabeth's arm for help and gestured at you with his right. "Lizzie, c'mon."

"No, he's right," she agreed, with a big nod. "You look amazing." Liz clamped her hand on your forearm, her eyes wide with curiosity. "What did Chris say?"

"The same," you shrugged, with a modest grin.

"See?" Elizabeth sang. "If he says so..."

"Hey," Sebastian frowned. "Since when does my opinion count for shit?"

Liz swatted her hand into his arm. "Shush. Because she's not dating you."

"It should still count," he muttered.

"It does," you assured him. "Thank you." Sebastian beamed, proudly, at the acknowledgment and you turned to Elizabeth. "And speaking of dresses..."

You swept a hand up in front of you to reference her and you saw a quick flush in her cheeks. "Oh," Elizabeth tittered. "Yeah." She looked herself over, shyly noting, "By Alexander McQueen."

"And boobs," Sebastian added, ahead of a sip of his drink.

You and Elizabeth let out a half-laughing and half-scandalized gasp. You leaned forward, going for the next smack of his arm.

"Whaaaat?!" Sebastian begged, shrugging with a helpless palm turned up at Liz. "Everybody's got eyes."
"But you can't just say it like that," you corrected, while you and Elizabeth snickered, still a little surprised by his comment. "You compliment the color on her, the way the rouching shows off her waist, or something. Then maybe you can say something about the keyhole style."

"Maybe," Liz emphasized, holding up a cautionary finger.

"I've been to Fashion Week," he noted, with a kind of disinterested tilt to his head. "I've seen more daring necklines and copious cleavage than you're sporting."

"You have a point," Liz conceded, with a laugh.

"But seriously, though," you said. "The girls look great."

"I know, right?" she agreed, checking herself out with a quick glance.

"Heyyy," Sebastian whined, pointing a finger between the two of you. "Double standard."

"It's a girl thing," Elizabeth shrugged.

"I'm wearing Dunhill, by the way," he flatly mentioned, "if anyone cares."

"We do," Liz cooed, putting her left hand on his bicep and reaching around behind him to grab his other arm and give him a hug. "And you look marvelous."

"Very handsome," you winked.

"I don't have to take this abuse," Sebastian said, holding his chin high. "Least of all from you two."

Both of you laughed, as Sebastian shrugged off Elizabeth's consoling hug and walked away. "No, come back!" you pleaded, trying not too laugh too loudly.

"What was that about?"

You both turned around to see Emily VanCamp behind you. She had a quizzical look on her face, and you glanced over your shoulder to check her line of sight, watching Sebastian get welcomed into his next conversation.

"Boobs," Elizabeth solemnly nodded.

"Your boobs?" Emily wondered. "Lookin' good tonight, by the way."

"Thanks," Liz smiled and you giggled.

Emily's brow knit with embarrassment, as she held out her hand to you. "I'm sorry," she winced, "I know I know you from on set last year and you're Chris' girlfriend, but I can't remember your name."

"[Y/n]," you told her, shaking her hand.

You must have had a look on your face, because Elizabeth piped up, immediately, putting her hand on your arm and saying, "I'm so sorry. It just slipped out."

"I know," Emily added. "We're not supposed to say anything."

"Oh, no," you shook your head. "It's not like that. It's-"

"That they're trying to keep it low-key," Elizabeth finished for you, in a semi-hushed tone.
"That's all," you agreed.

"Well," Emily winked, bumping her shoulder to yours, "your secret's safe with me." She groaned, rolling her eyes and adding, "I am sooo over talking to people anymore, anyway."

"One more stop," Liz reminded you both.

"Ugh," Emily sighed. "I just want to sleep in my own bed again." She brightened her tone, turning to you. "Anyway, how 'bout you? Where you from?"

"Ohio," you nodded, "originally. Been in LA for a few years now, so, I guess, that's home."

"But you like it, though," she presumed. "It's worked out for you. You've obviously stayed." She gestured around the room. "And now you're here."

"I'd say things are going pretty well," you chuckled.

"So, what are you doing now?" Emily wondered. "Are you coming along for Infintity Wars, or anything else?"

"Nope," you swept your head.

"Why not?" Liz frowned.

"Well, I don't really have time," you told them. "I work for Frank Grillo now, as his personal stylist. So, I get whatever projects he works on, plus events and appearances. I'm also the key stylist for his show on DirecTv. We're hoping to hear about a renewal for a third season soon. And then I work part time hours at a salon, to fill in the shooting gaps. So, you know, I don't really have the time to commit to another contract for a film Frank isn't on."

"Wow!" Emily marveled.

"That sounds like a lot of work," Liz seconded.

You smiled. "I guess," you considered. "But it doesn't really feel like work, when I'm hanging out with Frank and the crew."

"Frank's the best, isn't he?" Emily agreed, with a thoughtful hum at the end.

"I love him," you admitted.

Emily's face lit up and her hand grabbed Elizabeth's. "You remember the time..."

While Emily and Elizabeth giggled, reminiscing about a story about Frank hassling the chef about getting risotto on set, you listened with an awed kind of grin. Seriously, how did you get here? You're wearing Elizabeth Olsen's shoes, standing in the midst of people like RDJ and the royal court of Marvel, and Chris Evans just smiled at you from across the room. Add in taking selfies with Mark Hamill and all the travel adventures, and damn. *Please, don't wake up from whatever dream this is!*

You flashed a quick smile back at Chris and laughed at Elizabeth cursing herself for not speaking Italian, because, "Whatever Frank said had to be priceless."

"It was probably dirty as hell," Emily figured.

"All the more reason to know," you winked and the girls laughed out loud with you.
Liz and Emily were good company. You were surprised when Chris came over and they apologized for keeping you from him. Apparently, you three had been chatting for quite some time. About 45 minutes by his watch, when you turned his wrist to check the time. Chris brushed off their concern, saying he was just stopping by to say hello, before he gave you a wink and went off to catch up with Downey, Bettany, and a small cluster of studio types.

Shoes were pretty, but it was time to give the heels a rest. You wandered off to find a small couch along the edge of the room. With a glass from a passing waiter, you sipped champagne and chimed in on gossip and talked hair with Emily and Liz. When no one local was in earshot, the three of you giggled, trying out your best cockneyed accents on each other. You even smiled for a scrunched together pic for one of the photographers for the event.

By the time the three of you broke up, you had Elizabeth's phone number, and her assistant's, to get her shoes back to her, and an unsolicited assurance from Emily that she was going to remember the name of your side job salon the next time she needed a trim. You found Chris with Josh and Sebastian, all slouched comfortably at a table with Chris sandwiched in the middle. You seated yourself next to Sebastian and he lazily draped his arm across the back of your chair to bemoan how long the night was getting. You agreed, having felt the urge to yawn just before you sat down.

"It's probably about time for us to get going," Chris decided, with a small groan as he straightened up in his chair. "Still gotta pack for tomorrow."

"What time's your flight?" Sebastian wondered, looking between you and Chris.

"1:20 for you guys," Josh piped up.

Chris wagged up his brow and cocked his head, pointing a finger at him to say Josh had answered. "So, by the time we have to get up to eat, check out, get to the airport..."

"Yeah," Sebastian nodded, with a tired roll of his eyes. "Exactly." He took out his phone to scroll through his emails, while he asked, "How long is that back to LA? Or are you going to Boston since we gotta do New York?"

"LA," Chris shook his head. "Probably, what?" He looked at you, with a squint of concentration in his eye, as he estimated, "About eleven, eleven and a half hours, maybe?"


Next to you, Sebastian snickered. "Sounds about right," he agreed. "It's only, like, eight back to New York. You should move."

"I'm okay, thanks," Chris chuckled. "It's a nonstop. I think we can survive a couple extra hours."

"Suit yourself," Sebastian shrugged, before finishing the last swallow of his drink and standing up. "I'm gonna go make the rounds and sneak out of here." He took your hand in his, dotting a kiss on your knuckles, and checked, "You coming out to New York later?"

"Yep," you smiled.

"Awesome," he smiled back. Pointing across all three of you, Sebastian said, "Alright, you guys have a safe trip tomorrow. See you next week."

You waved your goodbyes and stood with Chris and Josh. Chris looked at you, asking, "You ready to get out of here?"
"I am," you agreed, with wide eyes and an emphatic nod.

It was just after 11, when you got back to your hotel. On your way through the suite to the bedroom, you grabbed your small shopping bags from Harrods. While Chris hung up the jacket for his suit, you stuffed the feet of your little bear into one of the outer pockets of your suitcase, so he was handy for tomorrow. Balling up the bags to throw away, you pointed out the box of chocolates on the bed.

"We should finish those before we leave," you told him.

"Like that'll be hard," he snorted, working on the buttons of his waistcoat.

"I wish I'd have known how good they were," you considered, taking off your shoes. "I'd have bought more."

"You should stake your claims now," he warned, pulling the unknotted tie from the collar of his shirt. "I might not remember to share."

With a grin, you shook your head. "You have no shame."

"Not really," he admitted, with a shrug, heading into the bathroom.

Considering how disappointed you were about missing out on the last white chocolate hazelnut truffle before, you decided to take inventory of the box and pick out a couple of the remaining chocolates for yourself. You set them aside in the box lid and went back to changing your clothes. By the time Chris returned to the bedroom, shedding his unbottoned shirt as he walked, you were just tugging up your sleep shorts.

He nodded to your dress on the end of the bed, asking, "You wanna hang that up with my stuff?"

You had planned on folding the dress in with the rest of your clothes in your luggage. You didn't have your own garment bag and the one from the store wasn't exactly suitable for being manhandled at the airport. As you were debating taking him up on the offer, Chris was already reaching out a hand for you to hook the hangar on. Wearing a small grin, you watched him add your dress to his bag of designer suits and run a hand down the front for it to hang wrinkle free. You put aside your suitcase and crawled onto the bed, picking up the chocolates on your way up to the pillows.

While Chris pulled on a pair of shorts and put away his vest and pants, you held out a milk chocolate butter cream candy for him to wrap his lips around. As he chewed, putting the last hanger in his bag in the closet, Chris hummed and realized, "These just keeping getting better. Any more of those?"

"Two," you nodded, looking over the box. "One dark chocolate and another milk chocolate."

"Gimme the dark chocolate one," he told you, sitting down to swing his feet up onto the bed.

Holding out the box to him, you pointed the way for him to his request. "I wonder if we can order these online," you mused.

Chris took his phone off the night stand, while he held out his open hand for his next candy. Apparently searching for the answer to your question, he nodded, saying, as he chewed, "Oh, yeah. You can buy 'em online." He handed over his phone. "See?"

"I am gonna get so fat," you happily decided, moving the screen up with your thumb. Beside you, Chris snickered, poking around in the box for another candy. Handing back his phone, you smirked, "Will you still love me when I blow up, like Violet Beauregarde, from all the chocolates I'm gonna eat?"
"Who the fuck is Vi-?" Chris started to laugh, his brow creased down in thought. "The girl from Wilky Wonka?"

"Yeah," you nodded. "Blew up into the giant blueberry? Had to be rolled out of the-

"I know which one she-" Chris stopped mid-sentence to give you an incredulous look. "You're naht gahn'a blow up like Violet Beauregarde," he groaned, taking the box of chocolates out of your hand. "But if you're that worried about it..."

You laughed, as he went on the hunt for his next selection. Inching over, you rested your head on his shoulder to wait your turn. Chris fed you the last butter cream and turned on the television. You channel surfed for the next half hour or so, snuggled up to Chris' side, while you both ate until the chocolates were gone.
"Time for bed," Chris sighed, taking a look at the alarm clock by the bed.

You agreed with a nod, gathering up the long empty box of chocolates from Harrods. "Long day tomorrow," you noted, closing up the box to put aside on your nightstand.

"You ready to go home?" Chris asked, turning off the television and setting the remote on the table on his side of the bed.

Tugging up the sheet and scooting down in the bed, you gave a conflicted hum and shrug of your shoulders. "Kinda?"

Chris chuckled, softly, clicking off the lamp by the bed. "You like it here?"

"Well, yeah," you admitted, turning on your side and nuzzling your pillow, while Chris spooned up behind you. "Everybody's so nice here, there's that 24 hour snack buffet downstairs- And you know how I feel about free snacks." Chris hummed his serious agreement, his forehead touching the back of your head and his exhales ghosting warm trails down your neck and shoulder. "I don't know," you sighed. "It's like I got to see so much on the trip, but like I didn't see anything at all. There's so much."

"It was a busy trip," he agreed. "Not a lot of free time. I tried to warn you."

"Oh, I'm not complaining," you quickly corrected, twisting your head around to see him as best you could. "I just mean, time flies when you're having fun."

"I know," Chris smiled, stretching a kiss to your cheek before you turned back to your pillow. "If you had to pick one place to go back to, where would you go?"

"Oh, wow." Your eyes and smile widened at the possibilities, even though you knew he couldn't see. "That's a good question." Chewing on your lip, you gave it a bit of consideration, before deciding, "Here. I'd pick London."

"Why?"

Taking a deep breath, you figured, "Well, I've spent a little more time here than I got to in Asia. Beijing and Singapore were great. But something about the pace here, maybe? It doesn't feel as busy. Not like busy busy, just, like, the crowd is thinner and everything's more relaxed. Besides," you giggled, "everyone's so charming, with their accents. I could listen to them talk all day."

"Fancy the accent, do ya, luv?" Chris asked, with a cockney accent any chimney sweep would be proud of.

"Oh, my god," you burst out laughing.

Behind you, you felt the suppressed chuckle move his chest, as he tightened his arm around your waist, and pressed his smiling lips into your shoulder. "You gonna stay heah, with yeh fancy pants palace guard boyfriend? Bahstine's naht good enough for you, anymore?" he teased.

_God damn!_ That natural Boston baritone makes you weak. You'd heard it enough, over the last several months, to be brave enough to try your own, "Nevah!"
"What?!" Chris laughed, thoroughly surprised, straightening away from your shoulder to crane his neck up to see your blushing face. "Did you ju-D o it again."

"No," you shook your head, burying your face into your pillow, inexplicably embarrassed.

"Cah'mon," he urged, giving your side a tickling pinch. "Say 'Go Red Sahx'."

You jerked at his touch, squirming into a ball to hide. "No," you laughingly whined. "That was terrible."

"Noo. It was beautiful," Chris promised, squeezing you tight. "You're a natural. Say 'Go Pats'."

"Stop," you giggled.

"Say you're going to the packie for some beah," he begged, still sniggering.

"Say I'm what?" you questioned. "What does that even mean?"

"Packie, ya know?" Chris insisted. "It's- Never mind," he decided. "You'll catch up when I get you to Boston."

"Am I gonna need a translator for that trip?" you joked.

"I might know a guy who could help you out in that department," he suggested.

"Oh, yeah?" you played along, as Chris' hand smoothed down your belly and slipped under you top.

"Mhm," he hummed, sucking on your earlobe before letting it loose after a soft bite. "Local guy."

"Ya don't say," you smiled, folding your arms over his wrapped across your belly.

Chris grew bolder and dipped his fingertips beneath the elastic of your shorts and panties, stroking leisurely over your folds. "Grew up theah," he went on, his voice purring to your ear and his beard brushing on your skin as he spoke.

"Ah ha," you mused. "So he knows his way around."

"Oh, he knows his way around alright," Chris playfully assured you and slipped a long finger inside you.

You hummed your approval, tilting your hips back into him, as his finger inside you curled and his thumb circled your clit. The fingertips of his free hand bunched up your shirt for his warm hand to palm over the curve of your waist. Your fingernails scraped lightly up and down his arm, while Chris peppered tiny kisses along your your shoulder.

You'd been having so much fun, you couldn't resist saying, "I can't wait for Scott to show me around Boston."

Chris' fingering came to an abrupt halt, his lips making a slow retreat from the nape of your neck. "Sc- Are you fahckin' kiddin' me?!"

You couldn't contain your mischievous giggling. "You said he was-

"Me," he emphasized, snapping up from behind you to crawl over you. Literally tangled in the sheets, he sat on your thighs, his arms straightened into the mattress to cage you in. "I meant me." He pulled his hands back, tickling your sides. "Scott?! Really?"
You let out a shriek of laughter. "I'm kidding!"

"Gahd damn right you ah'," he said, decidedly, folding down over you and taking your wrists in his hands to pin to the mattress. "You and your sass," Chris grumbled, the tip of his nose brushing up your throat, as his lips made their way to your jaw and his breath warmed your skin.

"I thought you said it was bedtime," you curiously reminded him, as he shifted over you, his legs straightening out behind him and along yours.

"We're in bed," he casually noted, before meeting your lips for a kiss.

You hummed, thoughtfully, against his mouth. When his wandering lips moved to the other side of your jaw, you pointed out, "I'm pretty sure you meant it was time to go to sleep."

"Did I?" he wondered, wrinkling his brow and scrunching his nose in doubt.

"Uh-huh," you nodded, stretching your fingers to touch his arms, while he still held yours.

"Are you sure?" Chris checked. "'Cause I can think of something else we could do while we're in bed."

Your hips rose up to meet his. "One last hoorah for London?" you asked, arching up an eyebrow.

"One more," he figured, with a small shrug. "Or however many we can get."

Chris went back to his business of covering you in kisses. Nibbling and licking his way back down your neck and across your collar bone. He let go of one wrist, to pull aside the thin strap of your camisole, and you curled your free hand over the back of his neck. You dotted a kiss to his temple, as his head turned for his lips to find the exposed skin of your breast, after his finger hooked into the top of your cami to pull it down. You instinctually arched up at the scrape of his teeth over your nipple, biting your lip into your mouth when the tip of his tongue flicked over the hardened peak there.

His other hand slipped your wrist, reaching down between the two of you to wriggle in between your thighs. Chris shifted his weight to one side, letting you spread your legs for him. He dragged a finger up and down the soft cotton of your shorts and underwear, before pulling the fabric aside to slip a pair of fingers inside you. Your fingers combed into his hair, while his trailed kisses up your stomach. You parted your lips to his and you shared a long deep kiss.

He backed off of you, stretching and reaching for the bedside table for a condom. While he was away, you pushed down your shorts and underwear, wiggling out of the lower half of your clothes. Chris got rid of his own shorts, struggling for a moment to unwrap the sheet from his leg to kick them aside. You snickered at the small groan of frustration he made in the process and he flashed you a self-deprecating grin. He practically dove back down on you, burying his face in the curve of your neck when you laughed in surprise.

You wrapped your legs around his hips, as Chris pushed inside of you. Cinching your arms around his neck, Chris hungrily kissed you. He settled into a rhythm, right away, while you both explored each other's mouths. You rocked your hips against his, working in time with each of his deep thrusts. While the fingertips of his left hand twisted into your hair, his right hand grabbed your ass, pulling you up to him. You unhooked your legs, planting one foot on the mattress to raise yourself up, tilting your hips to him. The new friction sent a tingle through your limbs and you fisted a handful of his hair.

Chris sucked and licked open mouthed kisses to your throat and under your jaw, scratching the
delicate skin there with his beard. Your pulse rose and breaths shortened. He seemed inspired by your sighs, changing his MO; drawing out his stroke and driving back into you as far as he could.

The whine you made told him he drove you mad, when he pulled out, teasing you by rubbing the head of his cock up and down your clit. The devilish smirk in the corner of his mouth told he was reviling in the sexy torture. You cupped a hand to his face, turning his chin back up to yours. Your eyes locked for a hot moment, before you crashed your lips to his and he crashed back into you. You moaned into his mouth, pulling at the back of his neck to keep him close. He took his hand back from your hair, sliding it under you to hug you to him. His pace quickened, his arms flexing to hold you closer. Chris squeezed the ass cheek in his hand, as your belly tightened and an excited heat radiated through you, while a satisfied profanity followed your exhale.

Chris wasn't ready to finish. He coiled up, raising his hips and coming to his knees to get a deeper angle. You clung to him, digging your fingernails into his skin, as you pulsed your muscles around him. With his forehead tilted into the side of your hair, he murmured a profanity under your ear, a compliment about how good you felt blowing across the building sheen of sweat on your skin.

He sat back on his heels, pulling you upright with him. You wrapped both legs around him again, folding your arms to hug around his neck. Chris pumped into you, a hint of sweat on his temple, starting to catch the city light creeping in from the curtained bedroom window. You rolled your hips in sync with his, pressing yourself to him while his large hands splayed up your back beneath your shirt. He broke away from your kiss to swallow down a breath, staring up into your eyes. You raked your hand back through his hair, brushing it off his forehead, as he dipped a hand between you to rub your clit with his thumb. Biting at your lip, you hummed your approval, as he fired up your nerves again. You panted out his name, feeling yourself lose control a second time, while his bit at your collar. His eyes crushed closed and you felt him twitch inside you, as he came and choked out a throaty, "Fuck."

You gently circled your hips in his lap, humming as you tucked your chin and gently sucked at his throat. Chris pressed his fingertips into your back, massaging you as they pushed upward and hooked over your shoulders. He rested his forehead against your shoulder, with a contented sigh. It was quiet for a long moment, while you two canoodled and basked in the afterglow.

"See?" he began. "There's other things to do in a bed."

You giggled, nodding, "As if I ever had a doubt."

Chris snickered, hiding his smile into your shoulder. He left a kiss there and looked up to you, telling you, "I love you."

"I love you," you smiled back, unfolding yourself from him.

You slid back from his lap and Chris climbed out of bed, disappearing to the bathroom. You patted around on the bed for your clothes and were just pulling them up over your knees when Chris walked back in. He gave a petulant whine, sliding back under the sheets, naked.

You laughed. "What?"

"What if I want get back in there later," he complained, waving a hand at you, and you barked out a laugh. "Now, I gotta move the sheets, take off your clothes..."

"A little extra work never hurt anybody," you pointed out. "It builds character."

"Want me to take it off?" you playfully offered.

"I would not complain," he shrugged, coming of as unaffected either way, as he folded his arms behind his head.

"Uh-huh," you nodded, pursing your lips into a tight smile. "Sure."

Chris pouted, thoughtfully. "I'm just sayin'."

"Well, I wouldn't want you to overexert yourself," you quipped, sitting up to pull your camisole off overhead. You shimmed out of the rest of your pajamas, tossing them to land on your suitcase in the corner and settling back into the bed, muttering, "But if this place catches on fire and a strong, sexy fireman ends up carrying me outta here naked..."

"I'd kick his ass," Chris confidently promised, folding his arm around you, as you cuddled up to his side.

"For saving me from the fire?!" you gaped, finding it too absurd to actually be offended.

"Fine," he conceded. "I'll thank him for saving you from the fire you probably started and then I'll kick his ass for touching my naked girlfriend."

"Aww," you cooed, batting your eyes at him. "And they say chivalry is dead."

"Shut up and go to sleep, smartass," he grumbled, with a smile.

In the morning, you were a little disappointed to be leaving. On the one hand, you were happy to be putting an end to the crazy international travel and to get back to Archie. On the other, you were gonna miss room service. After breakfast, and a final inspection of the suite for any forgotten items, you and Chris headed downstairs to check out. A porter took your bags to the car for you, after the hotel staff had given you both their sincere thanks for staying with them, hoped for you to stay with them again on any return visits to London, and wished you good travels.

You blushed, a little embarrassed, when the silver-haired doorman handed you your bear from the pocket of your luggage and told you, English bears had a tendency to get into a bit of trouble when unsupervised. "Best to keep him up front with you, Miss."

You blushed a little deeper at Chris' sniggering beside you in the car. "Shut up," you muttered, hugging your little bear in your lap.

"I didn't say anything," Chris said. He reached out a hand to pet the bear, but you smacked it away. "What?" he laughed.

"Don't make fun of my bear," you told him. "He's cute."

"He is cute," Chris nodded. "What'd you name him?"

"I didn't name him," you shook your head, turning around your bear to look over.

"What kind of person adopts a bear and doesn't name him?" he teased.

"The kind who'll pop you in the nose, if you don't be nice," you smirked.

"Should'a got the name of that palace guard," he considered.
"Damn," you frowned, realizing that would have been perfect.

"Don't let Archie eat him," he playfully warned.

"Never," you said. You set the bear back in your lap. "He doesn't tear up his toys, anyway," you assured him.

You took in the view from your window, of passing London, during your mostly quiet car ride to the airport. Checking in for your flight, Chris nudged your arm, teasing that you might have to cough up a few bucks to get an extra seat for your bear. You nudged him back, saying you could save money putting Chris back in coach and letting the bear have his seat in first class with you. Chris just nodded, watching the line move ahead of you, saying, "That's cool."

By the time there was nothing beneath the plane anymore but blue water, you had settled back comfortably into your seat for the long trip home. With your earbuds in and your bear snuggled under your arm, you took a nap. You woke up for your in-flight meal and played games on your phone to help pass the time, when you weren't talking to Chris about the things you'd gotten to see and do on your trip together. Through the magic of time zones, it was just about two o'clock when you got off the plane in Los Angeles.

You managed to avoid any hassles or questions about your undocumented bear, like Chris had warned you might get, when you were called to one desk in Customs and he to another. With your luggage claimed, you followed Chris out to a chauffeured town car and you were on your way home. The celebrity terminal in LAX definitely had its perks.

"You coming back with me?" Chris wondered, absentmindedly checking his email on his phone.

"Nah," you shook your head.

He turned his phone down on his leg and turned his face to see you. "Why not?"

Did he- Was he...disappointed?

Jerking your thumb toward your luggage in the car trunk behind you, you explained, "Well, I've got a whole suitcase full of dirty laundry. Besides, I need to pick up Archie today. I told her I'd be there before 5, if the flight was on time."

"Huh," he thoughtfully mused, turning up his phone to go back to his scrolling.

What else were you supposed to do? Even if you weren't basically out of fresh clothes, you still had to wrangle your LA life back into order. Your neighbor across the hall was collecting your mail and any packages for you, Archie was waiting for you at the sitter's, and you needed to see how the time zones might screw with you. After all, you were back on the schedule for a few days at the salon, before you dipped out again to go to the New York premier, as part of Frank's entourage.

"What?" you gently pressed, watching Chris go through his email.

"Nothing," he shook his head, with an indifferent frown. "Just thought maybe we'd hang out 'til New York."

"I've got some hours to cover this week," you reminded him, "and I need to get ready for New York. We can see each other in the evening, if you want." All of a sudden you recalled, "Oo, and I've gotta meet with Frank, too."

The nod you got was noticeably distracted, as Chris was still zoned in on his phone. He leaned
forward against his seatbelt, telling the driver to make an extra stop and your address. The chauffeur nodded. You tugged down the little sleeves on your bear's fuzzy arms and worried the side of your lower lip. Was he mad at you? No. Why would he be? There hadn't been any talk of "after" the international part of the press tour. You just assumed you'd go home and putz around with Archie and work for a few days. Besides, Chris had some press obligations, so it's not like he was going to be sitting on his ass bored all day without you.

"I thought you had stuff to do, too," you casually mentioned.

"Yeah, I do," he agreed, on an inhale, while his brow rose and head tipped slightly.

"We'll figure out some time in between," you assured him, with a warm smile.

Chris finally looked over again, catching your grin and reciprocating with a small one of his own. "I know," he nodded.

Thank goodness you lived closer to the airport. The driver took Lincoln Blvd into town, instead of the freeway, saving you the discomfort of a potentially longer car ride in the little awkwardness you were experiencing in the backseat. At the end of a half hour commute, you pulled over at the curb near your apartment building. The driver walked to the back of the car for your luggage, while you and Chris said your goodbyes.

He reached over and curled a hand behind your neck, to pull you over for a kiss. With a smile, Chris reminded you, "I've got Fallon and Degeneres later this week, some studio meeting bullshit, too. Gimme a call later, and we'll figure something out, okay?"

"Okay," you brightly agreed.

"Give my best to Archie," he chuckled, as you reached behind you to pop the door handle open.

"Of course," you assured him, flashing a smile of thanks to the driver for holding the door open for you.

You pulled up the telescoping handle of your rolling suitcase. With your Harrods bear tucked under your arm, you started along the sidewalk toward your building. The rear window rolled down on the Town Car and Chris smiled out at you.

"Don't forget to pick up some bear food, while you're out getting Archie today," he quipped.

You laughed, flipping your hand in a wave to shoo him away. "You don't even know what bears eat," you scoffed.

"Honey," Chris smugly told you. His face dropped to give you a look of derision and insist, "Winnie the Pooh. Pfft. Cah'mon, man. Everybody knows that."

You stuck out your tongue at him and he told you he loved you. You waved back when he did, as the car was pulling off, telling him you loved him too and blowing a kiss after the car.
Screw all the sappy phrases about "a man and his dog". Whoever said that stuff never met you and Archie. That wiggly ball of fuzz probably would have pulled a muscle, if he wagged his tail any harder when you picked him up from the sitter's. He was one happy pup. And the feeling was mutual. It always sucks leaving your fur baby behind. Time for a few good days of bonding before you head out for New York next week with Frank.

On the way home, Archie rode shotgun. Alternating between sitting up in his seat beside you and thoroughly hindering your ability to efficiently drive a stick shift by laying across the console to put his head in your lap, excitedly whimpering and grumbling stories to you about his adventures with his babysitter. Back at home, he tugged eagerly at the leash to get back to your cozy little apartment. He was quite a handful, so you left him upstairs while you brought in the rest of your things and stopped by your neighbor's apartment to collect your mail.

You had laundry to do and needed to call your mom and let her know you were home. Vacation: officially over. While you sorted lights and darks out of your suitcase and made separate piles on the floor, you used your shoulder to hold your phone to your ear and talked to your mom. Archie watched from his space curled up on the foot of your bed. When your call was over, you introduced Archie to your bear, letting him have a good sniff and giving him a sternly worded warning that the bear was irreplaceable and not a chew toy. You couldn't be sure if Archie actually understood you, but you tried to be an optimist. Your unnamed bear took a place of honor atop the extra pillow on your bed.

You let Archie follow you into the basement to start your laundry. With a load running in the washer, you clipped on Archie’s leash and headed out with him for a walk down to the beach. Checking off "Places To Visit" on your bucket list was good. But nothing beats the feeling of being at home. The hotel pools were nice, but not as good as your ocean. Walking along the water's edge, with the waves lapping up over your bare toes, you could feel the water warming. Your thoughts turned to summer and surf tanned skin just around the corner.

The fresh air and sunshine were relaxing. You spent a little while on the beach, letting Archie stretch his legs and chase his tennis ball. Back at home, you switched out your laundry and shuffled through the fliers and pamphlets of local takeout joints you kept in the junk drawer in the kitchen. You really needed to go to the store, but you didn't have the heart to leave Archie. And, let's be honest, you weren’t really motivated to go out and do anything that even remotely resembled work anyway. You were just proud of yourself for starting the laundry. High five, self! One small victory at a time. You decided on your favorite Chinese food place and called in an order. While you waited, you started watching a show from your DVR.

When your dinner arrived, you fed Archie his, if only because you were still mobile at the time. The long day of travel was starting to catch up with you, despite the assurance from your clock on the kitchen wall that it was barely 5 o'clock. You managed to eat and get your second load of laundry into the dryer, before you fell asleep on the couch. You woke up, roused by the sound of a fire truck driving down the street with its siren wailing. Rubbing the sleep out of your eyes, you checked your phone for the time and saw you missed a text from Frank while you napped. You were about an hour late, when you replied to Frank.

Frank fucking Grillo: You back yet? [seen 8:32pm]
You: I'm here! Sorry- fell asleep on the couch
It took a few minutes to get a message back. In the meantime, you ran downstairs to get your clothes from the dryer. Your phone dinged on the way upstairs, but you waited until you were back in your apartment to read your new messages.

Frank fucking Grillo: Fell asleep?? The press tour made you soft.

Frank fucking Grillo: Gym. 7 a.m. Be there.

"7? Nooo," you quietly whined, wincing at your phone.

You: 7?

You rolled your eyes over hard, when your phone rang. You sighed, already exhausted by the mere thought of being at the gym that early, before you accepted the call.

"I know," you grumbled.

"You know what?" Frank asked.

"Be at the gym at 7," you told him.

"That's right," he smugly agreed. "None of this mopey, ass dragging tomorrow. You're in LA now. You get back on LA time. And the best way to do that is get back into the gym."

"Are you sure?" you checked. "Cause I'm pretty sure sleeping for a wee-"

"Aht," Frank cut you off. "Gym. 7 a.m. End of discussion."

"Bring me coffee?" you tried.

"Me?" he scoffed and laughed. "Bring you coffee? Who works for who here?"


"Alright," he agreed. "We're gonna get you back on track and talk about your schedule. We got a lot 'a work coming up."


"Okay, kid," he chuckled. "Get some sleep. See ya tomorrow."

After you hung up with Frank, the first thing you did was set your alarm. ...And then set another alarm on your phone, just in case. The last thing you needed was to be late for a workout and meeting with your boss. Putting your laundry basket aside, you shooed Archie to the door for his last walk of the night. You figured your clothes were probably sufficiently wrinkled from sitting in the dryer for a couple of hours, what harm would a night in the basket do? You could fold and iron when you got home from the gym tomorrow.

Waking up in the morning was every bit as unenjoyable as you imagined it could be. You slept like the dead, but you still felt tired. Maybe Frank was right. Maybe all you needed was a good workout to get the ol' juices flowing. You would have to wait to find out, after you hit the snooze button on your alarms and went back to sleep.

But that much needed snooze had you scrambling to get Archie out for a quick morning walk and for
you to get to the gym on time. You scurried across the lot, your small duffle bag hanging from your shoulder hitting you in the ass while you ran to the door. With a big sigh of relief, you saw the clock on the wall. 34 seconds after 7. Nailed it. Turning your gaze to the gym area, you spotted Frank, already wrapped and staring expectantly at you. You hurried over, while he watched you excuse your way around other people already training with his fists turned into his hips.

"Made it," you smiled, only a little out of breath. "7 a.m."

"You call this 7 a.m.?” he checked, as you dropped your bag on the floor and unzipped the main compartment for your hand wraps. "7 a.m. is here, wrapped and ready to go at 7 a.m., not this running in at the last second bullshit."

You looked up, rolling your eyes at his disapproving smirk and click of his tongue. "Okay," you admitted. "So, I'm just a smidge behind this morning."

"A week and a half, running 'round with that Evans kid, and look at you," he tutted, shaking his head.

Unrolling a wrap, you frowned at him. "You sound like my dad."

He pointed a finger at your face, noting, "I almost could be, so stop it with the eye rolls and respect your elders...or I'm gonna drink your coffee."

You stopped twisting the material around your hand, your eyes soft in disbelief. "You got me coffee?" Your hopeful gaze followed as he gestured to a pair to paper cups from Bulletproof Coffee on the bench beside him, pointing out the one on the end was yours. "Aw! You're the best work dad ever," you gushed, forgetting your wraps to pick up your drink.

"And don't you forget it," Frank smugly insisted. Your brow wrinkled in surprise at the strength of your morning pick me up and he nodded. "A strong cup of coffee and a good sweat, you'll be right as rain. Guaranteed."

And you believed him. You got a good kick from the coffee. And took a good ass kicking from Frank. There was a girl Frank knew at the gym that had agreed to start sparring with you. She promised to take it easy on you while you learned the ropes, so to speak. When you finished your drills and workout with Frank, you got in the ring for a few rounds with her. Frank was in your corner. Your own personal Mick, barking praise, advise, and correction as you needed. At the end of it all, you survived, just like Frank told you you would. And, yeah. Damned if you weren't actually feeling pretty invigorated.

There was a restaurant, not to far from the boxing club, you went to. They only served brunch, but you didn't complain about a limited menu. The granola bar you wolfed down as you drove to meet Frank could hardly be counted as a meal. You put in your orders and, while you waited for your food, you and Frank started talking about the upcoming months.

"I hope you're not sick of the airport," Frank teased.

"So far, so good," you said, giving him a thumbs up. With a confident chin jut, you were eager to hear more. "Bring it."

Frank chuckled at your enthusiasm, folding his arms on the edge of the table and leaning in comfortably. "You might change your mind when you hear all 'a this," he warned.

Okay, now you were definitely intrigued. "Should I write this down?" you quipped.
"Might not be a bad idea," he considered, wagging his brow up with a thoughtful pout.

Oh, my.

"We'll see if I can keep all this straight," Frank smirked.

"Really wish I had a pen," you mused.

And, oh, how right you were.

"First things first," he wound up his pitch. "New York City, next week. When we get back, we've got a cover shoot for Backstage and then back to New York for a few things the 19th through 21st. Back To LA for YahooTV on the 23rd and the Kindom premier on the 25th. You still with me?"


"Good," Frank smiled. "June's a little all over the place."

"Like May isn't?" you scoffed.

"On the 1st," he began, raising a hand to start keeping score with his fingers, "is the premier for the next part of Season 2; viewing party at the house. We're doing UFC on the 4th, Austin for the 8th through 11th, and the SAG foundation on the 18th. Conan, then back out to New York at the end of the month for the Purge premier."

"LA. LA. Austin. LA? LA. And New York," you listed, not quite sure about where the SAG event might be. "Not too shabby, eh?" you cockily sought his approval.

"So far," he nodded.

"There's more?" you laughed.

"I told you on the phone, we had a lot to go over," Frank playfully sneered. "Weren't you paying attention?"

"You have no idea how hard I'm trying to pay attention," you slowly nodded, your eyes wide, both for emphasis and in a little bit of awe of how busy your summer was about to be. "Like, this might be the most effort I've put in since college."

Snickering, Frank pointed at you, nodding. "Good. That's good." He sat back in his seat across from you in the booth. "Now, here's the big news."

"You're killing me, Frank," you told him.

The more overwhelmed you got at your prospects, the more amused Frank seemed to get, smiling proudly when he said, "We're waiting to here about a project we're hoping gets picked up by Netflix. If all goes well, we might be in principle photography by August or September."

"Few months out," you realized, with a casual shrug. "Not bad."

"Not done," he reminded you, holding up a finger for you to wait.

"For fuck's sake, Frank," you complained. "How much more can we do this summer?!"

"I hope you picked up some useful phrases," Frank said, with a mischevious grin, "because we're going to China the first week of July."
"Because we *what?*" you balked.

Frank nodded, his suppressed laughter shaking his chest and his eyes crinkled in amusement. "Filming in and around Beijing," he confirmed.


You barely tuned back in to Frank saying, "Might have a magazine shoot in there somewhere." He shrugged. "Haven't got that one figured out yet, but the other stuff is solid. Plan on being in China through the better part of August."

"Jesus Christ," you mumbled, doing the math in your head. "So, if we go out on... That's, like, six or seven weeks... *in China.*"

The waitress came back with your food. Frank thanked her for you, before she left. And you appreciated it, still a little dumbfounded by your summer scheduling extravaganza.

"It was very clear in your contract," he carefully reminded you, "putting you on productions as my hair stylist may include lengthy international travel."

"Yeah," you nodded. "Yeah. No, I know. It's just-" You're eyes bugged. "I guess, I just didn't really think, you know... that I'd actually get to go anywhere. Off the continent, I mean."

Frank shook his head, chuckling, as he peppered his eggs. "So, you're okay with China?" he checked.

"Hell yeah, I am," you assured him, maybe a little louder than you expected. You shrunk into your shoulders, when a couple of dinners at the next table looked over. You flipped your hand up off the table in a small, but endearing, wave of apology. "Sorry, I'm just a little excited," you shyly explained.

Across from you, Frank sniggered as he chewed. "It's shaping up to be a busy year," he summed up. "And there's still some things floating around out there that haven't been decided."

"Like the show," you considered.

"Pretty optimistic for a renewal," he nodded. "So, that'll probably fill in the end of the year."

You are on fire this year! You had Kingdom, and you, like Frank, were feeling good about getting a third season greenlit by the network. There were the shoots and appearances you had already worked with Frank, and a shit ton more coming down the road. You were at the tail end of the Civil War press tour with Chris and looking ahead to follow Frank back to China for his next film. *And* there might be another production in Fall.

You were going to be raking it in. You were suddenly giddy. And rightfully so. This was turning in to what you'd dreamed your job could be when you first moved out to Los Angeles.

"You gonna be able to keep up with all of this?" Frank smirked.

"Definitely," you nodded. With a snicker, you added, "I just need to write it all down first."

"Don't worry about it," he chuckled, spearing another forkful of eggs. "It's already put together. Now that you're home, Rick should be getting you copies of everything and be in touch with you
about travel arrangements soon."

"Can't wait."

You went home after your "business meeting" with Frank. You needed a shower after your morning workout...and a place to squee in excitement without judgment. Because, honestly- Wow! Yayyyy!

Hair twisted up in a towel, you painted your toenails while you called Chris to tell him all your good news. Archie climbed up onto the bed and stretched out beside you. While you waited for your call to be answered, you dotted your nail polish brush on Archie's toenail, just to see if you could get away with it.

"Hey, babe."

"Hi," you smiled.

"You sound chipper," Chris noted. "Sleep well?"

"Hung out with Frank this morning," you told him, taking notice of how little Archie minded the spec of color on his toe.

"How's Frank?" he asked, with a small snort of amusement.

You gave Archie’s toenail a swipe of creamy blue nail polish and admired your handiwork, with an approving pout. Lookin' good, sir. Archie remained unaffected by his stylish splash of color.

"Awesome as always," you said, turning your brush back to your own nails again. "He even brought me coffee."

Chris laughed and he was right to, because, "He brought you coffee? Isn't that a little bit backwards?"

"I know, right?" you gaped, still a bit surprised he actually did it. "He's such a sweetie."

"Not a word I'd use, but okay," he chuckled and the sound made you smile. "So, what'd you two do this morning?"


"He let you sleep in?" Chris wondered.

"Oh, my god, no," you frowned. "Are you kidding me? He had my ass there at 7."

You could practically see the sour look on his face when Chris said, "Oh, fuck that."

"Frank says the best way to get over jet lag is to go to the gym," you shared Grillo's wisdom.

"Frank's answer to everything is, 'Go to the gym','" Chris sarcastically informed you.

"I kinda feel like he's not lyin'," you shrugged, still feeling surprisingly good.

Chris hummed his halfhearted agreement. "Yeah, or it could be the coffee."

You had to snicker, just a little. "Maybe it's a little bit of the coffee."
"So, was your business brunch more business or brunch?" he asked, as you were just closing up your bottle of OPI.

"Equal parts," you smiled, fanning your free hand over your toenails, as if that actually worked. But at least it gave you something to do while Chris asked about the second half of your morning with Frank. "He's got a lot of work for me coming up in the next couple of months."

"What's he got going on?" he invited you to elaborate.

"A lot, apparently," you giggled. "In May alone, he's got a magazine shoot, a few appearances in New York one weekend, some event with YahooTV, and then the Kingdom premier at the end of the month. And, obviously, the Civil War premier next week."

"Busy guy," Chris noted. "Lucky you, huh?"

"Boy, you don't even know the half of it," you warned him, your eyes widening at the list of dates you were expecting itineraries for to show up in your email soon. "June is some local appearances, three or four days in Austin, and a few days in New York before the Purge premier."

"You have any days in there you might be able to pencil me in for?" Chris teased, with a chuckle.

"For you?" you balked. "Ha! How 'bout for me?"

"Are you even gonna bother to keep that job at the salon?" he joked. "At the rate you're going, you won't have time to keep up with both, all that running around. Did he give you a day off in July?"

"Ha ha, yyyyeah," you started your set up for the big news. "About that..."

There was a hint of wariness underlining his curious, "Yeah?"

"More good news from the paycheck department," you promised, putting the enthusiasm back in your voice. "Frank's got a movie coming up."

"Welp, there goes July," he quipped, with a good natured laugh that followed.

"And August," you dropped in, biting the side of your lower lip.

There was a moment's pause, before Chris sighed. "Well, that pretty much takes up the summer." But the next instant, the disappointment passed with him saying, "No big deal, right? You'll get days off. We can catch up after work, if there's not a lot of night shooting this time."

"No, not a lot of night scenes that I know of yet," you could honestly say. "But there is kind of this teensy little hitch."

"What's that?" he casually asked.

"Yeah," you groaned, laying back on the bed. "It's actually shooting in China."

Nothing. You'd held your breath waiting for what you figured would be a another fast and witty reply, but instead, all you heard was nothing. This would be the perfect time for some crickets to start chirping.

"Hello?"

"China?" Chris finally spoke up.
"Uh-huh."

"Like, we just left China, 7,000 miles away, China?" he incredulously checked.

"Actually, it's closer to 6 than 7. I think it was like 63-hundred to Beijing," you corrected...And then realized that probably wasn't helping.

"Jesus Chr-" He stalled out. "Are you fucking kidding? Two months in China?"

"Beijing, actually. And, maybe less," you optimistically offered. "Sounds like maybe 6 or 7 weeks. Hopefully."

"Yeah, no shit, hopefully," he muttered.

"Sorry, but I-"

"No," Chris grumbled. "No, don't apologize. It's work, I know. But I-" He sighed. "No. It's cool. Really. We'll just...hope it's closer to six weeks, I guess."

"Definitely," you agreed, still worrying your lip.

"Hey, I mean," Chris added, "you didn't get a lot of time there with me, so, you know, maybe you can see a little bit more when you're not working."

"Right," you nodded, loosing your lip to grin at the lighter tone back in his voice.

"And Frank'll be there," he reminded you, "so, I'm sure he'll come up with some trouble to get you in."

"Ha!" you barked, reaching over to lazily pet Archie beside you. "More like, he'll find a gym to get in to."

On the other end, Chris laughed and it made you snicker. "Now that I'm sure of." The laughter between you fizzled and Chris suggested, "Maybe, if you're not too busy later, you wanna have dinner or somethin'? Maybe hang out, your place or mine, so you don't have to leave Archie?"

Your cheeks warmed at the charmingly considerate offer. "I'm not too busy," you assured him.
Chapter 53

You were meeting Chris at his house for dinner. Since he was hosting, you offered to hit up the store for something to eat. It was a fair trade. While you hurried through the grocery, Archie kept your car safe. Sure Archie's version of protecting your other baby was him stretching out along the back seat and napping, but the Jeep was still there when you came back so, good job, Archie.

Archie knew where he was going, even though you were a few turns and blocks away. He perked up in his seat beside you, his tail thumping against the seat well before you pulled to the curb near Chris' house. Across the street, you set down your shopping bags and scooped up Archie, holding him up between you and the camera when you pressed the buzzer at Chris' gate. From the speaker, you heard Chris' boisterous laugh. The gate lock clicked open and you pushed it open for Archie to scramble into the front yard.

Ahead of you, the door to the house opened and Chris appeared, crouching down to meet Archie. You made your way up the walk and Chris gave Archie's side a few good pats. He stood up and smiled at you, while Archie circled around his knees.

"Good job, buddy," he praised. "You brought company."

"And food," you pointed out, raising the shopping bags up high.

"And food," Chris repeated, sounding impressed and giving Archie's head a thorough rub. "You are a good dog."

"Admit it," you smirked, "you only invited me over to see my dog."

"Gah!" he groaned, leaning back and grabbing his chest. "She figured us out, Archie."

"Busted," you tutted, waving him on to go inside the house.

Archie rushed in ahead of you both. Chris shut the door behind you and gave you a playful swat, as you went by. He followed you into the kitchen, taking off Archie's leash and opening up a door to the yard for him. You put the groceries on the island and emptied your other hand of your keys and phone. By the time you had sorted your foodstuffs out onto the counter, Chris had filled up a bowl of water for your dog.

"What's for dinner?" Chris asked, pecking a kiss to your cheek before he put Archie's water down at the end of the island.

"Low-cal Caesar salad, turkey burgers, and this orecchiette pasta salad I think you'll like," you told him, eyeing over the items in front of you and hoping you didn't forget anything.

There was a pause, before Chris looked up at you from the pile of food on the countertop. "Turkey burgers and low-cal Caesar salad?" His brow creased down and nose wrinkled up. "First of all, is that even a thing? And second, turkey burgers? When you said 'let's grill out', I'm thinkin', like, you know, steak; real burgers. Like, I just killed this cow, let's put it over a fire. Not this-"

"Rabbit food?" you finished for him.

His brow rose and he shrugged. "Well, yeah," he snorted and he shook his head. "Are you- Can I ask, are you on a diet or something?"
You stopped, putting the small box of cherry tomatoes in one hand and the container of grated Parmesan cheese in the other back down on the counter, giving him a frown and cock of your head. "Christopher Robert," you chided him. "Really? And, no, you can not ask a girl that."

Chris raised his hands in surrender and you shook your head at him, with a small grin pursing your lips. "I'm just sayin'."

"I've got that mud run coming up in less than two months," you reminded him. "After all that rich food and dinners out on the press tour, I have got to start being a better human being." Putting aside ingredients into separate piles by recipe, you pointed at him and added, "It couldn't hurt you either."

Chris noticeably exhaled, balling his fists, rolling his shoulders forward, and flexing his arms down in front of him. He quirked up a cocky eyebrow, as he looked over his obnoxiously displayed muscles, noting, "I think I'm gonna be okay."

"You're such an ass," you tried so hard not to smile, shaking your head, disapprovingly. Wadding up one of the plastic shopping bags, you tossed it at him, telling him, as he batted the bag away, "Then bite your tongue and be supportive of your girlfriend."

"Is there something missing from the end of that?" he chuckled, with a curious expression. "'Cause it sounds like there's something missing from the end of that, like, 'if you know what's good for you' or maybe an 'or else'."

"I don't know," you shrugged, innocently. "You choose."

"I'm gonna go with my gut," Chris decided, leaning into the counter on his forearms, "and say it ends in 'if you know what's good for you'."

"Good call," you winked, pulling a knife from the block on the counter behind you.

The serendipitous timing of the knife grab didn't escape his notice, and Chris straightened up, jerking a thumb toward the yard behind him. "I'm just gonna go fire up the grill," he excused himself.

"Even better," you chuckled, trading the knife for the tomatoes to rinse.

Chris hung out in the yard with Archie for a bit. In the meantime, you started a pot of water boiling for the pasta and started mixing together ingredients for the Caesar dressing. You cheated, using store bought croutons for the salad, but the rest you whipped up on your own. Chris came back in for the burgers, adding a bit of salt and pepper to them before heading back out to the grill. Of course, Archie followed him back out.

You heard Chris holler out a two minute warning about the burgers being done soon. You hustled, sprinkling Parmesan over the green salad and crumbling feta into the pasta one. You were just dusting off your hands and giving the pasta salad a few extra turns to make sure the pesto coated everything well, when the men returned with the burgers. You scooped portions of salads onto plates, while Chris asked what you wanted to drink. He grabbed you a bottle of water, at your request, and you fixed up your burger the way you liked. The weather was sunny and you took your plates out to eat in the backyard.

Settling into your chair, you twisted open your bottle of water for a drink. You gave him a couple minutes to eat, before you asked, "So, how's the rabbit food?"

He nodded, while he finished chewing the forkful of pasta salad in his mouth. "It's not bad," Chris admitted. "Actually, it's pretty good. Where'd you come up with this?"
"My sister-in-law makes the pasta salad for barbecues," you said. Pointing to the Caesar salad on your plate, you confessed, "The low-cal Caesar recipe I got from Pinterest."

"Aw," he tutted, sounding a little disappointed. "And I was ready to give you all the credit. So much for that."

"I'm still the one that made it," you bragged. "But if you're sure you wanna do all the cooking from here on out..."

You shrugged and he sat up a little straighter, pointing at you with his empty fork. "Hey, now," he playfully warned, "don't go puttin' words in my mouth." You both laughed and, before the next bite of his sandwich, Chris offered, "Thank you. It really is good."

"You're welcome," you smiled, proudly. And rightfully so. "I may not cook much, because of work and not having a roommate anymore, but I've got a few tricks up my sleeve."

"I'd kiss the cook," he smiled, "but you've got a little ketchup..." Chris pointed to the corner of his mouth to mirror the spot on yours. "Right there."

You swept your thumb over the corner of your smile, as you chewed. Chris grinned at you and went back to his food. You enjoyed the pleasant evening air, with Archie laying by your feet. Chris even went back for a second helping of both salads. You didn't show him your proud smirk, as he got up to go back inside for more, but you hummed smugly to yourself. *Rabbit food.*

After dinner, you both cleaned up the kitchen. Chris loaded up the dishwasher, while you washed the knife and pot you'd used. You retired to the living room together. Cuddled up to Chris' side on the couch, he flipped through channels to find something to watch and you offered your opinion in the form of short hums in degrees of more or less interest. He didn't even ask, when he spotted Mr. Magorium's Wonder Emporium in the channel guide and put it on, catching it just as the mutant is given the job.

"Let's see if you really cry," he teased, with a quiet chuckle.

Giving him a soft elbow to the ribs, you promised, with your eyes set on the TV and a small shake of your head, "You're gonna be sorry. Just wait for that little sock monkey to hit the screen."

Okay, so you didn't cry the two times when that adorably sad sock monkey reached out for Jason Bateman. You were trying to keep a brave face and avoid any ribbing at your expense. And you held it together when Dustin Hoffman talked to the store about its sulking. Even though you felt him watching you, you didn't look back at Chris. You even ignored the subtle snigger you felt him holding down in his chest a few times, at the parts you'd told him would make you cry. But, man, Mr. Magorium's goodbye got you, like the punch in the feels it always was. You pressed your lips tight and tried not to blink, but, *dammit,* he heard your tiny sniffle.

Chris' arm held you a little tighter, as he quietly marveled, "Oh, my god, you're really crying."

"Shut up," you grumbled, giving him a nudge with your elbow and shifting a little in your seat.

"You are," his insisted. "I can see, your eyes are red."

"No, I'm not," you softly pouted.

"Aww," he gently cooed. "That's so-" Chris snickered. "You are adorable."
"Shh!" you frowned, flipping your hand toward the television. "I'm tryin' ta watch."

"Okay," he whispered, relenting.

Chris gave you another squeeze, pressing a long kiss into the top of your hair. You got away through the rest of the movie without any more teasing. When it was over, you knew he was staring at you again. When you looked back at him, he was smiling down at you on his shoulder.

Your face pinched, in utter defeat, and you complained, "Aw, come on!"

"What?" he laughed, his shoulders rising and his free hand flying up in innocence. "I didn't say anything."

"It's what you're thinking," you sulked.

"Hey," he shrugged, "you're the one who said this movie makes you cry. And, ya know what? It's true."

"Oh, like you never got choked up by a movie," you challenged.

Chris winced, hissing in a breath and letting his head fall to the side. "I may have gotten choked up once or twice."


"Pullin' out the big guns, huh?" he wagged a finger at you.

"It's gotta be one of those," you decided.

He was a self-proclaimed Disney nut. It had to be one of those childhood scaring moments.

"It's not," Chris told you, with a sweep of his head and a long blink.

"It's not Disney or it's not one of those particular moments?" you checked.

"Both," he said. "Neither."

"Spill it," you demanded. "You're killin' me with the suspense."

Chris grinned and shut his eyes, nodding for a long couple of seconds, like he was working up the nerve. Finally he said, "Legends of the Fall."

You blinked, more than a little surprised. Your brow furrowed, not quite sure if he was pulling your leg. "Really? That's it?" you doubted.

He coughed out a laugh, apparently surprised you didn't believe him. Maybe even a little offended you didn't. "Yeah," he nodded. "If you can make it through the first 30 minutes of that film without crying, you are not carbon-based. You are made of stone."

You sputtered, hiding your laugh behind your hand. Wasn't he supposed to be Captain America? Some manly man, impervious to such reactions? Let alone such reactions spurred on by...

"A Brad Pitt movie?" you double checked.

"Yes," he condescendingly agreed, "a Brad Pitt movie."
"Ohh," you shook your head. "I- Wow. I am changing my opinions about you, sir."

"What?" Chris laughed, giving your arm a pinch.

"Yeah," you nodded.

"You, the sock monkey girl, are judging me?" he scoffed.

"Hey," you argued, pointing back to the television and the credits crawling up the screen, "that movie is the complete package. It's got magic and whimsy and life lessons about believing in yourself and friendship and coping with death."

Chris was snickering at you again. So much so that his cheeks and eyes were turning a shade of red from the laughter he was trying to hold back in his chest.

"It's got a moving score and all these beautiful little moments," you persisted. "It's wonderfully endearing, dammit."

"Dammit," he mockingly parroted.

"There's no use talking to you," you decided, smacking the back of your hand into his gut.

It seemed to be the thing that broke the dam. Chris' laughter bursted out of him and he leaned forward, kicking up a foot as he doubled over himself. He clutched his chest, damn near in tears.

"That's cool," you jutted your chin at him, crossing your arms. "You wanna try and defend your chick flick now?"

He waved his hand, seeming to beg your forgiveness and for air, completely red faced. "No," he sighed for his breath. "No, I'm sorry. The sock monkey movie is very charming. I like it." You rolled your eyes and he insisted, "I do! Jason Bateman and the kid, that was great. And the sock monkey, like you said, is adorable. And, I'll admit, I was a little sad about Mr. Magorium there at the end."

"Uh-huh." You eyed him warily, setting back into his side as he sat back into the couch again.

"Seriously," he said, putting his arm back around you and a tone of sincerity dropping his voice, "it's a good movie."

"We're not watching movies together anymore," you informed him.

"What?!" he balked, giving your shoulder a nudge, in plain disbelief.

"Nothing we like," you shook your head. "Only new movies neither of us has seen. That way, no one ruins it for the other one."

"Cah'mon," Chris groaned, "I didn't ruin the movie for you."

"I love it too much to let you," you confidently said.

"We're still watching movies together," he grumbled. "I'll make you."

"Whatever," you shrugged, picking up the remote to start channel surfing.

"Whatever," he repeated.

"Fine."
"Fine," Chris shrugged.

"Okay then."

It was quiet for a moment, before he casually added, "Okay."

Your lips puckered into a tight smile and you shook your head. "You don't always get the last word!" you yelled, dropping your hand, and the remote, heavily into the couch.

Archie sat up from his spot on the far side of the coffee table, his ears perked up and head cocked. Behind you, Chris was laughing again. You gave his knee a scolding swat and he wrapped his other arm around you for a smothering hug.

There was a wheeze in his voice from laughing, when he told you, "I fahckin' love you. You and your sad sock monkey movie."

"Still don't get the last word," you grumbled, curling your hands over his arms around you.

You turned on ESPN, figuring sports would distract him from picking on you about getting a little misty over your movie. It seemed to work. There was a teaser about some Red Sox news in the upcoming story cue on the side of the screen. Yeah, this'll hold his attention. You nestled against him, stretching your feet out to the coffee table and watching the crawler at the bottom of the show to try and see if your home town team had played today.

The sun was down and it was time to decide on another show or calling it a night. Chris brought it up first, asking, "You wanna stay here tonight?"

"I have to work tomorrow," you told him.

"What time?" he asked, doing his best not to disturb you while he stretched to pull his cup on the coffee table closer with his fingertips.

"1 to 9."

"Well, I didn't wanna hang out with you all day anyway," Chris smirked.

"Jerk," you snickered.

"Nah," he chuckled. "I gotta go over to NBC tomorrow to tape Ellen."

"That sounds like fun," you considered. "When will it air?"

"Monday, I think," Chris said, taking a drink. "Lizzie's gonna be there."

"Well, shit," you frowned. "Shoulda brought her shoes with me, so you could take them back to her."

He shrugged, suggesting, "I could follow you home and get them."

"It's, like, 20, 25 miles back up to Burbank," you reminded him.

"I got time," Chris casually assured you. "That's literally all I have planned for tomorrow. I'll follow you, get the shoes, and go to the gym or something while I'm out. No big deal."

"If you're sure you don't mind the extra running around," you offered him the out.
"I don't mind," he promised, giving you a squeeze and taking another drink. "So, s'that mean you're staying here tonight?"

You sighed, as if it were actually some kind of hardship. "Yeah, I guess. If I have to."

"You poor thing," he chuckled.
In the morning, you and Chris chatted over breakfast, side by side at the kitchen island. There wasn't food there for Archie, but you scrambled up some plain eggs and tore up a piece of un-buttered toast for him, and he was okay with that. Chris asked about your upcoming schedule and you ran down the dates in May you'd be working with Frank. He nodded along, listening while he sipped coffee.

"Doesn't sound too bad," he decided.

"It's not, really," you agreed. "I can still work the salon. Probably won't do that as much in June though." You shrugged, figuring, "Might as well talk to the boss today about July and August."

"Yyyeah," Chris exhaled, "about that?"

"About what?" you mumbled, chewing on a cold corner of toast.

"When are you going to be home?" he asked, an inquisitive squint in his eyes.

With another shrug, you admitted. "I don't know. Haven't gotten a schedule yet. And probably won't for a little bit. It's still a little ways off for me to get a crew schedule. Why?"

"Well," he began, the wrinkle in his brow dissolving, "isn't your birthday in August?"

You quirked up a challenging brow. "I don't know," you feigned ignorance. "Is it?"

Chris snorted, his head bobbing. "Yes, it is," he dryly told you.

"Are ya sure?" you teased, sliding off your stool to head to the coffee maker on the counter.

"I am," he nodded, adding a snippy, "sassy." Chris sipped his coffee, confidently noting, "It's the 15th."

You brought the carafe of hot liquid life back to the island, refilling your coffee and topping off his, when he held out his mug to you. With a condescending pat on his head, you beamed, "Good boy."

You didn't catch what he mumbled, but the snarled up lip in his smirk was kinda hot. Just like everything else about him. Damn, you're lucky.

He shook his head and got back on track. "So, do you think you'll be home for it, or not?"

You put the coffee pot back on the burner, doing the math in your head. "Probably not," you decided. "If we go out the first week of July, add six or seven weeks for the shoot." You gave a halfhearted frown. "And that's supposing production stays on schedule? I'm not seeing it happen."

"Well, that's disappointing," Chris said, ahead of a drink.

"How come?" you wondered.

Having a job that literally revolved around other people practically always telling you where to be and when to sleep, you were acustomed to shuffling your own plans around for the greater good of Hollywood. Living in LA and spending most of your time with friends who had similar demands on their time, you adopted a kind of casualness about calendar moments. You couldn't always be home for the holidays and you had managed to be home for less of your birthdays, in recent years. It just wasn't a surprise to you that you might celebrate your birthday, or anything else, days or even weeks
late. The bigger jobs you got, and while you were still building discretionary income, the more
flexible you had to be. That's just how it goes.

Chris almost sputtered into his coffee, giving you a quick scowl. "Whaddya mean, how c- How can
you not be disappointed?"

"Well, what can I do about it?" you laughed. "I'm used to it."

"Now that is disappointing," he told you, pointing at you for emphasis. "You shouldn't be used to
that. Nobody should."

"We can't all be big Hollywood successes," you teased, "coming and going as we please on private
jets, and whatnot. Some of us have to work for a living, bub, and that means working when they let
you."

"Alright, smartass," he groaned, bobbing his head to concede your point. "It's your birthday, for
fahck's sake. Wouldn't you rather be at home with your family or friends?"

"Duh," you laughed. "But this isn't necessarily a bad thing."

"How's that?" Chris questioned, with a small jut of his chin for you to go on.

Rubbing your thumb across your fingertips, you sang, "Money money money money. Mon-ey!"
Chris laughed. "Dollar bills, yo. I'll be making that cheddah." He was shaking his head now, his
hand clutching his chest. "Gon' make it rain up in this bitch."

"You're fahckin' killin' me," he wheezed. "Where do you come up with this shit?"

"I dunno," you shrugged, smiling into your mug. While you had a drink, Chris composed himself.
"But seriously, it's gonna be a good year if it keeps up like this."

"Okay," he nodded, his smile finally getting reined in. "There's that."

You nodded, hoisting your mug in a toast. "So, my birthday'll be a bit delayed, but it's for a good
cause. There's always later."

Chris tipped his coffee to you, before he checked, "So, when you do get back, what are we gonna do
about it?"

"Uhhh..." Your mouth hung open a moment. Realizing you probably looked pretty goofy, you
snapped your jaw up and raised your shoulders. "I dunno."

And why should you? It was months away. Even in your most party prone years, you didn't start
planning birthdays so soon, for you or anyone else. A few weeks out? Yeah, sure. But not months.

"Well, you better start thinking about it," Chris snickered, probably at how clueless you looked.

"Plenty of time," you confidently waved him away. "As long as there's cake, I'll be happy."

"We can get you one of those big ass, custom cakes they make on the TV shows," he suggested.

"A bust of Captain America?" you joked.

Chris scowled, putting down his cup of coffee. "A bust of Ca-" His face wrinkled in offense. "What,
so you can chop me up into little pieces?"
"Oh, my god," you laughed, leaning into the edge of the island for support. "No!"

"You betta naht," he warned. "Jeeesus. The hell's wrong with you, ya psycho?"

"I'm sorry," you wheezed, still laughing.

"Terrible," Chris decided, giving you a sweep of his head and a disapproving click of his tongue.

"Sorry," you promised. "I'll come up with something—anything, besides a bust of Cap."

"Thank you," Chris tipped his head to you.

Chris followed you home. You ran upstairs, grabbing Elizabeth's shoes and rummaging around for something to put them in. You found a plain brown shopping bag and slipped them inside. You kept Archie upstairs, while you skipped back downstairs and ran back out to the curb. Handing the bag in to Chris, he looked at it and laughed, shaking his head.

"What?" you wondered.

"A brown paper bag?" he smiled, behind his sunglasses. "What, are we smuggling drugs or something?"

"Shh!" you hissed, taking a nervous look around, like the cops or someone was watching. He laughed at you and you grinned. "It's all I had to put the stuff in."

"Yeah," he snorted. "Okay, Scarface."

You jerked your thumb at the building behind you. "I had a bright, pink bag from Victoria's Secret I can go grab real quick. You know, if you weren't trying to be subtle about carrying around a pair of women's shoes."

"The brown paper bag is fine, sassy," Chris groaned.

"Okay," you smiled. "I gotta go. Tell Liz I said, thanks again."

"I will," he promised, with a warm grin.

"Have fun," you told him, popping up on the side of the Audi to lean into the window.

Chris stretched over the center console to meet you for a smiling kiss. "I'll call you later. Have a good night at work."

It was nice to be back at work. Your day wasn't too busy, with a little time here and there between appointments. In one of the lulls in your first half of the day, you sat across the table from your friend, Victoria, while she tidied up your cuticles and you quietly told her about your travels on the press tour. She had met Chris at Annalise's birthday party at The Viper Room. She had your confidence about keeping everything on the down low.

When your right hand was free, you unlocked your phone to show off some pics and gave her your left to work on. She laughed at your video with the palace guard and cooed at some of the pics you had with Chris. You gushed about the private dinner he planned for you and the last minute adventure he pulled together before you left Beijing. Vick called your relationship "goals" and
reminded you, although you were probably sick of seeing it, you owed her a trip to the movies to see Civil War.

Sick of Chris Evans on the big screen? Perish the thought! You put your schedules together and figured out when you could catch a showing after work on one of your early days. You penciled Vick into your phone and thanked her for touching up your nails. Your next appointment was a few minutes early and you didn't mind starting early.

You closed the salon with your manager, Laura. While you were straightening up your station, she balanced the register. When you were done, you emptied the dryer of the last batch of towels. With the office door open, the two of you could talk while you folded the linens, breaking down the list of events you had coming up with Frank.

"So, you're going to be quitting on me, aren't you?" Laura asked from the next room, thankfully sounding more playful than disappointed.

"No," you quickly denied. "No. Are you kidding? I love it here." You put aside a neatly folded towel and grabbed a rumpled one from the basket. "I just need another-"

"I know. I know," she assured you. "It shouldn't be a problem. You're giving me plenty of notice."

"I'm trying," you offered.

"Well, I appreciate the notice," she said. "I should be able to work around it. But I'll need dates as soon as possible."

"As soon as I get them," you promised, picking up the pile of towels to put away in the cupboard. You peeked into the office, leaning into the doorway to keep talking. "I should get a calendar for everything soon."

"Is it even worth it for you to keep working here, hon?" Laura wondered. "For all the things you've got going on anymore..."

You shrugged, with a thoughtful pout. "This is my safety net," you admitted. "This place has always helped keep me afloat."

"You've got another movie and all these events," she reminded you. "You've got the show-"

"Haven't heard about that yet," you said, with a grain of salt.

"It's a popular show," Laura knowingly nodded. "I'd be surprised if they dropped it so soon. I like having you around, [y/n]. You've got a steady book of happy clients, when you're around, and you do great work. The other girls like you, too. I can work with having you come and go, but don't you worry about making too many commitments?"

"Kinda," you shrugged. "Sometimes. But my dad always said, work hard while you're young so you don't have to when you're old. I can keep up."

Laura laughed and shook her head. "If half the people in this business had that mindset..." she looked up from her work to smile at you. "We'll sit down together, when you get your calendar, and see what we can do."

You talked to Chris on your commute home, with him on speakerphone and the phone set up on
your dash. You told him about your talk with your boss at the salon and how supportive she was. He took the opportunity to interject some of his own concerns about your summer workload. You appreciated that he couldn't see you roll your eyes on the phone.

"You're going to miss the whole summer," he told you.

"I'm not gonna miss the whole summer," you groaned. "Except for Frank, I make up my own schedule for the salon."

"Yeah," Chris agreed, but you heard the argument coming, "but you work all the time."

"Well, I wouldn't, if I could afford to live months off between projects," you shrugged, slyly adding, "like some people we know."

"Alright, sassy," he grumbled.

And you snickered. "Eyes on the prize, Evans," you smiled to yourself. "Big money. I'll buy you somethin' nice."

"Oh, thanks," Chris sarcastically agreed.

"Real nice," you promised, trying not to laugh.

"Alright, fine," he relented. "Moving on."

"Moving on!" you brightly agreed, with a passionate raise of our hand at the idea, even though Chris didn't see your enthusiasm.

"New York."

"I've heard of it," you nodded, with a thoughtful pout.

There was a pause, before you heard Chris' laugh from the other end of the line. "I'm going out late on Monday. How 'bout you?"

"I'm out with Frank at 10," you told him.

"Monday?" he checked.

"Monday."

"So, you're gonna be there a few hours ahead of me," he distractedly said. He seemed a little clearer, asking, "What about check-in?"

"What about it?" you frowned.

"Well, I'm out there 'til 10:30, optimistically," he reminded you. "What are you gonna do 'til I get checked in?"

It wasn't a big deal to you. You knew you'd get there first and figured you'd just leave your bag at the front desk.

"I don't think we have anything going on, when we get there," you shrugged. "I was just gonna bum around the lobby, maybe go poke around downtown."

"I don't want you bumming around in the lobby," he complained.
You laughed. "Why not?"

"I don't know," he practically whined. "Because it's New York and you're-"

"Just a defenseless little girl, all alone in the big, bad city?" you teased, in your most innocent baby voice.

"You know what?" Chris dared, sounding like he wanted to laugh. "Fine. Get kidnapped and sold to some Arab prince. See if I care."

"Are you sure you're not thinking of the plot for Taken?" you wondered.

"Maybe," he conceded. "Does it matter?"

"No, I'm cool with that," you decided. "Liam Neeson's a certified bad ass. He'll save me."

"What if I don't call him and tell him you've been kidnapped?" Chris challenged, sounding a little offended.

"That's okay," you nodded, knowing, "Frank'll call him."

There it was. That burst of laughter. You smiled, giggling at the happy sound.

"He knows him," you pointed out, still smiling as Chris settled down.

"Just stick close to Frank," he instructed. "He won't let anybody steal you."

"I'll be okay," you chuckled.

"I know you will," Chris admitted. "Besides, the kidnappers would give you back in an hour, after all the sass you'd give 'em."

"That's cool," you nodded, with a pursed grin on your face, as you pulled up to the curb near your apartment. You told him to hold on, while you parked and gathered up your things. Taking him off speaker, your tucked your phone between your ear and shoulder, crossing the street to your building and asking, "So, how was Ellen?"

"The show?" he questioned.

"Uh, yeah, the show," you stated what you thought was the obvious. "What else would I be talking about?"

"Oh, it was good," he said, adding a hum to second himself.

"Oh, yeah?" You had hoped for more and pressed, "It was good? That's it? Did you guys do separate segments?"

"No, actually, we were together for most of it," he barely elaborated.

Climbing the last few steps to your floor, shaking your head. "Was it a bad interview?" you worried. "She always has such good shows."

"Oh, no," Chris disagreed. "It was good. Lots of fun. It's just- ...Well, you'll just have to see it for yourself."

You were just pushing open your front door, giving Archie a wide smile for meeting you when you
stepped in. "You know that sounds kinda mysterious, right?"

"I know," he snorted. "I just think, if I tell you now, it won't be as much fun on Monday."

"Okay," you chuckled, putting down your keys and purse on the dining table. "That sounds better."
At work the next day, time flew by pretty well. Too help butter up your manager about your upcoming absences from the salon, you scheduled yourself for the full day. It worked out for you, too. All of your time was booked with clients. Your manager was right- people loved you. *Duh.* When your regulars called for appointments and knew you were back in the shop, word got around. Smiling and familiar faces always help the day go by fast. Besides, a day spent with a chair that was never empty meant a good day of tips for you. *Cha-ching!*

After work, you grabbed a late dinner on your way home. You threw your sub sandwich in the fridge to take Archie out for a long apology walk, for him being cooped up all day. You chatted with Chris on the phone, while you wondered around with Archie. You caught him up on your busy day and he let you in on some of his obligations for New York. Some of his appearances were pretty public, like the premier and at the Stock Exchange. But he was making a visit to the Marvel offices and thought you might want to tag along. Of course, you agreed.

You got off the phone when you were back upstairs in your apartment. Feeding Archie, and yourself, worked better with two hands anyway. Before you hung up, you made plans to catch up with Chris and Scott for the Red Sox game the next day. With Archie chomping away on his kibble, you took your sandwich out to the living room to see what you'd been missing in your DVR.

The next morning, you and Archie took a jog along the beach. The warm sun felt amazing and you were noticing the improvement in your endurance, when you checked the running app on your phone. Give yourself a well deserved pat on the back. That mud run you've got coming up is gonna be a walk in the park. ...A very, muddy and oddly planned park. But, whatever. You're gonna crush it!

After your shower, you put your hands on your hips and frowned. Yep. There was that pile of press tour laundry you'd left lying in the basket. With a sigh through puffy cheeks, you got to work, matching socks and folding shirts. You couldn't put it off anymore. You had to pack for your next trip and some of what you needed was in the rumpled mess.

Sorting through the pile, you folded what clothes you could and set aside the rest to iron. You opened up your suitcase on the bed again and Archie groaned from his spot on the floor. He knew what was coming. You shushed him and checked the forecast on the weather app on you phone for the Big Apple and back home in Cincinnati. You were making a quick stop on your way back to Los Angeles. You plugged your iPod into the sound dock for some tunes, while you started tucking away a few outfits for your trip.

While you put some things on hangars for the closet, you pulled out the Red Sox jersey Chris had gotten you. You knew better than to show up to watch the game without it. Giving the shirt a quick sniff to see if it smelled too stale from hanging in the closet so long, you smirked to yourself, thinking about the shit it would stir up if you left the jersey at home. After all, the Sox were playing the Yankees. Any attire New York colored or related would surely cause heads to explode. But, *nahhhhh.*

You tossed the shirt into the newly emptied laundry basket to go in with the small load of laundry you needed to do to be done for the week. The joke wasn't worth causing the Evans boys a meltdown. You went to the rack of hooks on the back of your bedroom door to get your Red Sox cap and walked it out to set by your keys, so you wouldn't forget.

By the time you ran your little load of laundry through the washer and dryer, and folded it this time,
like a responsible adult, it was time to head over to Chris’ house. Archie took his regular spot upfront with you, copiloting with his head out the window for most of the ride. You made a mental note to check around on Amazon for a Red Sox scarf, or something, for Archie to wear. Chris would get a kick out of that.

It was a bit of trouble finding a place on Chris’ street to park. The curb was kind of crowded. You ended up a couple of houses away. The weather was nice and you weren’t surprised to hear the sounds of a small barbecue, as you passed a neighbor’s house. At the gate, Archie sat, leaned lazily against the side of your leg, while you pressed the call button.

"Stop!"

You flinched in surprise at the greeting you received, and laughed at your own startled reaction, putting a hand to your stomach to settle your fright.

"Who would cross the Bridge of Death must answer me these questions three, ere the other side he see."

You squinted at the camera lens, from behind your sunglasses, playfully worrying, "Scott? Honey, are you drunk?"

"Not yet," he promised. "Where was I? ...Oh! Bridge of Death."

"Uhh," you frowned, looking around you. "No bridge here. Can I come in?"

"Ugh. Fine. ...Who would pass the Gate of Death," Scott corrected, "must answer me these questions three, ere the other side he see."

Stunned, you stared at the camera for a moment, a wary eyebrow raised over the rim of your shades.

"Okay," you shrugged. "Ask me the questions, gate-keeper. I am not afraid."

"What is your name?" Scott asked and you answered. Apparently satisfied, he moved on to the next question. "What is your quest?"

"I seek the Holy Grail," you said, confidently.

From the background of the speaker, you heard Chris yell in the distance, "Just let her in the fahckin’ gate already."

"What...is your favorite color?" Scott challenged.

"Blue," you nodded.

"Right. Off you go," Scott cheerfully said, and the gate unlocked.

"Thaaaank youuu," you smiled, pushing open the gate and letting Archie in.

Ahead of you, Scott was waiting at the door, looking quite pleased with himself. "Hello," he smiled down at Archie, as your dog pranced into the house by him. Scott looked back up, offering you a welcoming hug and saying, "Hell-lo!"

Hugging him back, you told him, "I was expecting the air-speed velocity of an unladen swallow question."

"Does anyone know the answer to that?" he wondered aloud, gesturing you into the house ahead of
"It's about time," Chris exaggeratedly complained, from his spot slouched into one of the chairs in the living room. Archie wagged his tail, while Chris scratched his head on his knee. "Fahck man, the game's about to start."

You immediately understood why the street was a little busier than it had been on previous Sundays. You and Scott weren't the only ones over for the game. Scattered between the living room and streaming in and out of the kitchen were several of their friends. You waved back to Josh, as he got up off the couch to go to the other room. A couple of the faces you recognized from your night out at The Nice Guy awhile back. You crossed over to Chris, bending down to kiss him when he expectantly turned his face up, puckering his lips, and he hugged his arm around the back of your legs. He pointed out the guys you didn't know, and they said 'hello' and waved to you in turn.

"Hungry?" Chris offered. "Got a bunch of stuff and drinks in the kitchen, if you want."

"Little bit," you nodded.

"Oh," Scott scoffed, jutting his chin at his brother, "I get yelled at for taking too long to open the gate, but you make her get her own food?"

"Shad up," Chris grimaced. "Too long? That was the fucking Inquisition."

"Nobody expects the Spanish Inquisition!" Scott declared, much to your amusement and the laughs of a few others. He came over, taking your hand to pull you with him to the kitchen. "C'mon. I'll be a good host."

You flashed a toothy smile at Chris, while Scott led you away. He tugged you along, all the way to the kitchen, and loosed your hand when he turned to walk around the far side of the island. Spread out on the countertop was an impressive array of do-it-yourself sandwich fixins. There were two different loaves of bread, a pile of sub rolls, a selection of cheeses and sandwich spreads, and pounds of deli meats. And that was just on the island. On the counter along the kitchen wall was a collection of chips and dips and salsa. Yeah, that might be enough to get a handful of guys through half a baseball game.

"Glad to see he cooked," you joked, looking over the manfood buffet.

Scott snickered, looking around, "Trust me, it's better this way."

Now that you were alone, you had to ask, quietly, of course, "Am I the only one here without a Y chromosome?"

Scott sputtered into a laugh. He waved a hand to compose himself and then swept it down himself, saying, "Well, I mean, technically..."

Shaking your head, you reluctantly noted, "That doesn't count." Scott shrugged with a cheeky smile. "I thought it was just the three of us, or I wouldn't have brought Archie. I didn't know there'd be all of this," you said, looping your hand over the food everywhere. "Where are the girlfriends?"

With his jaw dropping open in completely exaggerated offense, Scott held up both hands to point at himself. "Why do you have to be so mean?"

"Oh, my god," you rolled your eyes, sniggering while you plucked a corn chip out of a bag for a scoop of salsa.
"I dunno," Scott shrugged. "He mentioned it to Josh and it just kind of went from there. Not my party." He gave you an almost worried once over. "Do you mind?"

"No, of course not," you assured him. "Just a lil surprised."

He jerked a thumb over his shoulder to the fridge. "Want something to drink?"

"Sure," you smiled. "What's he got?"

Opening the door of the refrigerator, Scott took a surveying look up and down and said, "Uhhhh...Sam Adams, Sam Adams, Sam Adams, Stella. Sam Adams, Stella, Stella, Stella." He turned to look over his shoulder at you to note, "Bud." Twisting back, he rattled on, "Stella, Budweiser, Budweiser Budweiser"

"Does he have any beer?" you interrupted, sounding genuinely curious, as you wrinkled your brow in thought and grabbed a plate.

Scott dropped his head, his shoulders shaking as he laughed. "Yep," he nodded, "I think so."

"I was worried there, for a second," you snickered.

"Or we can whip up something from the bar," he offered.

"Oo," you lit up, your curiosity piqued. "Is there a signature cocktail for this party, or one for the Red Sox in general?"

Stepping away from the fridge door, as Josh came back in to grab a bottle of beer, Scott said, "I don't think so."

"There's gotta be something," you insisted, pulling your phone out of your pocket.

If anyone would know, it was Google. You typed in a search for Red Sox themed drinks and came up with mostly a bust. There was a Red Sox drink, but it wasn't one you could make with what was lying around the house. Scott huddled up over your shoulder, as you scrolled and tapped through your results. He checked stock, while you rattled off ingredient lists of a couple tasty sounding hopefuls from lists of baseball themed cocktails.

When you stumbled across the Clubhouse Drinks menu for Fenway Park, you both got a little excited. They were simple, but you and Scott eagerly high-fived at the two recipes you could make work. Now, the only question was, what about the measurements?

"How hard can it be?" you airily figured, with a shrug.

"Only one way to find out," Scott decided. "A little trial and error never hurt anyone." He pointed at you and gave instructions. "I need a lemon, a lime, some ginger ale, and the cranberry juice- stat!"

Giggling, you sprang to life, scurrying past him on your way to the fridge and on his way to the liquor cabinet. Poking around in the fridge, you moved some things aside to find the juice behind the rows of chilling beers and a can of ginger ale on the bottom shelf. You grabbed a lemon and a lime from the three tier hanging fruit basket near the sink. Scott met you at the cutting board with a bottle of booze in each hand and a shaker tucked under one arm and a bottle of club soda under the other.

He jutted his chin down at the cutting board, seeing the sandwich bread crumbs on it and telling you to wash it off. While you cleaned, Scott grabbed a shot glass for measuring and a couple tumblers for serving. With the cutting board clean and dried, you toweled off your hands and Scott grabbed a
knife for the fruit.

"I need your thumb," he told you, grabbing your hand and pulling your thumb over to press on your phone to unlock the screen.

Peering over Scott's shoulder from your tiptoes, as he studied the list of drink on your phone, you wondered, "Which one?"

"This one first," he decided, pointing out the ABSOLUT Nation. "I feel like the other one's not gonna need as much work."

"Do the hard part first," you agreed, nodding.

"Okayyy," Scott breathed, rubbing his palms together, before pulling a tumbler in front of him and uncapping the bottle of vodka.

"Do we need the shaker?" you checked, holding it up to waggle in your fingertips.

He held his breath, thinking, with his finger pointed up in the air. "Nnno." He eyed the ingredients, thoughtfully frowning when he suggested, "One to one and two parts soda?"

"Sure," you shrugged, watching him go to work.

With the vodka and juice measured in, Scott poured straight from the bottle of soda water. "Ice," he scowled. "We forgot ice."

"I'm on it," you promised, taking the empty cup with you to grab a handful of ice from the freezer. "We are shitty bartenders."

"Probably," he figured, dropping a piece of ice into his concoction. Scott wagged his brow up, smiling before a sip, "We'll find out!"

You chewed on your lower lip, trying to gauge his reaction. "Well?"

He cocked his head a bit and tutted, "I don't know." He passed the glass to you. "Too much cranberry?"

"It said a splash of cranberry," you reminded him, taking a sniff of the drink first.

"Well, how the hell much is a splash of cranberry?" he begged.

You scrunched your nose up at the taste. "I don't know," you admitted, "but it's less than that."

"Next!" he laughed, twisting to pour the drink into the wet sink.

Scott tried again, this time literally only adding enough cranberry to see the drink splash. But that wasn't it either. And so it began, you Goldilocks-ing your way through another three batches of boozy experiments. There was something not quite right about each version. You guys just couldn't put your finger on it.

"Have you ever had one before?" you pressed, reaching across him to dump out the fifth try.

"No," he shook his head.

"Seriously?" you gaped, smacking the back of your hand into his arm. "Then how the hell are we supposed to know if we got it right?"
"Well, I don't know," he whined. "I figured we'd just both agree that it tasted good."

Well, you couldn't fault him there. It was a democratic idea. You chuckled, shaking your head as you unlocked your phone again. *Fair enough.*

"Maybe we should try the other one," you mumbled. But then it occurred to you, "Have you had one of these?"

"I think so," Scott squinted. "It's been awhile." When you gave him an exhausted look, he rolled his eyes and flipped his hand at you. "Just cut the fahckin' fruit."

Whoa. Wait. Did he just drop the accent on you? *Ha!* That was a first. Sure, it didn't have qutter the same effect on you as Chris' did, but still. *That's fantastic.*

You dutifully picked up the knife and set the lime on the cutting board, halving and quarting it and doing the same to its yellow counterpart. Scott cracked open the ginger ale, conservatively adding it to the whiskey before holding his hand out for wedge of each fruit. Like a nurse assisting her surgeon, you were there. He squeezed a dribble of lemon and lime into the cup and gave it a few swirls to mix.

Scott took a taste and thought on the flavoring for a moment, before handing the drink to you. "Oh, yeah," he slowly nodded. "That's not bad. That's almost it."

The whiskey was a bit more than you expected, but it wasn't bad. "A little more lemon?" you posited.

"A little more soda," Scott added, already reaching for the lemon and adding a dash of ginger ale. "Now try."

"Better," you nodded, looking over the drink in your hand.

He took the glass back from you to make his own judgment. "That's it," he grinned. "That's the stuff."

"What stuff?"

You both turned your attention to Guillermo coming into the kitchen. "We're trying to crack drink recipes," Scott explained, lifting the glass in his hand to show.

"Didn't know it was happy hour," Guillermo chuckled. "What's the specials?"

"Beantown Gingers," Scott proudly announced, already getting to work on making a second helping in a fresh glass. Guillermo leaned onto a barstool to watch. When Scott was done, he set it down in front of his friend, turning up his palms beside the drink to invite him to try. You waited for the verdict, grabbing a roll to start making yourself a sandwich.

"That's some good shit," Guillermo approved. "Nailed it."

"Remember to tip your waitress," Scott quipped.

"Don't quit your day job," he joked, taking his drink back to the living room.

Shaking his head, with a snort of a laugh, Scott offered, "You want one, or are you having something else?"

You stopped layering meat on your sandwich just long enough to look him up and down. "Did we
not just find our signature cocktail for the day?" you scoffed. "Yes, I want one."

"You don't have to get all snippy about it," Scott muttered.

You bumped him with your hip, making a big show out of obnoxiously reaching across him for a couple slices of cheese. Scott chuckled and bumped you back. You started spreading mayo on the top of your bun, when Josh and one of the other guys came in. They looked on, as Scott stirred your drink.

"Hey, man," Josh began, staring hopefully as Scott put your drink down near your plate. "Guillermo said you guys had BeeGees in here. Can I get one of those?"

"Absolutely," Scott beamed.

There was a taller, but empty, glass on the island and Scott grabbed it to get back to work. While you chewed on your first bite of sandwich, he asked you to grab another glass from the cupboard and some ice. You set the glass down on the counter for Scott, taking a cereal bowl with you to the fridge to fill up under the ice maker in the door. In the short minute you'd had your back turned, there were another two customers waiting for a drink.

Scott was just twisting over his shoulder to ask you for more cups, when you piped up, "I'm on it."

"Another ginger ale and more fruit, too," he added.

Pinching a few extra tumblers between your arm and body, you made a quick pit stop by the fruit basket for another lemon and lime. You bent down to line the glasses along the counter and put down your handful of the bright colored fruit. With another bite of sandwich, you turned back for the refrigerator, grabbing a couple of cans of soda. Better safe than sorry.

You picked up your knife and went to work on the lemon. You and Scott assembly lined the drinks, with Scott pouring and you adding the squeezes of juice. A few minutes later, Scott mixed up the last drink for himself and you were a few bites deeper into your homemade sub.

"What's the holdup?" Chris asked, leaning around the doorway from the dining room into the kitchen. "The first inning's over."

"Whoopsie," Scott cringed.

Chris lifted his chin, straightening up off the wall, and looking at the collection of bottles on the island in front of you and his brother. "Hey, whatcha got there?"

"Beantown Gingers," Scott bragged, taking up his glass for a sip.

"No shit?" Chris wondered, coming in to the kitchen, his brow raised in hopeful curiosity. "Is that what everyone has?"

"It's the game's signature cocktail," you proudly informed him.

"Let me get a taste 'a that," he said, jutting his chin toward the booze.

Reaching past Scott, you passed your cup to Chris. He took a sniff and then a sip. You ate your sandwich. Chris' brow knitted down, as he gave a scrutinizing look to the drink. You shared a glance with Scott. His expression said he was wondering if Chris knew better than him if the concoction was correct, too.
"Not bad," Chris nodded. "Who came up with this? Tastes just like at Fenway."

You and Scott elbowed each other obnoxiously, wearing proud smirks at your accomplishment, before Scott told him, "She did."

"We did," you corrected, not being one to hog glory when credit deserved to be shared.

"But she came up with the idea and found the Fenway cocktail list," he insisted.

"Well, he's been the mixologist," you touted, giving Scott an extra nudge of your elbow. "I just cut the fruit."

"She helped with the taste tests," Scott pointed out. "And did all the leg work for glasses and stuff."

"Okay, enough," Chris snorted. "Geez, I didn't know you two were already married."

"We're opening our own bar," Scott quipped. "She's gonna be the Coughlin to my Flanagan."

Now, wait just a damn minute.

You put your hands on your hips and frowned, raking your eyes up and down Scott. "How come you get to be Tom Cruise?" you demanded.

Scott turned a finger up to his face, asking, "Have you seen this smile? Of course, I'm Tom."

"That sounds dangerously close to insulting," Chris warned his younger brother.

"Oh, because I don't have a million dollar smile?" you scoffed, laying on the offended attitude a little thick...and barely able to keep from smiling. "Is that what you're saying?"

"Told ya, man," Chris shook his head, in front of another sip of your drink.

"I have dug a very deep hole, haven't I?" Scott dropped and shook his head.

"Yyyep," Chris agreed.

"I guess the divorce was inevitable," Scott sighed, with his shoulders sagging in defeat.

"That's okay," you pouted, rubbing your hand soothing on Scott's arm. "I've been sleeping with your brother the whole time."

"You bitch!" Scott hissed, giving you an angry scowl.

Chris almost spit out his drink. Well, actually, your drink and- Son of a bitch! That's your drink!

"Hey!" you cried, pointing accusingly at your drink and then to Chris. "You said a taste."

Chris stopped, looking down at the last couple of drinks left in your glass. "Oh," he casually realized. "My bad."

"Well, even though you cheated on me with my brother," Scott began, sliding over his drink to you, "I still love you. Here."

"Aww," you cooed, giving his arm an affectionate squeeze, as he went about making another drink for himself. "You're the best ex-husband I ever had."

"The one he has is watered down from sitting anyway," Scott smirked.
"Ha!" you cheerfully barked.

"Hey, wait now," Chris frowned. "The best ex-husband you ever had? How many times have you been married?"

"A lady never tells," you coyly smiled, ahead of a demure sip of your drink.

There was a ruckus from the living room; a chorus of manly "oh!"s. You couldn't quite interpret if it was a good or bad sound, but it had Chris' attention turned over his shoulder. Scott suggested now might be a good time to get back to the other room and you agreed. Grabbing your plate, with what was left of your sandwich, in your free hand, you fell behind the Evans boys on the way back to the living room. Chris dropped back into his chair and you squeezed in nearby on the couch with Scott. Josh explained the uproar and you settled in to finish eating and watch the game.

You and your bartender buddy, Scott, were the hit of the game, refilling another round for the guys during the commercial break before the top of the fifth inning. But it was Vazquez' long ball in the bottom of the 7th that was the big moment, when the Sox took the 8-6 lead and held on tight. The Sox swept the fahckin' Yankees, as you'd come to learn was, apparently, their proper name, for the first time since September of '13 and the guys fucking loved it. The whooping and hollering were worthy of an on field celebration. Archie may not have known what was going on, but damned if he wasn't wiggling with happiness, like the rest of the guys. And you were just giggling in the midst of it all, trying not to be in the way of the high energy high-fives and fist bumps going around the room. Must be a guy thing.

As a baseball fan, sure, you could appreciate the Red Sox, and understand the significance of the sweep. But, still, they weren't "your team". You were still a hometown team girl. But in a room full of rowdy fans, in a Red Sox hat and jersey, that your diehard Sahx fan boyfriend from Bahstin had bought you, you were officially part of the Red Sox Nation as well. And if being a member got you the same excited, if not damn near suffocating, squeeze and giant kiss that Chris gave you during the celebration every time the Sox won? Well, sign you the fuck up!

When it was over, and the guys had turned it down a notch, or as small a notch as they could do for several animated minutes of shit talking about the Yankees, you didn't go back to your spot on the couch. Everyone was taking their seats or heading out to the kitchen for more snacks and fresh beers. And you were too, until Chris pulled you over to sit with him. With your legs draped comfortably across his lap, you propped your head up on your bent arm resting on the back of the chair. Scott was an angel and brought you a bottle of water, like you asked, on his way back from the kitchen, while you were seatbelted in place by Chris' arms wrapped comfortably around you.

Someone turned on ESPN and you caught the score in the crawl at the bottom of the screen saying your Reds won over Pittsburgh earlier in the day and you smiled. You sipped on your water, observing all the man talk about the game and snickering at the hand waving and shushing when the Red Sox game highlights came up. Damn, these men are passionate about their team. When the video segment ended with the walk off the field and the host's reminder of the final score, the celebration started all over again. You shrugged. Definitely a guy thing.
Chapter 56

The wave of happiness over the Red Sox win rolled on for another few hours. You listened in as the guys traded stories about their favorite moments in Red Sox history. You chimed in with a few of your own fond memories about going to ball games with your family and friends at home. Surprisingly, nobody faulted you for being a Reds fan. Well, at least they didn't hold too big a grudge against you. After all, the Redlegs have had their share of woes and they appreciated a fan who could stick with their team in good times and bad. And besides, they had the word "red" in their name. They couldn't be all that bad, right? Ahh, boys and their jokes.

Somewhere toward the end of the night, the shield came out of the closet. You elbowed Chris, playfully reminding him that Sebastian isn't the only one to play with the prop. A couple of the guys took turns wielding Cap's signature weapon. The shield shenanigans provided a whole new round of laughs. They played at their best Captain America impressions and Chris nodded along, with a good hearted smile, even though they got the lines wrong. There were a few cell phone pics taken and, when you asked, Chris reluctantly nodded. Yeah, this does happen as often as you think it could.

Eventually, the party thinned out. You went to let Archie out into the yard, planning to head out soon yourself. While you waited for your pup, you started straightening up the kitchen a bit. All the perishable stuff had been put back in the fridge some time ago, but there were still plenty of snacks and dishes spread around. You put lids back on chip dip jars and folded up open bags of chips and pretzels. You gathered all the empty glasses on the counter beside the sink and started filling up the dishwasher.

Behind you, Scott came in to put his own dishes away. "Well," he smiled, "aren't you just the perfect little 50s housewife."

"Whaaa?" you frowned.

Scott snickered, cutting in to add his glass to the washer rack when you straightened up to grab another pair of cups from the counter. "Cleaning up after the men and their party," he smirked.

"Well," you decided, pushing in the full rack and dusting off your hands, "won't make that mistake again."

"What mistake?" Chris asked, walking into the room with a handful of empty glasses from the living room. He looked between you and the open dishwasher door, frowning, "You don't have to clean up."

"But she's so good at it," Scott noted. "Get her a little apron an-

"Hey!" You pointed a shaming finger his way. "Keep it up and I'll find someone else to mix drinks with."

"You wouldn't dare," he assured you, with a confident, if not a little smug, grin and raise of his chin.

"I've come to the recent decision," Chris mused, "not to ask anymore what you two are even doing."

"That might be for the best," Scott nodded.

"For everyone," you seconded, moving on to add the dirty plates to the machine.

You all chuckled together and Archie pranced back into the kitchen. Scott walked over to shut the
door and wondered, "So, what kind of trouble are we getting into tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow?" you curiously repeated.

"Yeah," he nodded, crossing over to the fridge for a bottle of water. Scott looked at his brother, observing, "We got all morning before we gotta be at the airport."

"That's so sweet of you, to drop your brother off at the airport," you smiled.

"Pfft," Scott grimaced. "I'm not a taxi." He took a drink of his water and explained, "No, weee are going to the airport. For the trip to New York."

"Oh," you blinked, putting the last dish into the washer and shutting the door. "I didn't know you were-"

"Geez," he chuckled, pointing his finger back and forth between you and Chris. "Don't you two ever stop fucking long enough to actually talk to each other?"

"OH MY GOD!" you cried, snapping the dish towel in your hand into Scott's gut.

"Dude," Chris complained. "Cah'mon."

You felt the redness in your cheeks, immediately. Chris dropped and shook his head, doing his best not to laugh, but his shaking shoulders couldn't be denied. Scott's smug grin told you he was more than pleased with himself for getting the reaction from you. He snickered and sputtered, pointing at your face.

"We talk all the time," Chris corrected, purposefully bumping his shoulder into Scott, as he pushed past him to get to the refrigerator. "It's just never about you."

"Oo. Ow," you winced. "You want some aloe for that burn?"

"Heh," Chris smiled, reaching across the front of Scott to give you a high five. "Nice."

"Don't be proud of that," Scott argued. "That was weak."

"Worked for me," Chris shrugged, taking a Stella out of the fridge. He looked at you, checking, "Want somethin'?"

"Bottle of water, for the road?" you suggested. "I gotta finish packing tonight."

"Oh, that's right," Scott recalled. "You're on an early flight." He turned to his brother, saying, "Looks like it's just you and me."

"Can't," Chris swept his head, easing down onto one of the stools at the island and reaching down to scratch behind Archie's ears. "Got a haircut in the morning, then the gym, and-"

"Wait," Scott interrupted, crushing his eyes closed, as he shook his head and waved a hand in confusion. "What do you have a hair appointment for?" He emphatically gestured toward you, presenting you with both hands in a way that would make Will Smith proud, while he squinted at Chris. "You've literally got a professional at your beck and call."

"Heyyyy," you pouted. "That makes me sound like a call girl."

Scott stepped over to hug an arm around your shoulders, squeezing you close and telling you, "Honey, you can be whatever you wanna be." Your mouth slowly gaped, as you looked up at Scott.
"You wanna be a call girl, then you be the best call girl there ever was."

You slapped the back of your hand into his stomach and Chris barked out a laugh. He put up a hand, at seeing your frown for him, assuring you and excusing himself by saying, "But, like, definitely a high end call girl."

"Yeah," Scott chimed in. "Like, five grand an hour. Easy."

"Oh, my god," you realized, shrugging Scott's arm off of you. "You two are both idiots."

Looking at his watch, Scott frowned, looking a little disappointed. "Took you this long to figure it out?"

"Babe, come on," Chris argued, holding his open palm toward Scott. "I mean, he did say an easy five grand an hour. That is. very. good."

"In this economy?" Scott seconded, with a knowing nod. "It's very good."

"When did I become a hooker?" you begged.

"Call girl," Chris corrected, raising a finger to make his point.

"High end call girl," Scott clarified, pointing across to his brother and sharing a nod of agreement.

_**Dear eight pound, six ounces baby Jesus.**_ You'd never considered that you'd end up in jail, charged with a double homicide, but damn. These two were on a roll tonight. You shook your head, with a smile.

"Idiots," you muttered. And then you recalled, "Hey, weren't you supposed to be picking on Chris?"

"Oo, that's right!" Scott excitedly remembered. "So, what are you getting done to your hair? Wanna go Goth?" He circled a hand around his head. "Do, like, black as night with maybe some purple tips."

"No," Chris said, firmly, ahead of a drink from his beer.

"Maybe a perm?" Scott offered. "Bring back the bowl cut?"

"No," Chris emphatically insisted.

You snickered, pleased not to be the butt of the jokes now. But you were curious to know, "Are you just getting a trim or are you actually doing something different with it?"

Chris shrugged, spinning the cap of his bottle on its edge on the countertop he leaned in to. "I dunno. Hadn't really decided."

"But you're doing something," Scott tried to figure out.

Taking off his ball cap and raking his hand back through his hair, Chris said, "I guess I've just been getting a little tired of it."

"You could just let it grow," Scott shrugged, sounding pretty indifferent. "The world needs more mullets."

"Ohhh, no," you disagreed, wagging a finger. "No, it does not."
"I'm not growing out a mullet," Chris grimaced, and Scott snickered. He flicked his middle finger down at the counter, shooting his bottle cap across the island at Scott.

Shaking your head, with a smile, you dipped down to pick up the little metal disc off the floor before Archie zeroed in on it. "You're tired of styling it?" you investigated.

"Styling?" Scott scoffed. "All ya gotta go is put some gel, or something, in there and comb it back."

"And I used to think my job required skills or, at least, a certain level of talent," you quipped, tapping the toe of your shoe into Scott's shin.

He reached over and wrapped his arms around your head and shoulders, awkwardly swaying you in a tight hug. "It's okay," Scott cooed, patting your head.

You put your hands into his chest and pushed and wiggled your way free, as Chris urged you, "Don't pay attention to him."

Moving around to the far side of the island, out of Scott's reach, you plopped down onto one of the couches. Archie came over to say hello and you told Chris, "You should try something different, if you're thinking about it."

"Nah," Chris swept his head. "I'll probably just get a trim."

"Pussy," Scott muttered.

You snickered, lightly scratching the top of Archie's snout, and adding, "Boredom could be your subconscious saying it's time for a new do. Sleep on it. See how you feel about it in the morning."

"Let your conscience guide you," Scott gently said, sounding quite mystical.

You all shared a good laugh, before Chris surveyed, "Don't you think it's getting a little long?"

With a shrug, you stood up and perched yourself on the edge of the barstool beside Chris. You combed your fingers back through his hair, gently holding it between your fingers to raise it up for a better inspection. You hummed, a little indifferently, and raked your fingers back again to settle down the hair you'd fluffed. It looked alright to you, but you could see he really was giving a haircut a lot of thought.

"It's maybe a little long, right now," you acknowledged. "It could definitely be trimmed up, if you want to keep the length. Just to take a bit of weight off of it; lighten it up a bit."

"You still got some magazine stuff coming up, right?" Scott pointed out. "You really wanna do something before you're done with the shoots?"

"Does it matter?" he questioned, taking a drink of Stella.

"No," Scott shrugged. "Jus' saying', people are probably expecting this Chris Evans," he waved a hand up and down his older brother.

"I don't think that's too big of a thing," you reasoned. "A stylist is picking clothes for the theme of the shoot, not for the hair. Hair's just another accessory to work with. The groomer is just there to clean up the look." Chris nodded and you smiled, warmly, scratching you fingernails along the back of his head. "Besides, you have to live with it everyday, not them."

"Good point," Scott seconded.
You slid off your barstool and planted a noisy kiss on Chris' cheek. "Sleep on it," you told him, giving his scalp one last loving scrape. "It'll come to you in the morning. But I gotta go."

Before you could walk around him, Chris reached back and hooked his arm around your waist. He pulled you into his side, offering, "You could stay."

"I can't," you frowned, your disappointment showing in the cock of your hip as your weight shifted. "I need to get Archie squared away for the sitter's and finish packing for myself. And you've got your own stuff to do in the morning."

"Yeah, but I don't have to," Chris tried to persuade.

"Yeah," Scott nodded. "Just wear a hat for the rest of the press tour."

"If I could..." Chris joked.

You shook your head, grinning. Giving his arm around you a pat, you coaxed, "Okay, come on. Gotta go."

"Stay," he sweetly insisted. "It's late. It's already 12:30 and you're, like, a half hour from home."

"Welp," Scott decided, throwing his hands up and straightening up from where he leaned against the counter, "there it is. Irrefutable science. Guess you're staying."

"Aren't you the little helper," you smirked at Scott, as he walked around the island.

You accepted Scott's hug as best you could, still latched into Chris' arm, while Scott proudly smiled, "Yes, I am." He gave Chris a clap on the back of his shoulder, shaking his free hand when Chris twisted around to offer it. "Call me after your appointment," he told him, "and I'll catch up with you at the gym."

"Probably, like, 10:30," Chris estimated, giving a firm nod.

Pointing back at the two of you, as he walked out of the kitchen for the front door, Scott called, "G'night guys."

You and Chris chorused a wish of a good night and a safe trip home to his younger brother and Archie followed him out of the room to see Scott to the door. Chris gave you a little tug and sweetly smiled up at you. From the other room, you heard him door shut and Archie prancing his way back across the hardwood to the kitchen.

"How 'bout it?" Chris asked.

"I can't," you whined, dropping your head pathetically to the side. "Besides, I don't have anything here."

"You have a toothbrush," he countered. "What else do you need?"

"Then I gotta walk of shame it outta here," you explained, with a jerk of your thumb toward the street, "in the same clothes I came in with."

"Hey," he said, suddenly serious, "there's no shame when you're wearing a Sahx jersey."

You rolled your eyes and you both snorted a laugh. "You're ridiculous," you decided.

"I'm relentless," Chris corrected, arching up a mischievous brow. "You gonna make me beg?"
Now, there was an idea. Captain America begging. But, more specifically, Captain America begging for you. You had to admit, it wasn't a bad mental picture. You pushed your fingers back through his hair, pretending to give the proposal some weighted thought. While you contemplatively hummed, Chris took another pull off his beer, his eyes fixed on yours while he waited for you to decide.

"Fine," you gave in. "But we have to set an alarm."

"Done," he agreed, with a confident smile.

"Okay," you nodded, smacking your hand on his arm. "Now, let me go, I gotta pee."

He did let you go, but teased, as you walked around him to put your bottle of water back in the fridge, "Too many BeeGees?"

"Too many everythings," you joked.

"I'll lock up and be there in a minute," he told you, standing back up and nudging the barstool under the edge of the island counter with his knee and side of his foot.

You gave Chris a thumbs up and headed to the master bathroom. On the way, you picked up your keys and phone to take with you. Maybe a bit confused about whether or not you were staying, Archie stopped by the front door before hurrying to catch up with you down the hall.

The house quieted, as Chris turned off the television in the living room and you set your things on the nightstand. In the bathroom, you smiled at seeing your toothbrush in the cup next to Chris'. At least you had that there. It was kind of funny to consider how often you'd been at Chris' with actual luggage lately. Now, practically empty handed, it was kind of ridiculous by comparison to think about how over-prepared you were those nights you came here from the airport.

You gave your teeth a good brushing, opening the door for Archie to find you, after hearing his fussing from the other side of the door. Giving yourself a once over in the mirror, you shrugged off the idea of washing your face. The longer the quiet went on in the house, the more tired you realized you were. Archie happily wagged his tail when Chris walked in.

Chris smiled down at the dog, as he carefully stepped around him to get to the vanity beside you, noting with a smile, "It's a little crowded in here."

"You should probably buy a bigger house," you told him. "This one is a bit tiny, don't you think?"

He snuffled a laugh, muttering, "Sassy" as he put toothpaste on his brush.

You took off your hat and set it aside on the counter. Borrowing a comb from the counter, you took down your hair and combed it smooth before tying it up in a knot to sleep. Chris rinsed and spit, dropping his toothbrush back into the cup and wiping his mouth on the hand towel beside him. You leaned into the mirror, eyeing yourself carefully as you ran the tip of your pinky over your lower lashes to separate them at the corner. You preened for a minute, turning your face to see in the mirror and tucking away a few hairs that had escaped your style without any hairspray to tame them.

You caught Chris looking, watching you with a faint grin in the side of his mouth. "What?"

His brow wagged up and his lips pursed, as he shook his head. "Nothing," he shrugged.

"Okayy," you warily said, sliding your hat under your hand on the counter, as you left the bathroom.

In the bedroom, you stepped out of your gym shoes, toeing them neatly together at the end of the bed
on your side. You unbuttoned your jersey, sliding it down your arms to fold. Chris walked in from the bathroom, stopping with a stutter in his step at seeing you lay your outer shirt on the end of the bed.

He held out a hand, flicking his finger back toward him. "Here, gimme that," he told you. You handed him your jersey and he went into the walk in closet. From the next room, Chris reminded you, "You still got that dress in here."

"What dress?" you questioned, shimmying off your jeans.

"From London," he answered. "The one you and Lizzie and Joe's wife got."

"Oh, yeah," you recalled. With a grin, you quipped, "Sweet! It'll be the best dressed walk of shame ever."

Chris came back in the bedroom, chuckling and shaking his head at you. "How many walk of shames you got under your belt?" he teased.

"I don't do walk of shames," you assured him. With a smirk, you corrected, "I do victory marches."

He stopped, twisting at the waist to see you over his shoulder from where he stood by the dresser, taking out a t-shirt from the drawer. "Victory mar-" Chris ducked his head, his shoulders shaking with a laugh. "Jesus," he shook his head. "First time I've heard that."

"Makes it sound better, doesn't it?" you suggested.

"It makes it sound way better," Chris nodded, tossing you the fresh tee.

"I don't like to do walks of shame," you clarified. "I'm a relationship girl." You shrugged. "But maybe once or twice..."

"Knew it," he smirked. "Everybody's done it."

"Most people," you figured, trading your tank top and bra for his t-shirt.

Chris stripped out of his clothes, emptying his pockets on his way back into the closet. You folded aside the sheets and climbed into bed. Archie laid his chin on the side of the bed, hoping for an invite up, but you shook your head. While you were setting an alarm on your phone, Chris came back to turn off the light and join you in bed.

He asked if you'd set an alarm and you nodded. While he settled into his pillow beside you, you put aside your phone and pulled the sheets up. Chris picked up his arm, opening up a space for you, and you cuddled up to his side.

"New York, tomorrow," he noted, ahead of a kiss into the top of your hair. "Last stop."

"My god," you marveled. "There won't be anything left for us to do or talk about."

"Yep," Chris hopelessly agreed. "Looks like this is the end."

You stuck out your hand and turned your chin up to look at him. "Well, we had a good run, Mr. Evans," you accepted. "It was nice while it lasted."

Chris shook your hand, playing along, "But we'll still be friends, right? Or, maybe, I could just hire you to mix drinks at my parties."
"Sure," you shrugged. "Stop by the salon sometime. I'll give you the friends and family discount."

"That's mighty kind of you," he said, doing a hell of a job of not laughing, despite the subtle noise you heard in his chest just dying to get out.

"Well, nice guys are hard to find," you told him. "I say you earned the 20% off."

"Thanks," he beamed, giving you a quick squeeze. Chris seemed to have an idea and offered, "Hey, since it'll be awhile before you find another nice guy like me, and, of course, it'll take me a while to find anybody as good as you again, what d'ya say we just stick together? I mean, we won't have shit to talk about or do, but we could at least be miserably bored with each other."

"Hmm," you hummed, touching a finger to your chin in thought. "They say 'misery loves company', so yeah. I got nothing better to do, I guess."

"Sounds like a plan," Chris smiled.
Chapter 57

It occurred to you, standing in line for your chance to check in for your flight to New York, that you had become ridiculously familiar with the layout of the Los Angeles International Airport. You had the sneaking suspicion that if you called the girl over at the ticket counter Emily, she would answer, even though there was no way of seeing her name tag from where you were. With an odd sense of satisfaction, you even gave directions to a weary looking mom of two small boys to find the Coffee Bean before her flight. Yeah, there's the distinct possibility, you might be spending a liiiittle too much time at the airport lately. You met up with a not surprisingly chipper Frank at the gate and chatted while you waited to board.

Your flight was on time and smooth. Considering everybody and their mother was trying to get out of JFK and into a cab for the city, you were happy to have the studio arrange a car and driver to pick up Frank and, vicariously, yourself. He pointed out some places that passed outside the window on your ride to the hotel. You smiled, pointing out the more Frank talked about New York the more New York came out in his accent. He didn't disagree and you certainly didn't have a problem with it.

You bummed around with Frank, while he checked into his room. When the man at the desk asked if you would be checking in as well, you explained you were waiting on someone else. He was happy to hold your luggage until your, ahem, "roommate" arrived. In the meantime, Frank offered for you to hang out with him to kill some time. You politely declined, saying you were dying for a late lunch, by your LA clock, and figured you'd take a walk to find something to eat. He told you to wait there and he'd go with you.

About fifteen minutes later, you and Frank were venturing down the busy evening streets of New York City's financial district. You caught a glimpse of the Freedom Tower, as you made your way a couple of blocks away from the hotel. You ended up at a sandwich shop over on Nassau Street. The narrow shop wasn't too crowded and you took your meal on bar stools at one of the small tables for two lined along the walls, gorging yourselves on oversized panini.

While you chewed on your mouthful of your Milano panini, Frank wiped a napkin at the corner of his mouth, asking. "You ready for all the back and forth comin' up?"

You nodded, until you could speak. "Pretty excited about it," you said. "It's gonna be crazy."

"You all squared away with your other job?" he wondered, going for another bite of his sandwich.

"All set," you assured him. "Just need to sit down with the boss and give her the dates I'll be out of town."

"How'd China go over?" Frank smirked, talking out of the side of his mouth.

"Surprisingly good," you told him, with a bob of your head. After a sip of your soda, you added, "I think she's pretty used to me disappearing at length, anymore."

"No, I meant with Evans," he chuckled his correction.

"Ohh," you tittered and shrugged at your misunderstanding. "Yeah, okay, I guess. He seemed a little bummed I'd be gone for my birthday."

"When is that?" he checked, his brow wrinkling in thought. "That July or August? You're a summer baby, right?"

"So, he's mad you're gonna be working," he understood. "What about you?"

"I'm actually okay with it," you smiled. "Wouldn't be the first time I'm not home for it. You guys can sing Happy Birthday to me in Mandarin."

Frank snorted, with a nod. "That might be doable," he suggested. "He'll get over it, right?"

"Oh, yeah," you assured him, with a confident scrunish of your nose. Because, of course he will...won't he? "We'll just do something when I get home. No big deal."

"Gonna be a busy few months," he observed, with a slight cock of his head. "We get started tomorrow, bright and early."

"I'm ready," you smiled.

"We gotta be over at Mendez at 8," he reminded you. "We're gonna be wrapped up most 'a the day with EW. What's your guy up to?"

Squinting as you tried to recall, "He's doing the stock exchange in the morning with Renner and some press after that. He's going over to the Marvel offices for a quick visit before Fallon that night. Thought I might go along to Marvel." You shrugged. "It's being covered by Marvel's PR, and his brother will be there, so it'll be pretty low key."

"When's that?"

"Not sure exactly," you said. "Early afternoon, maybe?"

"I'm gonna need you 'til probably 1 o'clock." Frank told you. "Maybe later."

"I know," you nodded. "I'm not gonna try and sneak out. If I can go, I can go." You have him a thumbs up. "Work comes first. Still a business trip."

Frank grinned and shook his head. "Well, I still want you to have fun on the business trips."

"I do," you brightly promised. You pointed a hand around. "I am." Going back in for another bite of your panini, you added, "This place is great, by the way."

With a proud smile and snort, Frank nodded his agreement, while he chewed. When he finished, he reminded you, "Don't think you're getting out of a workout, just 'cause I'm getting filmed tomorrow. I expect to see you sweat."

You frowned uncomfortably, your head lolling to the side. "I don't know," you complained. "I don't know anybody there..."

"I'm gonna show you around," he promised, with a quick jab of a finger your way to prove it. "Introduce you to some people. They're gonna take good care of you. You're gonna love it here."

You walked around with Frank for a bit after dinner. You went over to the World Trade Center, marveling at the new structure and taking a couple of photos of the Freedom Tower outlined by the night sky. Your reverenced stroll around the memorial pools was moving, despite all the bustling of the city nearby. You guys got coffees from Starbucks on your meandering way down Albany to get to the Esplanade. You wondered down the riverside walk for awhile, taking in the view of the Jersey
cityscape and the Statue of Liberty down the way.

Leaned onto the railing to overlook the Hudson, you and Frank went over the finer points of the schedule for tomorrow. The film crew would shoot Frank's workout at Mendez Boxing. They expected to start at 8, which meant leaving early to catch a ride up to midtown in the morning rush. After that, the producers wanted some B roll footage of Frank in the city, before moving on to one of Frank's favorite watering holes for the actual bulk of the interview.

Lazily making your way back up river, Frank gave you the skinny on the people at Mendez Boxing and why he was making the trip up there for the interview, instead of just getting time at any of the dozens of closer fitness centers near the hotel. He spoke highly of the people there and mentioned a few he was hoping to run into. If not tomorrow, he was optimistic to catch up with them in the couple days after that he was still in town. He was excited to show you around the gym, one of his favorite places in the city, and it showed.

It was admittedly late, when you walked back into the lobby with Frank. Considering the early start for the day tomorrow, it would have been sensible for you both to at least be on the way to bed, if not already asleep. But Frank wasn't going to let you just sit around in the lobby and be bored waiting for Chris to arrive. Like he said, it wouldn't be proper, not when you had your very own Bronx born and bred tour guide at your disposal.

Frank went up to the counter with you to get your suitcase, telling you about the bar you were headed to tomorrow for the last part of his EW shoot, while you waited in line. Digging your phone out of your pocket, you saw you'd missed a pair of calls from Chris and some text messages.

**Flip Cup Hero**: Landed. Be at the hotel soon.

**Flip Cup Hero**: I'm here. Don't see you in the lobby. Where'd you go?

**Flip Cup Hero**: Checked in. Come home.

When it was your turn at the front desk, you were surprised to hear your suitcase wasn't there anymore and that it had been sent up to your room. With an embarrassed smile, you asked, "And, if I were in my room, where exactly would I be?"

The clerk chuckled with you and Frank, passing a key card to you across the marble desktop, as he told you your suite number and pointed your way upstairs. The nice man wished you both a good night and Frank escorted you to the elevators. He left you with a smile and reminder to meet him in the lobby by 7:15, leaving you to ride up the last couple of floors by yourself.

When the elevator doors opened, you checked left and right, following the clues of the numbers on the other room doors to find your own, down the hallway to the right. You stopped, just short of getting your key into the reader on the door, when your phone rang in your pocket. Taking it out, you smiled at the caller ID and swiped your thumb to connect the call. Ahead of you, the door opened and you laughed at seeing Chris hang up his phone and your screen black when the call disappeared.

"There you are," he smiled, stepping aside for you to come in. "I was just about to call Frank and get Liam Neeson's number."

"Ha ha," you playfully groaned, pecking a kiss to his cheek as you passed. Getting the first look at Chris after his hair appointment, you tapped a finger on your chin as you turned around and squinted, curiously, at him. "Something's different about you," you shook your head to yourself. "Hmm...Did you do something different with your hair?"
"Alright, smartass," he groaned, rolling his eyes and turning down his head as he brushed a hand back over the top of his short hair. Chris looked a bit self-conscious when he lifted his chin and asked, "You don't like it?"

"I do like it," you smiled, stepping over and reaching your hands up to rake your fingertips back across his scalp, your eyes admiring the new fluffiness to the shorter style. You frowned, for a second, cocking your head to the side, trying to figure out, "Who does this remind me of?" Chris shrugged and it came to you. "Oh, Nick Gant!" you chirped, and then promptly shook your head. "No, not with the beard. It's more Puncture. That's it. Mike what's-his-name."

Chris sniggered, shyly, shaking his head. "Guess so."

"You don't like it?" you checked.

"No," he quickly assured you. "No, I do. It's just, ya know, it was kind of a last minute decision and with the press tour still goin' on an- I dunno."

"Well, you're the one that has to look at it everyday," you playfully reminded him. "So, you better like it."

His brow wagged up, as he pointed at you. "You gotta look at it everyday, too."

"Meh," you shrugged. "If I don't like it, I can always cut it while you're sleeping."

Chris barked out a laugh and you smiled, innocently. You twirled around, taking a look over the suite. Not too shabby.

"I've been trying to call," Chris noted. "Where ya been?"

"I was wondering around with Frank," you explained. "Sorry, didn't hear my phone in my pocket."

"You hungry?" he asked, locking the door behind you.

"No," you shook your head. Your eyes widened for emphasis, adding, "had a big dinner with Frank a little while ago."

You crossed the room to take in the city view from the living room window, as Chris went on, "Well, I ordered some room service for myself. I had the front desk send up your suitcase. It's in the bedroom."

"I heard," you chuckled. "Thanks." Chris came over, wrapping his arms around your waist and giving you a squeeze. "How was your trip?"

"No complaints," he shrugged. Chris planted a kiss into the curve of your neck. "Got in a couple minutes early, so that's always nice. How was yours?"

"Good," you smiled.

Chris let you go and you started to tell him about your miniature sight seeing tour through lower Manhattan with Frank. He listened, following you into the bedroom and watching while you opened up your bag to get out your toiletries and a few odds and ends for the night. You were interrupted mid-sentence by a knock on the door. Chris excused himself to meet Room Service and held up a finger to you, telling you not to lose that thought about the Statue of Liberty.

While he was away, you took your kit of essentials to the bathroom, setting up a small corner of the
vanity for yourself. From the living room, you heard the door shut and lock again. Before you went back to the other room, you changed into your pajamas. Catching up with Chris, he was seated at the table, cutting into a juicy steak with fries. Oo, fries!

He sent you a grin, as he chewed and you came into the living room. Plucking a pair of thick cut fries from his plate, you slipped backward over the arm of the couch to fall back on the cushions with your feet hanging over the side. Chris didn't even bat a lash at the loss of some of his food and, when he swallowed his bite, reminded you to finish telling him about the Statue of Liberty.

"Oh, yeah," you lit up, pausing before you went on to eat one of the fries in your fingertips. "I was sayin' how it looks so good on the river, but it looks like I was taking a picture of a miniature, the way it came out on my phone." You shrugged, munching on the other fry. "Just need to be closer next time."

"So, what else did you do?" he asked.

"That's about it," you told him. "Just walked around, talked about tomorrow."

"You still coming with me?" Chris checked, ahead of biting into a pair of fries pinched together.

"I'm gonna try," you hopefully said, bending your neck to peek around the end of the couch at him.

Chris noticed and smiled at the awkward and, yeah, a bit uncomfortable angle. You flashed an angelic grin and his shoulders moved with the quiet laugh held down while he ate. He nodded, as he chewed.

"You know," he began, taking a drink, "you don't have to. It's okay, if you can't make it. I know this isn't like the other stops. You have work to do this time, and I don't want you to think you have to rush around or anything because I asked you to do something you didn't have time for."

*Good lord.* Is he ever not considerate? Who knew guys could be so understanding?

"I want to try," you assured him. "What if Stan Lee is there, or something else incredible happens, and I miss it?"

Chris sputtered into his glass and shook his head, composing himself. "Stan's not gonna be there," he said. "He doesn't do too much traveling lately. Besides, it's just going to be some department heads and writers kind of thing. It's not a big deal."

*Aww.* "Dammit," you pouted. "Well, at least Captain America will be there."

He nodded, with a smile. "At least he'll be there."

You hung out on the couch, chatting with a Chris while he finished eating. You found out Scott was staying just down the hall. He was still going to the Marvel HQ with Chris tomorrow, so you would have company, if it was too boring, while Chris made the rounds. Having to get an early start for the day, you excused yourself to bed, hoping to fall asleep soon. Chris told you he was going to be up for a bit and that he was going to hang out in the living room, so he didn't disturb you. He could afford to still live on LA time.

Traipsing around town with Frank must have helped you fall asleep. When your alarm went off, you felt pretty rested. You tiptoed around the room, getting ready while Chris slept soundly. You weren't sure exactly when he came to bed, but he was out like a light. It worked to your advantage, as you dug around through your things to pack a bag for the gym/work. You could wear your gym clothes out, but you still needed to pack a few things for cleaning up after your workout. Plus, you
needed to pack the items you’d need to style and touch up Frank throughout the day. You were pretty proud of yourself for getting everything into your backpack. Sure, you didn’t have enough room to stuff your boxing gloves in there, but tying them off to the top of your bag was actually kind of cute. You dotted a soft kiss on Chris’ forehead and whispered goodbye, just in case he’d wake up to remember later, and were out the door.

You set up camp at a small table for two, sneaking in a quick breakfast before meeting Frank. The two of you caught up in the lobby, right on time. Sharing a cab uptown, you guys made small talk about how your nights were and whether or not you were able to sleep. Walking through the door of the gym, Frank immediately lit up, flashing a big, open smile to the girl at the front desk and his friend, Terry, waiting for him. The men exchanged hugs and Frank introduced you to his friend/trainer. You shook hands and Terry said the film crew was already set up and waiting.

Frank didn't go directly to the crew. Instead, he took his time, stopping at least a dozen times to say 'hello' and shake hands with, but mostly hug, the people he knew. And he introduced you to them all. The producer caught on and sent the cameraman to work early, shadowing Frank as he made his tour around the gym. Terry pointed you to the women's locker room, where you could stash your jacket and bag while you worked out. Frank made it a point to tell his friend, Terry needed to find someone to put you through the wringer. Just because you were in New York didn't mean you didn't have to work, he said. Terry laughed, with a nod, and, when you came back to the gym floor, he introduced you to a late 20-something blonde. Her name was Shannon and she would show you around and be your workout partner for the day. From where Frank was nodding along to the segment producer's notes, Frank pointed at Shannon, giving you a nod that said you were in good hands.

And you were. You and Shannon hit the bags, and hit it off. It turns out, she had signed up at the gym a few years ago with a girlfriend to drop some weight after she had her son, and she's been coming to the boxing club five days a week ever since. The two of you palled around, running drills, doing core workouts, and just generally working your asses off on the heavy bags and in the ring. Every once in awhile, you'd catch a glimpse of Frank doing his session with Terry. You needed to keep track of him, so he, or the crew, wasn't waiting around on you to move on. You wrapped up a little early with Shannon. She understood and you hurried off to shower fast and, hopefully, be ready before Frank was. Shannon told you how nice it was to meet you and told you, anytime you come back to New York and want to work out, she'd meet you. Frank was right. There are some good people here.

Trading your sweaty gym clothes for jeans and a chic, loose fitting t-shirt, accessorized with some long necklaces and a few bangle bracelets, you turned your blow dryer on your hair for a couple minutes. Checking your phone for the time, you saw you missed a text from Chris, sometime while you were sparring with Shannon. It simply said, good morning and told you to have a good day, but it was enough to make you grin like an idiot while you knotted up your damp hair on top of your head. You repacked your bag, leaving the stuff you’d need for Frank on top, and headed back out to the gym. Frank was nowhere to be found, so you went over to hang out with the EW staff, figuring he had hit the showers. You chitchatted a bit with the crew, happily answering questions about how you had come to work for Frank and your thoughts on him and his projects. It pleasantly passed the several minutes you waited for Frank. Terry came back out of the locker room, letting you and the crew know it was safe to film in there again.

Frank was still a little sweaty, even after a shower. While he sucked down water, you got to work drying and styling his hair. He had cooled off, by the time you were done. You eavesdropped, while the producer talked to Frank about the next bit of filming and you packed up your tools. Leaving the gym, you tagged along, following behind the film crew, Frank, and Terry, as they strolled through Madison Square Park. A few people recognized Frank, coming over to ask for a photo. You smirked
to yourself, figuring it was probably the hair that always gave Grillo away in public, especially when he was outside of L.A. You volunteered, taking strangers' phones to snap their pictures with your boss for them.

One guy, a self-admitted comic book geek and Crossbones fan, pointed a finger at you, saying you looked familiar and asked if you were an actress. You laughed and said, no, you're just a hairstylist. Frank figured it out, telling the fanboy, if he's been to Wizard World and seen a girl with purple hair next to him, that's why he knows you. A light bulb went off for the guy and he snapped his fingers at the hint. Yeah, you were the girl with the purple hair on Instagram.

"Holy shit," he smiled. "Yeah, I followed you to see about any Civil War set pics. The stuff you share from Kingdom is just great. Thanks for that."

You had a fan. Like, actually you. You had a fan and here you were, meeting him, and he was meeting you. How cool, and unexpected, is that? Your follower asked for a picture with you, too. While you laughed and blushed at the idea, Frank eagerly stepped up to take the picture, telling you, "Oh, you're doing it. Get in there an' smile."

Your fan put his arm around your shoulder and you both smiled for Frank. Honestly, how could you not? He was smiling wider than anyone, clearly enjoying your shyness in your awkward moment of internet fame. The guy shook yours and Frank's hands, giving his thanks and best wishes for another season of Kingdom. Frank and Terry both chuckled at you saying how weird that was and you continued on your walk. On the other side of the park, Terry said his goodbyes, holding Frank to a promise to see him at the gym on Thursday. He was sure to invite you back, too.

You thumbed cabs to get to the Odeon. The camera man and producer rode with Frank. You hitched a ride with the soundman in the next taxi. Riding down Broadway in the yellow colored car, you took a short video of some of the theaters and sights you passed by to post on Instagram later. At the restaurant, you were shown to the bar on the side of the establishment. The area had been set aside for the crew, so no diners or wait staff ruined the shot of Frank giving his interview from a barstool. You sat yourself at one of the small tables off to the side and out of the way to watch. A bartender occasionally appeared to mix a drink for Frank, or anyone who needed one, when there were pauses or adjustments made for the interview.

By the end, you became aware of a dull ache in your face from the small grin you wore listening to Frank talk about himself and his work. The confidence he spoke with was downright inspiring, when he talked about early decisions he made with his career, about his family, and following your dreams. You didn't know how much of it would make it into the segment, but you were glad you were there to take it all in in person. When it was over, the producer came over to you, asking you to sign a release. Everyone at the gym who was possibly caught on film signed one and they asked you to do the same, saying it was likely because of your relationship with Grillo that you were close enough to him to maybe end up in a few shots, especially in the park. You happily signed.

While the sound tech was taking the mic off Frank, and the videographer was getting ready to break down his gear, you caught a look at the clock on the wall. Chris had told you his visit to Marvel Entertainment started at 2 o'clock. It was just before 1:30. You frowned, thinking that you had just left midtown just a couple hours ago and now you had to go back up stream. If you could catch a cab quick enough, you might make it. You reached in to tap Frank's shoulder and draw his attention off the work of the tech at his side.

"Yeah, sweetheart?" he kindly smiled.

"If you don't need me anymore today," you started, with a small incline of your head for the door, "I'm gonna go try and catch up with...you know, for the tour."
"Yeah, sure," he nodded, waving a hand to send you on. "Of course. You know where you're going?"

You nodded patting your cell phone in your pocket. "Got the address in my phone. Hopefully, I can get a cab."

You shrugged on your backpack and Frank gave you a hug. "Hey, thanks for stickin' around for this," he told you, before grabbing your face and pecking a noisy kiss to your cheek. Still holding your face, he looked you intently in the eye, telling you, "You be careful runnin' around up there by yourself, okay?" You nodded, grinning at his fatherly concern. "If you guys need somehin' to do tonight or you end up on your own, you come by for dinner, alright? I'm meeting some family uptown."

"Okay," you agreed, with a smile.

Frank gave your cheek a pat and threw his head toward the door, loudly telling you to "Get outta 'ere" and then, maybe?, swearing after you in Italian. For all you knew, he was reciting ingredients for a delicious marinara. You couldn't be sure, but the sound of it made you laugh, as you hurried out the door to try and wave down a taxi as you started up the street.
Chapter 58

You flung the cab door shut, hurrying into the building on west 50th and quickly finding your way to the front desk of Marvel HQ. Your toe involuntarily impatiently tapped, waiting for your turn behind the FedEx guy. You were a few minutes late. You'd sent a text to Chris, letting him know you were running behind because of traffic, but he hadn't replied. With your arms crossed in front of you, you held up your hand, biting at your thumbnail, a little anxious. You looked around, looking for a familiar face but Chris, or Scott or anyone else, was nowhere in sight. Nope. No one. Stupid traffic.

Your arms dropped to your sides, seeing the delivery guy wrapping up his business. You checked your watch, blowing air out through your puffed cheeks. The delivery man stepped aside and you moved up to the counter, flashing a polite smile to the woman at the desk, when she asked if she could help you.

"Yes. Hi," you began. "I'm here for the tour. I'm running a few-"

"I'm sorry," she interrupted. "We don't do tours for the-"

"Oh, no," you grinned. "I'm not here for a public tour. I'm here with Mr. Evans' tour."

Please don't think I'm some psycho fangirl. Pleasepleaseplease.

With a meek smile, you gave her your name, hoping there was a list or something for people Chris was traveling with today. You hoped even harder that you were on it. The receptionist turned to her computer and asked you to wait while she called someone in Media Relations. You took out your phone sending a quick SOS to Chris.

You: In the lobby. They might think I'm a stalker. Halp

The message was delivered, but that was it. You didn't know if it had been seen, but it certainly didn't get a reply. Too bad you didn't have Scott's number to try. You wondered, when exactly was the appropriate time in the relationship to get the numbers of your significant other's siblings and family? You know, for the next time you're trying to catch up with your millionaire, Hollywood boyfriend in New York on a press tour for his next blockbuster movie. No, seriously. That's a legit thing for you now. Holy crap. When did this happen? Better yet, how did that sound less weird before now?

You kept a patient grin on your face, despite the nervousness in your gut that the receptionist was actually calling Security to kick you out. Even the guy sorting the mail and deliveries onto his cart at the end of the desk gave you a wary look. The receptionist was dialing another number now, mumbling something about someone not being at his desk. Yeah, she's definitely calling Security.

You looked around you again. Hell, at this point, you'd settle for seeing Megan, or anyone else who looked vaguely familiar. While the receptionist worked her phone and computer to try and get someone to verify your story, the elevator off to the side of the lobby dinged and a young man with a fade and man bun crossed the lobby. He leaned over the end of the high countered desk, so far that his toes drifted off the ground and his loosely knotted, skinny tie hung down to the desktop. He came back up, after trading an envelope to the outgoing mail bin and taking a couple of pieces of candy from a dish near the woman's phone.

The man slid back off the counter, while the receptionist smiled and shook her head, still on the
phone. Popping a peppermint into his mouth, he quietly tried not to interrupt her call, asking, "Has anybody come in?"

Your ears pricked and you stood a little straighter. The receptionist hung up her phone, checking, "Who are you looking for?"

"[Y/f &I/n]," he said, shifting the candy to the side of his mouth. "Chris Evan's PA."

His PA? Shit, yeah! You'll take it! Anything to get you back to him and Scott. You demurely raised your hand chiming in you were Chris' personal assistant at the same time the receptionist gestured an open hand to present you.

"Oh," the young man smiled. "Perfect." He stuck out his hand. "I'm Luke; one of the interns here at Marvel." You shook his hand and nodded when he added, "Let's get you caught up."

In the elevator, Luke told you Chris was in the bullpen, meeting some of the artists and writers. You were a few minutes late, but they had really only just finished introductions and some welcome pictures. The elevator doors slid open and the intern offered you your choice of a peppermint or a Jolly Rancher. You picked the peppermint, thinking of the sandwich you had during Frank's interview, hoping to ward off any bad breath. As you walked, Luke the intern gave you a crash course in Marvel's strict "no photos"/visitor policy. Of course, you nodded your complete understanding of the rules.

A couple of turns down some hallways and you spotted Chris and his group ahead of you. They were standing around, Chris nodding along to a man speaking and motioning around the large room. Next to Chris, Scott took a lazy look around, spotting your approach when his head lolled over his shoulder. Scott lit up, giving you a wide grin. He turned around, lightly smacking Chris in the back, before taking a few steps to meet you. Chris took a quick peek over his shoulder, when he saw Scott wasn't next to him anymore. Chris flashed you a warm smile. You gave your thanks to Luke for getting you where you needed to be.

"You're, like, the worst personal assistant ever," Scott told you. "It's like it's your first day."

"Sorry," you shrugged, innocently. "I'll try harder."

Scott snickered, inclining his head for you to join the others. "You haven't missed much," he assured you.

You tiptoed up to the back of the group, tuning in to the Marvel rep's tidbits. You took in the poster size comic covers and other Marvel art adorning the walls. The tour moved along through the bullpen of writers and artists, occasionally stopping to introduce staff to Chris and let them chat for a couple minutes or show off their work. There was an official photographer on hand to record Cap's visit. On more than one occasion, the group stopped for a couple of photos to be taken of Chris and some of the creative minds he met with.

Probably one of the neatest things about the tour, as if being on some of the holiest of grounds a fangirl could ever traverse wasn’t enough, was when Chris met Nick Spencer. The first issue of his new series was already in print. Although it wasn't released to the public yet, Chris took a few minutes to skim through the pages. You didn't get to see, but you couldn't wait to ask what he read. While you waited for Chris' visit with Mr. Spencer to conclude, you huddled in the back, whispering with Scott about how you each had spent your mornings.

You chatted about his flight out to New York and the hotel. The two of you made plans for breakfast before tomorrow's busy premiere day began. There was a debate, but yes, Chris was allowed to join
you at breakfast. Scott told you about Chris and Renner ringing the opening bell at the Stock Exchange. You told Scott about Frank's interview and the nice people he introduced you to.

"So, it's the gym I smell on you," Scott quietly figured, taking a couple quick sniffs of the air and nodding his agreement with himself.

Your cheeks immediately burned. Your mouth dropped open, horrified. "No, I do not," you insisted, in your hushed mortification, trying to find a subtle way to do a pit check, but there were people everywhere.

"Nah, I'm just kiddin'," Scott whispered, with a smug smirk.

_That sonuvabitch._ You couldn't have scowled any deeper, as he tugged your elbow to move along with the group out of Spencer's office. You pinched the back of his arm, it was the least you could think to do to him, and the silent yelp on his face was glorious justice if you'd ever seen it. He rubbed at his arm, muttering something about if he bruised, and you stuck your tongue out at him.

"You are vicious," he decided, shaking his head at you.

"You said I smelled like the gym," you flatly reminded him.

Scott hooked an arm around your shoulders, giving you a small shake and tugging you to his side. He made a point of exaggeratedly inhaling, promising, "It's not _that_ bad. I'm sure no one else will even notice."

"You're not my favorite Evans anymore," you told him, dipping out of his hold and reach. He actually scuffed to a stop, falling a step behind everyone else. His jaw set forward, pursing his lips into a puckered frown, he nodded tightly. "That's cool." Scott caught up again, with a new resolve, telling you, "I'm gonna win you back. ...Just wait."

"Sorry, dude," you said, with a stubborn shake of your head. "Not for sale."

"Oh, come on," he grumbled, his voice dropping a few notches when the tour made its next stop. "You can't seriously say _that_ -" Scott complained, pointing at the back of his brother's head in front of the group, "is the better option. I'm way cuter."

"Every guy in Hollywood is pretty," you softly noted, tilting your head to see past the heads and shoulders in your way of seeing Chris while he said something. "You'll need a better argument than that."

Pointing a finger back at his chest, Scott declared, "Well, obviously, I'm the better dancer."

You wagged your hand in the air, with a one-shoulder shrug of indifference. "Eh. It's a toss up."

"You're kidding, right?" he scoffed, bending to your ear to be heard in your quiet conversation. "After that shameful display?"

You gave him a quizzical look. "What shameful display?"

"Didn't you watch Ellen?" Scott wondered.

When you shook your head, with your obvious confused expression, Scott took out his phone to remedy the problem. A few taps and a minute later, you were holding his phone while YouTube loaded. You're a clever girl and didn't want to get busted screwing around on the internet, so you dug
around in the front pocket of your backpack for your earbuds and plugged them in. The group went on to the next stop and Scott was your seeing eye dog, helping you navigate a turn in the hallway with a helpful hand on your elbow, while you watched.

You watched with a grin, trying not to snicker, or make any other noise, out loud. Your safety net was your lip bit firmly between your teeth. And you did so good, too. The revelation that Chris and Elizabeth were dating was cute, if not a bit surprising, news to you. That they were apparently engaged made it even more adorable. You felt such secondhand embarrassment for Lizzie when she shrieked in surprise at Chris scaring her in the bathroom. That one actually made you cover your mouth with your hand to keep from making any sad noises on her behalf. Poor thing. But you nodded, approvingly, when karma came to visit Chris in the form of the guy in the Iron Man costume scaring the crap out of him.

Aww. In the last clip, your heart melted a little at Chris stumping for Christopher's Haven. What a sweetie. You didn't know what to expect from the Last Dance segment, but you'd seen Chris at the club. He had some moves. You glanced over at Scott when the group came to the next location. He was watching you intently...maybe a little eagerly?

Your head bopped along with the music. "Last Dance" was a classic and you'd been known to shake some ass to this one of Ms. Summer's signature songs. But nothing could have prepared you for Chris pirouetting like a ballerina. No, scratch that. Like a pretty convincing ballerina. The tiny snort that escaped you came off as a sneeze. Someone walking out of an office door behind you actually was sweet enough to bless you.

You held it together, pressing your lips tightly together, to get through Single Ladies. Elizabeth was keeping up, in her own shy way. She was adorable as always. But, dear lord. When Lap Dance happened... Well, there are no words, really. You couldn't stop the cough of a laugh that came out, but thank god, Scott could. He slid over and clamped his hand over your mouth, hiding you as he turned away with you, his shoulders shuddering with his own choked laughter. You put your hand over Scott's, knowing the cackling that would come if he took it away. Your eyes were watering you were holding down so much laughter. Scott soothingly shushed you, giving the top of your head a comforting stroke, while he snickered beside you and the video wound down.

"Ohh...my god," you cried, as quietly as you could, when it was over. Handing Scott his phone back, you couldn't believe what you'd just witnessed. "Holy crap."

"I know, right?" Scott gently wheezed. "That's your boyfriend."


"I'm not claiming him, anymore," he disagreed, as you both turned back around to the rest of the group.

Ahead of you, Chris was peeking over his shoulder at you. There was a wrinkle of curiosity in his brow, before his eyebrow quirked up into something more akin to suspicion. Next to him, Megan was watching. Her expression was much easier to read. Disapproving. You and Scott both snapped to attention, instantly wiping the smiles off your faces. The tour was directed further on into the head offices and, thankfully, Chris and Megan's attentions were taken back to walking.

"Uh-oh," you mumbled.

"Yeah, that's not good," Scott solemnly agreed. "We're gonna get it."

At the end of the tour, some more PR photos were taken of Chris in front of a giant mural of some of
Marvel's biggest comic stars. There wasn't anything top secret to be seen there and the small group was allowed a selfie there, to prove they had been to one of the promised lands of fandom. You snapped one for yourself, solo. It'd be a sin not to, when your hair is as fiery today as Jean Grey's. You took a pic with Scott. Not that you expected to grab one with Chris. What the hell, right? You were already in trouble. Might as well commemorate your last moments of life, before you hit the door and find out your fate with Megan. You and Scott hammed it up with some wildly exaggerated smiles for an adorable overhead selfie.

With all the thanks given to the staff at Marvel, you filed outside with Chris, Scott, Megan, and the Marvel staff showing you out. There was a limo waiting, but Chris and Scott took a minute to smile for fans and sign autographs. You kept on walking, as if it had been just a coincidence you left the building behind the Evans boys. Using what you'd learned from Josh, you slinked around to get in the far side of the car without anyone's notice. When the others caught up with you, Scott climbed into the stretched car first, taking the space next to you on the long bench seat. Good. At least he wasn't going to let you hang alone.

You didn't have to wait long. As soon as the door shut, Megan jumped in. "What on Earth were you two up to?"

"Sorry," you sulked a little.

"It's my fault," Scott said, with a sincere peak in his brow and his fignertips touched to his heart. "Don't be mad at her."

Wow. He jumped on that grenade pretty fast. Way to go, Scott!

"It's both of you," Megan assured him, pointing a finger back and forth between the two of you.

"Did I miss something?" Chris wondered, innocently enough.

Of course, he hadn't noticed your shenanigans. He was being a responsible adult, listening respectfully and paying attention to the tour. You and Scott, on the other hand, were kind of obnoxious at times, you realized. Hindsight is 20/20. Either one of you should have known, watching those stupid videos could have waited for the car ride back to the hotel. Literally, any other time but on the private tour of Marvel Entertainment Headquarters would have sufficed. You ducked your head, more than a little ashamed.

"We were kinda screwin' around in the back there," Scott regretfully admitted. "It was kinda hard to hear from where we were, so we were watching the videos from Ellen yesterday an-"

"Yeesh," Chris winced, crushing his eyes closed and scrunching up his nose. He peeked out from the slit of one eye, seeming to worry, "Which part?"

"I think we got all of it," Scott perked up a bit.

"I think we got all of it," Scott perked up a bit.

Chris squinted, shifting his gaze between the two of you. "Is that what you were crying about?"

"I was trying not to laugh," you explained, "but it was sooo hard."

"Laughing once or twice is one thing," Megan began, "but the horseplay and the snickering... You two were up to something the whole time. This is not a vacation. Chris' appearance here was a-"

"It wasn't that bad," Chris groaned, gesturing a limp hand toward you and Scott, with a loll of his head over to Megan. "I mean, I barley noticed. I'm sure nobody else did."
"You'd be surprised," she assured him.

"It was a little boring, sometimes," Chris argued. "I mean, for Christ's sake, you guys literally stood around watching me read a comic book."

"These are professional appearances," Megan reminded everyone. "The more... goofing around that happens, the harder it's going to be to keep [y/n] under wraps. And calling her your PA?" She turned her frown from Chris to you. "If you're going to go to these events, you have to be on time."

"Aw, that's not fair," Chris turned up his hand. "She was working today."

You shrank a little into your seat. It was like watching parents fight. Well, okay. Not fight, but bicker about their poorly behaved children's antics in public.

Chris rolled his eyes, with a little snarl of an inhale and shake of his downturned head, as Megan made some valid points. Sneaking in late and screwing around with Scott really did draw attention to you. And probably didn't shine a good light on Chris either. You apologetically shrugged, when Chris lifted his eyes to yours. He flashed a quick grin before taking a deep breath and interrupting Megan's not completely unreasonable rant.

"Okay okay," he said, putting up a hand. "I think we all understand where we could'a done better today."

"I'm not kidding," Megan warned. "If you're going to keep bringing [y/n] along on these appearances-"

"I'll be good," you hurriedly promised, eager to win back Megan's approval...or at least a little patience. "Today was a fluke. I could have left a little earlier- Should have, considering the traffic around here. But it shouldn't be a problem." You put up a hand for emphasis. "My work with Frank won't get in the way of any more of Chris' events. And I'm really very sorry for-"

"We both are," Scott chimed in. "It really was my fault. I started it."

You fought the urge to throw yourself under the bus with Scott, when he patted a hand on your leg that seemed to say he had this one. Not that it looked like Megan cared who started or did what, anyway. You both had been little shits. And you all knew it. Well, except for Chris apparently.

"It's not gonna happen again," Chris simultaneously promised and insisted. "Okay? Let's just... just never mind. It's not a big deal. We got Fallon in, what, an hour and a half? Let's just get ready for that and then we can grab some dinner, alright?"

For varying reasons, everyone seemed a little reluctant to quit trying to make their own case, but you all did. The ride back to the hotel was a bit awkward. You twisted the loose end of one of the laces on your boxing gloves hanging from the backpack between your feet. Megan and Chris were both occupied by their phones. Next to you, Scott gave you a nudge and a sweet grin.

Scott leaned in, his arm pressing against yours, figuring, "I guess we need adult supervision."

You snuffled a laugh and shook your head. "I see backpack leashes in our future," you quietly agreed.

"Sorry I go you in trouble," he offered.

"Nah," you smiled, leaning to push back on his arm with your shoulder. "We got us into trouble."
Scott dropped his arm around your shoulders and gave you a squeeze. "Just think of how stylish we'd look in prison together. My keen fashion sense. Your hairstyling magic..."

"We'd be unstoppable," you agreed, holding up a hand for your half of a high five.

Your hands smacked together and Chris and Megan both looked up from whatever was so interesting on their cell phones. A small sigh of defeat left the publicist. A small snort left Chris.
Chapter 59

Back at the hotel, you, Chris, and Scott parted ways with Megan after the elevator. The three of you headed back to Chris' suite, so he could change and get his things ready for his appearance with Jimmy Fallon. While Chris took a fast shower, you and Scott hung out in the living room, slouched deep into the couch with your feet up on the edge of the coffee table. You commiserated about your scolding from Megan. Well, you could call it that, if you weren't giggling at Scott's scrunch-nosed, exaggeratedly whiny parody of Megan and the whole scene.

You sighed out the end of your laugh and it hit you. "You don't think we're really in trouble, do you?"

"Mnnah," he decided. "Wouldn't be the first time. ...Well, for me anyway. Kinda figured she'd be used to it by now."

Snickering, you considered, "Yeah, but you're his brother. What can she really do to you?"

"You're his girlfriend," he countered. "What can she really do to you?"

"I don't know," you shrugged. "Just that whole, if you're going to keep showing up for these appearances bit..."

"That did sound a little harsh," Scott agreed.

"I just don't want Chris to get in trouble," you worried.

"He's not gonna get in trouble," he groaned, rolling his eyes at you. "And Megan's just stressed out. It's the end of a long trip. So much travel and everything lately. Maybe her fuse is just a little shorter for it. She'll be alright."

You hummed and nodded. *Maybe.* But still, "I don't think I'm gonna go to Fallon."

Scott was just inching down a little further in his seat to rest his head on your shoulder, when he pouted, "Why not?"

You'd have shrugged, if he weren't using you as a pillow. Tipping your head over onto his, you explained, "What am I really gonna do there? I mean, there were all kinds of people at Marvel, so I blended in..." You snickered. "Well, would have if it weren't for you." Scott pinched at your knee and you swatted him away. "But I'll kind of stick out like a sore thumb. Like, what do I even do there? Hang out in the dressing room? Do you get a seat in the audience?"

"Yeah, or you could watch from the side of the stage," Scott suggested. "It's fun."

"Said the guy everyone knows," you smiled. "But me, it'd be like, who's that girl with the red hair with Chris' brother and publicist? You don't think it'd be weird? Part of the reason Megan's going to have a stroke, or something, is waiting for people to figure me out."

"So, maybe being a part of the entourage tonight, where people are constantly poking around to see if anyone needs anything and introduce themselves and shit, isn't the best place to hang out when you're the new girl," he put together.

"Yeah, maybe?" you wondered. "Besides, I can just watch it later."
Scott gave your leg a pat. "Maybe you should sit this one out. What are you gonna tell him?"


"Oo, good one!" Scott lit up.

"What's a good one?"

"Cramps," he said, sitting up to look at you as confused as you were. His brow wrinkled, asking, "You said cramps, right?"

"No, I said, crap," you corrected.

"Well," Scott began, "do you wanna say you're not going because of cramps...or because you crapped yourself?"

Mouth falling open in disgust, you backhanded Scott in the gut. He laughed, rubbing away the sting on his belly, while you complained, "That's so gross. I would nev-"

"Hey, you said it," he argued.

"No, I did not," you huffed.

He threw his arm around your shoulders and pulled you into his side. "Fine," he groaned. "We'll tell him it's cramps. ...Ya little stinker."

"Oh, my god," you whined, poking a finger into his side.

Scott grabbed your hand, and it kept you from trying anything else, as Chris walked into the room. "What'sa matter?" he frowned at you.

"She's not feeling good," Scott quickly explained. He held up his hand to hide the side of his mouth from you, obnoxiously loudly whispering to his brother, "Cramps."

Chris' brow rose and he simply said, "Oh."

Wow. That went well. All it took was that one, not so subtly said word and you could tell, he wasn't going to investigate it further. Not that Chris ever really struck you as squeamish- Well, okay, the whole spiders thing, technically. But you hadn't had a reason yet to broach the awkward subject of woman problems. While you had the feeling you two could talk about anything, did you really need to give him all the gory details, just for the sake of "sharing everything"? Probably not.

The one time you came close to the topic, Chris was feeling a little frisky, nuzzling and pawing at you on the couch a couple months ago. Not exactly at your most devastating seductress best, feeling bloated and crampy, you gave the cliché "not tonight" line. He gave one solid effort to say he didn't mind, if you didn't, but your weary side eye let him know it wasn't in the cards, that time. He was happy with the conciliation prize BJ you gave him and you enjoyed the cuddling on the couch after. Nothing really close to the subject has come up since.

"Yeah," Scott nodded, sympathetically rubbing his hand up and down your arm. He looked down at you, cooing, "Poor thing."

The set up was there. Time for you to do your part. You screwed on an uncomfortable face and told Chris, "I think I'm just gonna stay in tonight." You scrunched up your nose, to disappointedly add, "After the gym this morning and running around, now this. I'm beat."
Chris frowned, but seemed to understand. "Maybe a nap and hot bath'll help," he suggested.

"It might," you shrugged.

"Will you come to dinner after we're done?" he asked.

Damn. Can't skip one thing and then show up chipper at the next. Can you? According to the small frown Scott flashed you, no. He's right. *Stay in character.*

"Meh," you pouted. "I think I'm in for the night."

Chris looked a little disappointed, before turning his gaze over to Scott. "You still comin'?"

"Hell yeah, I am," he nodded, hopping up from the couch. "I gotta see this."

The brothers both smirked, stifling their laughs. Chris sidestepped over to you, between the couch and coffee table. He planted a kiss on your forehead, telling you to call if you needed something or you changed your mind. Okay, so you felt a teensy bit guilty for scamming your way out of the Jimmy Fallon taping, but technically Scott did the lying for you. Well, he started it anyway. What a helper.

After the guys left, you ran through your social media accounts, liking pics and catching up on everyone's days. While you had your phone in hand, you got a text from Frank, checking in to see if you and Chris wanted to join him for dinner, like he offered earlier. It sounded so much better than bumming around the suite all by yourself, but, if you weasled your way out of Fallon and dinner with the Evans boys because you were "sick", there's no way in hell you could get away with dinner with the Grillo clan. Reluctantly, you declined. Oh, what a tangled web you weave...

Obviously, stuck in for the night, you slipped into something a little more comfortable and read over the room service menu. You called down for a burger and fries and cheesecake to be sent up. Hey, if you were selling the cramps story, dessert always helps, right? Might as well enjoy the opportunity. To get through the next few hours, you channel surfed and messaged with your brother. Dinner hit the spot, while you kicked up your feet on the coffee table and watched the *Sex In The City* movie. Can you get anymore 'cute girl in New York' than that? You had gotten a text from Chris after he left the studio, hoping you were feeling better and letting you know where they were going to dinner, in case you had changed your mind. Looking over yourself, with your hoodie on and socked feet stretched out on the length of the couch, you decided you were doing okay. You told him to have fun.

And Scott and Chris were apparently having fun. You were just folding your legs under you on the couch, reading a completely unnecessary reminder text from your friend Victoria about Fallon starting and Chris being on tonight, when you realized it'd been awhile since you'd heard from Chris and it was obviously getting late if late night TV was airing. You settled in, eager to watch. You missed Ellen, but you wouldn't miss this.

You fangirled via text, sending screaming emojis and gifs back and forth with Victoria when they aired the movie clip Chris brought to the show. She asked you to be honest, was any of that CGI? And you proudly shook your head, no, while you typed. You'd seen it with your own two eyes. You even told her about the takes where Chris' grip slipped off the rig because of sweating in the heat. But nothing could have prepared you for the next segment.

**Vick:** What's frozen blackjack??

**You:** I have no idea
Because you didn't. And if you did, you don't know that you'd own up to it in public. When you heard it was something Chris came up with last night, you knew it wasn't with you. It was probably some gag he and Scott plotted on the plane. Your mouth hung open in curiosity, when someone brought out the funnel. It dropped in pure what the fuck?? when Chris explained what was about to happen. You clamped your hand over your mouth, watching in amused horror at the entire pitcher of ice water getting poured into the front of poor Jimmy's pants. Ohhhh my god. You doubled over into your lap with laughter. Yeah, this is definitely something those damned Evans boys came up with together.

How you got through watching the rest of the card game without hotel security coming to the door telling you to keep it down, you didn't know. Because you. were. howling! You almost missed the door opening, if you hadn't caught sight of it out of the corner of your eye. Chris came in, locking the door behind him, changed back into the casual clothes he'd left in and carrying his suit for the show. He looked at you, sitting there all red-faced and teary eyed from laughter, and then to the television. Realization spread across his face and he just dropped and shook his head, walking away to put his things in the other room, maybe looking a little embarrassed.

His appearance was over and the commercials came on. Chris said something from the bedroom, but you missed it. Turning the TV down, you asked him to repeat himself and he observed, on his way back in, "You're up late."

"Wanted to stay up to see you," you smiled, pointing to the tv.

"I see," he nodded, sitting down between you and the arm of the couch. Chris reached over and picked up your foot, pulling it into his lap while his thumb pressed deep circles into your sole. "What'd you think?"

"I think you both looked like idiots," you happily admitted.

"Thanks, babe," he nodded, with a small snort.

"Sopping wet idiots," you giggled. "But I'm sure nobody minded the suit clinging to you."

"I heard you laughing, when I came in," he smugly pointed out. "You're obviously feeling better."

"Laughter is the best medicine," you smiled.

"It's a miracle!" he proclaimed. Without missing a beat, he dryly added, "If you were actually sick."

Whaaa? Ohh, the laughing. Yeah. Maybe you were having too much fun.

"Well, I-"

"Scott dimed you out," Chris told you, before you could dig yourself any deeper.

"Traitor!"

"Dammit," you complained.

"Don't be mad at him," he swept his head. You shrank into your shoulders, at his casual scolding. "Why didn't you just tell me you didn't want to go?"

"It's not that I didn't want to go," you shrugged. "I just, you know, thought maybe I shouldn't."

"Why shouldn't you?" Chris questioned. He nudged for you to take your foot back and give the
other. "I thought the whole point of you coming on the trip was t-"

"Well, after today with Megan," you began to explain, but Chris just grimaced and shook his head.

"What does Megan have to do with anything?" he cut in, his fingers stilling on you foot.

Your hand went up at the obvious answer. "Because she's mad that me and Scott were goofing around? I'm already in trouble with her. I thought maybe it'd be better if I didn't go and it'd give her a break."

"A break from what?" he frowned, begrudgingly going back to his massage.

"From stressing out about whether or not Scott and I are gonna misbehave or draw attention to ourselves," you answered.

"Oh, come on," he rolled his eyes. "You're not in trouble, babe, I promise."

"Well, she's right, isn't she?" you pressed. "We were saying, if I go to Fallon, there's all those people poking around and then what would I do? Would I get a seat in the audience or do I-"

"Who's 'we'?" Chris shook his head, clearly confused. "You and Megan decided?"

"No, me and Scott." You sighed. "He said there's always people checking on you when you're there and introducing themselves, so what would we say when someone asked who I was? And Megan was just saying about how much harder it could be to keep me a secret, if-"

"You're not a secret," he corrected. "We're just trying to stay low key so we keep our privacy as long as we can."

"Which is fine," you agreed. "I like it that way. But you were the one that said the press tour might give it away. So, what's the harm in me dipping out of you taping Fallon? I'm doing us a favor. Besides, I didn't miss anything." You gestured to the TV. "I caught up."

"No," Chris cocked his head, looking at the rest of the show on the television. "You missed the show. And you missed dinner after the show with Jimmy and his wife. Because you faked cramps."

"Okay," you conceded, meekly, "when you say it like that..."

"Not like that," he disagreed. "Exactly that." Chris shifted to look at you, pulling his knee up when he twisted into the corner of the couch and putting his arm up along the back. "What'd you think you were doing?" You were about to try and climb up out of the hole you'd dug, but he went on. "You know, I bring people along with me on these trips because I want the company. These tours get exhausting, real fast for me, and it's nice to know I've got someone in my corner that I can just relax and have some fun with. That's why Scott's here. That's why I wanted you to come along. I want to share this with the people I love and, maybe, to have something about all this seem a little normal. And if it's not what you thought, or you don't like it, just tell me. I won't be mad."

"Noo," you promised, reaching up to put your hand on his arm. You pillowed your head there, earnestly saying, "No, that's not it at all. These trips have been incredible. I don't want you to think I'm ungrateful, unhappy, or...or not interested, it's just, you know, maybe I am drawing attention when I shouldn't be. Maybe me being around for every event is gonna get us caught." It occurred to you, "Maybe I just don't know how to do both; to be there and be under the radar. I can admit, sometimes, I get a little excited sometimes."

"You don't have to be under the radar," he assured you. "I want you to be excited about this stuff
and have fun."

"But Megan's mad because I-"

"Part of her job is to worry," Chris shook his head. "She does a lot of things, but the big one is maintaining my public image. And if I start dating someone, yeah, her job gets more complicated, because she's managing the usual PR plus trying to reign in the media and working with the other PR camp about staying ahead of it all. I've set the bar pretty high for my privacy, when I can. And, yeah, she probably is a little relieved you didn't come out tonight, but not because she's mad at you or whatever."

"So, again," you figure, "I'm back on the 'good behavior bandwagon'. Because I forgot to hire anyone to work in my PR camp."

Chris chuckled and swept his head. "When it finally comes out, she's gonna be in overtime, because she's not only maintaining my image, she's handling yours. She'll take care of it. Believe me, she may seem a little...stressed right now, but she's a pro. I've been with her for years, because she's good at her job. But her job isn't to keep you from enjoying yourself. That's not what she means by it. She's just looking out for her client's best interests."

"That's a little cliché," you smirked.

"For our best interests," he corrected, with a half-roll of his eyes over at you. There was a warm grin in the side of Chris' mouth. "Don't come to an event, if you don't want to. Don't hide, worrying about what other people will think. And don't make up some bullshit about cramps, or whatever. We're in this together. When we get found out, we get found out. Come along with me. Have fun and don't feel bad about enjoying yourself." His fingers stretched out to stroke gently up and down the back of your neck, and he added, "But maybe you and Scott shouldn't sit next to each other, okay?"

You snickered at his smile and playfully raised eyebrow. "Okay," you agreed.

In the morning, Scott came over for breakfast. Chris let him in while you were still putting up your hair in the bathroom and waiting on Room Service. Through the open door to the bedroom, you overheard them chatting about their respective upcoming days. When you were finished, you smiled your greeting to Scott, as he sat in the chair in the corner of the room. He smiled and waved you over, while Chris was talking about a couple appearance and interview obligations he had for the day. Crossing the room to answer Scott's beckoning, he opened up his arms to you for a hug. You bent over to meet his reaching arms, falling into his lap when he gave you a tug.

Scott wrapped you up in a crushing bear hug and, pressing his cheek to yours, dramatically pleaded, "Don't be mad at mee!" You pinched his side, calling him a traitor and trying your best to frown at him. He tickled under your arm, telling you, "He was on to you already."

"You were?" you pouted, looking over your shoulder at Chris by the dresser.

Chris nodded, while Scott explained, "He cornered me in the car after Fallon."

"Nobody cornered you in the car," Chris rolled his eyes over hard.

But Scott insisted, "He threatened to hit me, if I didn't talk." He smoothed a hand over his own cheek. "I mean, this handsome face... What was I supposed to do?"

You lovingly patted his cheek, with an exaggerated, "You poor thing!"
"Nobody was gonna hit you," Chris groaned. He pointed a finger at his brother, adding, "But you're working your way to it, right now."

"Ya see?" Scott threw out a hand at Chris. "He's an animal!" Scott raked his eyes up and down him, holding you a little closer, as if you could offer some kind of protection. "You brute."

You and Chris had a laugh. A moment later, Scott gave up and smiled along and you offered, "Sorry to put you on the spot."

"Nah," he dismissed the apology, with a scrunch of his nose. "No worries. Like I said, he already suspected something was up."

"How'd you know?" you wondered, giving Chris a curious look.

"Just seemed kind of sudden," he shrugged. "One minute you were all smiles and then-"

He shrugged again, obviously not needing to go on. You were about to open your mouth and compliment his keen detective skills, when there was a knock on the door. Breakfast had arrived and Scott gave you a pinch on the ass to shoo you from his lap. You let out a small yelp and jumped up, rubbing the stinging spot. Scott laughed at you, asking, as he stood, if you wanted him to rub your butt to make it better. Chris argued it was his job and you told them both the only way to appease you was for one of them to answer the damn door and let your pancakes in.

You had a good part of the day to kill, before you had to meet up with Frank before the premier. Chris had some appearances to make and you were going along to keep Scott company. You both promised to be on your best behaviors. Scott even held up his hands to prove he didn't cross his fingers. Chris seemed pleased and figured Megan would be relieved as well.

Surprisingly enough, you and Scott did behave. Okay, fine. There were a few moments you two were snickering together, but that was the worst of it. Megan didn't have much of a side eye to give you, let alone anything to complain about. You and Scott slipped outside, while Chris made a visit to a charity screening of the film by the New York Daily News. You treated him to a shaved ice from a food truck a few doors down from the theater. That was a little disappointing for Chris. He frowned when he got back into the car, but you shared what was left of yours on the way back to the hotel.

All prettied up, in a black wrap front, sleeveless top over a pair of slim white pants and black, strappy stilettos, you hurried off while Chris was waiting on his bother and relaxing before he had to leave. You passed Scott in the hall on your way to the elevators and his way to your suite. He gave you a lascivious growl and a smack on the ass, as you went by. Down a couple floors, Frank let you in, with a smile and an approving once over.

"Don't you look ravishing," he complimented. "I'm gonna have the best lookin' date on the carpet."

"Thanks, boss," you grinned, taking your bag off you shoulder to start unpacking your things to style Frank's hair.

"That Evans kid is missing out," Frank teased, walking over to the table in the room to pick up his glass from an early dinner to take a drink. He turned back to you. "D'you eat something? Hungry?"

Aww. So thoughtful. Best work dad ever.

"No," you promised. "I'm good. Thanks."

Grillo asked how the visit to Marvel went and you told him the mildly embarrassing truth. He chuckled and shook his head, while you didn't have a comb to it for a minute. There wasn't much
strength behind it, when he told you should've known better. But you blushed a little anyway at the soft scolding. He considered, at least you had fun. And that made you grin again.

You rode along with Frank in his car over to Brookfield Place for the next, and last, screening for your whirlwind adventure on the Civil War press tour. It was exciting to be back with Frank. You'd missed him at the Asian and European stops. But damn if it wasn't a little bittersweet. After all, this was it. Tomorrow, you were headed home to Cincinnati for a quick visit before heading back to Los Angeles and Chris was staying in New York to finish up his promo responsibilities for the movie.
Chapter 60

Before you guys got out of the car at Brookfield Place, you took a selfie with Frank. Outside, the crowd was as enthusiastic as the ones before. You inched along in the background, as Frank made his media appearances. Keeping an eye out for Chris, you spotted some of the other principle cast. You made sure Frank's hair was perfect, before he stepped out for the photoline. When you moved out of the way, you felt a gentle tug at your elbow and smiled at seeing Scott reaching out for your attention from the crowd of guests nearby.

"You busy?" he worried. With a quick glance back at Frank, you shook your head. "Good," Scott smiled. "C'mere for a minute. It'll be quick, I promise."

You followed along, as Scott led you by the hand. You didn't go far, only a few yards into the mix of people. He stopped, smiling back at you as he inclined his head. Scott waved his hand down you, presenting you like a prize to a small group of people.

"Guys, this is her," Scott beamed. "This is [y/n]." He looked back to you, explaining, "This is my dad, Robert."

"Oh," you blinked, mouth gaped for a moment, before offering your hand and hoping your surprise wasn't too evident. You didn't know this was going to happen and were thankful that no one else could hear how fast your heart was suddenly beating. "It's so nice to meet you."

You were introduced to his wife and their children. Scott watched, with a little smirk in the corner of his mouth, apparently amused by you nervous titter. You were relieved you'd put in some effort to look good, knowing you'd be near Frank for the important part of the night. Everyone was all smiles, and it made you feel confident you were making a decent first impression.

There was a hand at your back and you twisted over your shoulder to see Frank had found you. "Hey, there you are," he grinned.

Ever the social Italian, Frank wasted no time getting to introductions. He lit up, realizing you were with part of the Evans clan. Of course, he talked you up a bit, gushing about how lucky he and the show were to get you back under contract and complimenting Robert on the man he'd raised and what a pleasure it was to work with Chris. Frank was a charmer. But it was also time for him to head inside, and that meant you too. You politely excused yourself, getting sent away with a squeeze of your hand and a peck at your cheek from Scott and smiles and waves from his family.

Walking inside with Grillo, he gave you a sly grin, teasing, "So, you're meeting the family, huh?"

"I met his mom before the LA premier," you nodded.

His brow rose up, somewhere between impressed and mischievous. "Oh, yeah?" he mused. "Sounds serious."

"Serious?" you chuckled. "Like the heart attack I almost had before meeting his mom?" You jerked a thumb over your shoulder. "Or like the one I just had because I didn't know that I was meeting his dad tonight? Yeah, might be serious." You groaned out a sigh. "God, that was awkward. I just stood there like a deer in the headlights."

Frank laughed, shaking his head. He dismissed your worry with a swat of his hand at the air, saying, "Ahh, I'm sure they love ya. You got nothing to worry about."
"Thanks, Frank," you blushed.

You watched the movie with Frank, keeping tabs on Chris and his family with quick glances their way during the screening. You'd waved hello to Mackie and Sebastian from your seat before the theater lights went down. Sebastian had mouthed something you couldn't really make out. Maybe something about finding them after the show? Whether or not that was it, you knew you'd get a chance to catch up afterwards.

There was a reception after the movie. You moved around the room with Frank for a bit, grabbing a cocktail and some hors d'oeuvres while you circulated. It was becoming old hand for you to be greeted warmly by the Russos and the others at these events. You were gonna miss the new familiarity of the premiers, just when you really found your stride at them. Oh, well. It was fun while it lasted and you'd gotten invaluable experience to help you be ultra comfortable when you would be working red carpets for Frank down the road.

You left Frank's side when he started talking to the Russos about his upcoming project in Beijing. While they were considering the production aspects for the stunt work, you were waved over by Sebastian and Chris, in almost perfect synchronous. You were welcomed by both with warm hugs and smiles. Sebastian asked how the night was going and apologized, as if he needed to, for not being able to see you before the movie began. Chris mentioned that his dad had said you all met before the movie started and you nodded, telling him how nice they were. Obviously skipping over your nervousness for the surprise meeting. He seemed pleased to hear you got along, however briefly, without him and said he hoped you didn't mind meeting them for a late dinner at the hotel. Of course, you didn't.

You floated around the reception for awhile with Chris. You were pretty sure you had managed a few minutes of conversation with just about everybody there. When you came across Elizabeth Olsen, you were sure to thank her one more time for letting you borrow those shoes in London. Ever an angel and gracious, Lizzie waved it away and smiled, assuring she was happy to help and she would do it again, anytime. With dinner plans waiting, you and Chris didn't spend as much time at the reception as you had the other events. It felt a little rushed, as you tried to keep track that you said goodnight to everyone you could.

On the way out past Frank, he held you up for a quick hug and a charming reminder of how lovely you looked. He thanked you for your work and invited you back to Mendez with him in the morning. Your flight out didn't leave until the early afternoon and he knew it. The only excuse you had not to was that you would be being lazy. And that excuse never flies with Frank Grillo. Chris was off to Good Morning America first thing tomorrow, so you didn't have any other plans for the morning. Frank's expectant stare made you cave and you planned to meet in the lobby at 8, giving both of you plenty of time to recover after the Marvel reception and the rest of your night with the Evans family. Naturally, Grillo couldn't resist a jab at Chris, pointing out how nice you looked in black and white...just like Crossbones did. Chris nodded his agreement, with a tightly pursed smile that said he wasn't going to get baited into Frank's trap...this time.

Josh was waiting for you by the door. He escorted you off to the side to get into the car, while Chris worked his way across the fans and photographers still outside. Back at the hotel, the two of you caught up with Scott and the rest of the family in the restaurant foyer, before being shown to a table. You were on your best behavior at dinner, mindful not to curse with Chris' younger siblings across the table and sticking to a glass of wine with your meal, hoping to not come off as a lush. Your stories about work and your family were cleaned up a little, trying not to let any embarrassing details slip and hoping Chris' dad's side of the family was as won over as Lisa's side seemed to have been.
You even shared some photos from your phone, when Robert asked Chris about how the
international part of the promoting had gone.

Chris and Scott were both sweethearts with their younger siblings. It was a delightful family meal
and when dessert and coffees were gone, you were a little disappointed the night was ending.
Everyone agreed you had to make time to visit Boston. It was official- now everyone had invited
you. And when you finally got to go, they would be eager to show you around and have you over
anytime. You thanked them for the offer, promising to take them up on it...as soon as your schedule
allowed it, that is. Before you parted ways for the night, you heard again how nice it was to meet you
and accepted everyone's wishes for safe travels while you worked this summer. While Robert and his
wife were being so kind, Chris stood by, with his hands comfortably stuck in his pockets and an
admiring grin on his lips.

On the elevator ride up to your floor, Scott nudged your arm with his elbow, confidently deciding, "I
think they liked you, kid. I think you're gonna be alright."

"You think?" you, for some reason, still worried, chewing on the side of your lip.

"They loved you," Chris assured you, giving your hand in his a squeeze. "Everybody does."

"I was so nervous," you admitted. "I didn't know they'd be here and-"

"You didn't tell her?" Scott frowned, looking past you to Chris, as the elevator doors opened to your
floor.

"Of course, I did," Chris insisted. Turning the corner into the hall, his brow wrinkled in confusion,
he muttered, "Didn't I?"

You shook your head. "Don't think so," you told him. "I think I'd have remembered."

"You did look a little surprised," Scott recalled, pocketing his hands, while you all stopped.

"I'm so sorry," Chris frowned. "I swear I thought-"

"No worries," you grinned, shyly. "There's a lot going on lately. If you remember everything else on
this crazy tour, you're doing pretty good."

"You guys really should talk more," Scott snickered. He stepped in to peck a kiss to your cheek.
"But, seriously, they loved you," he nodded, confidently.

Scott and Chris hugged, as Chris said to you, "See? Told ya."

You got an extra goodbye hug from Scott, telling you to have a good trip home tomorrow. You
promised you would and you guys split up to call it a night. Back in your room, you stepped out of
your shoes as soon as you were in the door. With a dramatic sigh, you shuffled into the bedroom to
change. Behind you, Chris was chuckling.

"What's that for?" he invited, as he diverted to stand by the dresser and unfasten his watchband.

"Tired," you answered, dropping heavily onto the end of the bed.

He chuckled, watching you toss your shoes one at a time to land by your suitcase. "Last stop," he
reminded you, shrugging his jacket off his shoulders. "It's all over now."

"You've still got a couple days," you pointed out, falling back to lay on the bed, with your feet on the
"Yeah," he nodded, putting his jacket on its hanger, "but I'll be home Saturday."

"The end is near," you ominously said, and he chuckled.

"What are you going to do with your long weekend home?" Chris wondered.

"At this rate," you figured, "sleep."

Chris laughed, toeing off his shoes. "You're coming home Sunday night, right?" he double checked.

"Back to the grind on Monday at the salon," you said, giving a wobbly thumbs up before letting gravity drag your arm back down to the mattress.

"So, how long you in town for?" he grinned.

You tipped your head back to see him in front of the closet. "Huh?"

Chris snickered at the side of your lip snarled up in confusion, before he explained, "Well, now that the press tour is finally ending, everything's getting reversed." He pointed at you. "I'll be at home and you'll be flying all over, working with Frank."

"That is kinda weird, when you put it that way," you realized, with a hum. "Yeah, but you'll have plenty of stuff to do while I'm gone."

There was a noncommittal pull in the side of his mouth. "Probably just go back to Boston," he shrugged. "I don't really have anything else planned for this year."

"You bum," you disapprovingly shook your head, pulling yourself up.

"Hey," he frowned. "I've done plenty lately. I deserve a break just as much as the next guy."

"How long's your break gonna be?" you asked, going over to your suitcase.

"How long are you gone?" he threw out, with a crooked smile.

You stood up from your suitcase, looking over your shoulder at him. "Seriously?" you gaped. "My god, how long were you planning on being in Boston?"

Chris chuckled, hanging the rest of his suit in his garment bag. His eyebrows rose, as he admitted, "Probably most 'a the summer. Maybe longer. Depends on how things go with you."

"Well, that inspires confidence in our relationship," you sarcastically groaned.

You were flipping open your suitcase, when Chris' balled up t-shirt hit you in the back and fell to the floor.

"That's naht what I meant," he complained, "and you know it."

"Hey," you warned, wagging a finger at him, as you dipped to pick up the shirt and toss it back to him.

Chris caught the shirt and flapped it out to fold and tuck away in his suitcase, while he went on, "I meant since you're gonna be in Beijing, or wheh'evah, I might as well spend time with the family. It's been awhile since I took any really time there that wasn't the holidays lately."
You smiled at the idea. "That sounds nice," you nodded. "You'll be busy and havin' so much fun, you won't even know I'm gone."

"Oh, believe me," he assured you. "I'll know."

Chris was up before you, but not by much. He quietly apologized, when he thought it was his moving around and getting ready for his appearance on Good Morning America that woke you. He hadn't heard your alarm go off, while he was in the shower. You missed your chance for a quick breakfast with him, since he was leaving before you, but you had already planned on getting breakfast downstairs, instead of a wait on Room Service possibly making you late.

By the time you would finish up at the gym and get back to the hotel, you'd have just enough time to get a shower and get to the airport. You sent Chris off with a kiss and wish for him to have a good show. He told you to have a good flight and to give his regards to Frank.

Frank met you in the lobby at 8, as promised. With your gloves and wraps tucked away in your backpack, you guys caught a cab back up to Mendez Boxing Club. Walking in the door for the second time, you felt pretty comfortable. There was no sense of the flutter of shyness you'd had before about not knowing anyone. You were figuring out fast, when you walked in with Frank anywhere, you were automatically welcomed like you were old friends. You just might be becoming a little Italian by osmosis.

Terry was there to train with Frank. You stuck close to them, for the most part. Your sparring partner from the other day was on a day off from the gym, but you had enough routines from your LA sessions with Frank that you wandered off a couple times to do your own thing. You were getting pretty good with a few of the jump rope tricks and the heavy bag was always there for you, when a training partner wasn't. You got along just fine.

When it was time for you to leave, Frank was still at it, going a few rounds with Terry. What can you say? The man's a beast. You leaned on the side of the ring, saying your goodbyes.

"You headed out, sweetheart?" came Frank's breathy question, as he spotted you near the turnbuckle and juked away from Terry's cross.

"If I leave now," you said, "I'll have just enough time to get a shower and be packed before my flight."

Grillo waved a gloved hand for Terry to stop and came over to hang on the ropes, reaching down to give your cheek a soft nudge of his gloved hand. "You alright getting back to the hotel by yourself?"

"I know where it is," you promised, tipping away when he gave you a couple more playful taps, egging you on.

"I'm just sayin'," he shrugged, with a smirk. "A pretty girl wondering around New York, alone..."

"I feel pretty good about it," you smiled, with a firm nod. "New York is full of superheroes, right?"

"And villains," he cautioned, pointing at her with a gloved hand and a knowing rise of his brow.

"Crossbones is from New York," you noted, pointing back up at him. "All I gotta do is say I work for the big guy himself and they'll let me pass."

Frank winked, giving you a broad smile of approval. "That's my girl," he nodded. He gave you
another pat on the head, telling you, "Have a safe trip home, kid."

Being back home in Cincinnati was a relief. Once you dropped into the passenger seat of your mom's car, you could feel all the stress of schedules and traveling for the press tour just melting away. Your mom was eager to hear all about your trip, but she had promised herself she wouldn't ask until everyone got together at your parents' house for dinner. She didn't want you to have to repeat everything. But she couldn't help gushing on the ride home about the photos you had forwarded while you were still on the tour.

Back in your old room, you unpacked a few things to get settled in for the weekend. Your mom had taken a half day from work to pick you up. Your dad would fire up the grill for dinner after work for when your brother and his wife came over. You helped your mom in the kitchen, seasoning burgers for the grill later and preparing a salad and a couple other side dishes and a dessert.

Over dinner and dessert, you answered questions about your recent travels. You passed around your phone, when there was a picture or two you could use for show and tell of a story. Everyone had a laugh at the video Chris made of you and that adorable guard at the Palace. Your mom and sister-in-law practically swooned over the description of the private dinner you had in London. Your dad was relieved, and said as much, when that story didn't end in a proposal. Everyone laughed again, and you assured him that with all the work the two of you did keeping you busy and definitely not having been dating long enough, he had nothing to worry about.

When you figured everyone had to have had enough of hearing about the press tour, you turned the conversation toward them. The weather was nice and you had had dinner out on the patio in the backyard. Everyone was comfortable in the cushioned chairs of the wrought iron dining set that you all just stayed put for another hour after you'd finished your stories just soaking up what everyone else had been up to since your last visit. It was good to be home.
Chapter 61

The weekend at home went by just as fast as you were afraid it could. But you made the most of every minute while you were there. You caught up with some friends for a couple nights and got a pedicure with your mom and your sister-in-law one afternoon. You had your fill of home cooking and local favs. As much as you hated to leave to go back to work, you still could smile contentedly on the plane ride back to the coast.

You picked up Archie on your way home from the airport. He was delighted to see you again, as always. And when you got home for the night, you sent Chris a message to say you were both there, safe and sound. He called a minute later, asking how your trip had been. You were happy to report your brother and his wife were expecting the first grandbaby in the family sometime in November and that your family had made the same offer as his; that Chris had to find time to come out to Cincinnati with you on your next trip home. He agreed, that sounded fair.

You were back to work at the salon on Monday morning. With all your available hours booked for that week, you barely realized how fast time flew. Victoria reminded you about your girls’ night out, in the middle of the afternoon, to go see Civil War together. She wanted to be sure you hadn’t forgotten, when her last customer of the day had her a few minutes behind and it looked like you might leave for the day without her. Of course, you could never forget and assured her you were just heading in the back to get a break from the bustling salon until she was ready.

While Victoria was finishing her last appointment for the afternoon, you were perched on the counter in the back room near the laundry machines and texting with Chris. You told him you were off to the movies after work. When he asked what you were going to see, you told him it was "some modern drama about friends torn apart by a love triangle" and then sent a picture of the Civil War movie poster.

Flip Cup Hero: Very funny

You: Had ya goin there for a second there, didn't I?

Flip Cup Hero: Yes. You're very clever.

You snickered at his obvious sarcasm.

You: I hope you know I expect a full refund if this movie sucks...

Flip Cup Hero: I'm not reimbursing for snacks

You: Fair enough

Flip Cup Hero: How many times are you going to watch that movie?

You: Hold on...I'm trying to divide my paycheck by the price of a matinee ticket to find out how many times I can afford...

Flip Cup Hero: Dear god...I'm dating a fangirl

You chewed on your lip to keep from laughing, shaking your head, while you waited for the message the rolling ellipsis said was coming.
Flip Cup Hero: I've been warned about people like you

You huffed, with a small, passing frown.

You: Just remember who asked who out first

You: This is all your fault

Flip Cup Hero: Guilty

Flip Cup Hero: I guess I'm stuck with you.

Ha! He's stuck with you. What a dork.

You: For.ev.er

Victoria popped he head around the corner, asking, "All set?"

Sliding off the counter, you shouldered your purse and nodded. You drove separately to the theater, so neither of you had to go back for your car later after the movie. With some popcorn and a drink, you settled into your seats just before the previews started. For a 4 o'clock weekday showing, the theater was practically full. You couldn't help the tiny smile curling up the corners of your mouth, excited for Chris and the others that people were so eager for the movie, and proud that you had even just a small part in helping make it happen.

There were a few times Victoria's hand clutched your arm, silently letting you know something amazing had happened or she wasn't expecting something, as if you weren't paying attention. At the end, after the casual fans had left and you and the other true believers had seen the end of the credits, the two of you gushed about the movie on your way to the parking lot. You headed off to a nearby restaurant for a light dinner and you gave Victoria some inside tidbits about what some of Chris' cast mates were like in real life.

When the night was over, you messaged Chris, while you took a lazy walk with Archie.

You: Back from seeing CW for the eleventieth time. Still as good as the first time

Flip Cup Hero: lmfao "eleventieth"? Sounds like you need an intervention!

You: You took me to the other three dozen showings. You're an enabler

Flip Cup Hero: Three dozen doesn't sound right

Flip Cup Hero: You sure you're not exaggerating a little?

You: I stand by my math

Flip Cup Hero: You're not tired of seeing it yet?

Really? How is that even a question?

You: NEVER!!!

You: It's a cinematic masterpiece!! Bury me with a copy of this movie!!

Flip Cup Hero: Lol been drinking tonight?
You: Sober as a super soldier ;)

Flip Cup Hero: Brb gonna google “fangirls anonymous” and find you a meeting...

You: Shudder to think the search results that might get you

Flip Cup Hero: Yeah. Better not. But seriously, you might have a problem;

You snickered to yourself, thinking about your next comment.

You: I might. Have you seen the guy in that movie??

While the ellipses told you Chris was typing, you found a gif of Liz Lemon fanning herself to send him.

Flip Cup Hero: Actually, heard that guy's kind of a douche

You laughed out loud and, beside you, Archie looked up at you and wagged his tail a little faster at your enthusiasm.

You: Who cares! He's fucking hot!

Flip Cup Hero: Your standards are that low huh?

You: OR are they that high?

Flip Cup Hero: I heard his muscles are all CGI anyway...

Flip Cup Hero: Either way, sounds like I'm lucky you settled for me;)

You: Pretty lucky;)

You were back in to your LA routine. On the days you worked a late shift at the salon, you met up with Frank at the gym in the morning before work. The nights you got off in the afternoon or early enough in the evening, you spent with Chris. You went out to dinner with him and his brother and a couple of their friends one night, and spent a couple free afternoons with Chris and Scott just hanging out. Chris came by your place a couple nights to relax and take long walks with you and Archie, even if you helped close the salon. He figured you guys got to spend more time together if he came down to meet you and Archie by the time you'd be home, since the salon is closer to your place than it is to his. It was nice to be back in the casualness of being home and just hanging out, after the rush and craziness of the press tour.

It was about the middle of May, the press tour was a couple weeks behind you and you were working the first half of the day at the salon. In between clients, you took a peak at your phone and saw you'd missed a call from Frank, but that he'd sent you a message soon after, instead of leaving a voicemail.

Frank fucking Grillo: Call me back when you're free. Got some news for you.

Catching a glimpse of your next appointment walking through the door, you messaged back that you were at work until 3, but you'd call when you were done. Later on, you saw Frank's reply that he'd be close to Culver City and named a nearby tavern to meet him at when you got out of work for a
little business meeting. You sent a message to Chris saying you'd be a bit late to meet him and you'd
let him know when you were done with Frank. Chris was going to meet you at your apartment to see
you before you left with Frank for New York tomorrow.

You'd been to Oldfield's before, for an after work cocktail with some of the other girls at the salon. It
was just a short drive from work. The crowd was filling in for happy hour, and you found Frank on a
stool at the far side of the bar. He waved you over with a smile, pointing down to the barstool beside
him, as you gave a nod to say you'd seen him. You slid onto the stool as Frank lifted his hand for the
bartender's attention. You two exchanged a quick greeting and smiles. Frank had a practically full
glass of rosé in front of him, and you knew he hadn't been kept waiting long. You ordered a glass for
yourself and, while the bartender was away, asked the boss what was up.

"Got some good news yesterday," he smiled, proudly. "I was a little too busy to get in touch with
you then, but..." Frank shrugged. "Better late than never."

"Do tell," you grinned, eager to hear.

"I got a call from Joe," he began. "We got another movie greenlit."

"No shit?" you marveled, nodding your thanks to the bar man, when he sat down your drink.

Frank lifted his glass and you grabbed yours to toast with him, as he told you, "Netflix picked up
Wheelman; the one that we floated around Cannes." Your glasses clinked together. "We should start
shooting this fall."

"That's fantastic!" you beamed. "Congrats, Frank."

He nodded and noted, "And to you. Adding another paying gig to the schedule."

"I do like getting paid," you joked, with a thoughtful pout and tilt of your head.

Frank chuckled and took a drink, as you tasted your wine. "And it gets better," he teased. You told
him not to hold back and he added, "You're not gonna believe where we're shooting."

"I wasn't expecting Beijing before," you said. "I kinda feel like I should say someplace as equally
exotic and unexpected, just because."

"Right?" He laughed and nodded. "How does Boston strike you?"

someplace like Beijing again, I wouldn't have picked it."

You both laughed and Frank joked, "What? You disappointed?"

"Hardly," you disagreed. "Actually, its kind of funny, because Chris was just saying how he was
probably gonna spend the summer in Boston, since I'm going to be in China with you."

"That's good," Frank nodded, "because it might be a short turn around from China depending on
when we wrap. We're hoping to start filming in September. If he's going to be in Boston, he
shouldn't have too much to say about your traveling for work again so soon."

"True," you agreed. "In fact, all I've heard from him and his family is how I need to go to Boston.
Guess that solves that."

"It's a great town," he told you. "You're gonna love it."
After your celebratory drink/business meeting with Frank, you called Chris on your way home. You didn't tell him about Boston, but you told him that Frank had another project in the works. You told him you were on your way home and the two of you could talk more about it later. Chris told you he was heading out to his car and would see you at your place soon. You got home with a little time to spare for a quick walk with Archie. By the time Chris arrived, you were sitting on the front steps of your building and Archie was lying in the grass beside you. You let go of Archie's leash, when Chris turned down the walk to the door. He happily greeted your pup, taking hold of his leash to bring him along with him to see you.

Walking into your apartment, you told Chris, "You're not going to believe where I'm going with Frank. I'll give you three guesses."

"For that project you mentioned before?" he checked, unclipping the lead from Archie's collar and hanging it up by the door. You nodded and Chris' brow wrinkled with thought. "I'm guessing it's not China again." You shook your head. "Have I been there before?"

With a discerning squint in one eye, you said, "Pretty sure you have. And more than once."

You playful little devil, you. Of course he's been to Boston. But it was kinda fun to watch him try and work it out.

"Someplace I've been and more than once," Chris mused to himself, taking a seat on the couch. "Have I been there or have I worked there?"

"Yes," you nodded. "Both."

"Okay then," he shrugged. "Atlanta?"

"Nope," you shook your head, sitting down at the other end of the couch to face him. "It's a trick," he decided. "You're not actually going anywhere. He's filming in LA and you're going to be here while I'm in Boston."

You shook your head again, smiling. He was so close!

"I've filmed in a lot of places," he pointed out. "This could actually go more than three guesses."

"But you only have one left," you reminded him, holding up a finger for a visual aid.

"I give up," he shook his head, raising his hands in defeat and letting them fall into his lap. "There's too many possibilities."

"You give up?" you double checked.

"I give up," he bowed his head.

"Boston."

"What?"


Chris' face lit up and, with a bounce, he turned in his seat to face you. "Are you serious?"
You nodded, laughing at his new enthusiasm. "Deadly serious," you promised.

"No shit," he laughed. "That's awesome! For how long?"

Now even Archie was excited, popping up from his space on the floor to nose at Chris' arm. "I don't know," you shrugged. "Too early to say, but it'll be a few weeks at least, I'd guess. I don't know yet if it's part in Boston or all in Boston."

"But Boston is Boston," he figured. "It's gonna be awesome. I'll get to show you around, everyone'll get to see you. We can catch some Sahx games down at Fenway."

"It's not a vacation," you smiled, holding up a hand to slow him down. "I've still got a job to do there."

"I don't care," he swept his head, sliding down the couch to wrap his arm around your shoulders and pull you closer. "You're gonna be filming in Bahstin. That's all I'm hearin'."

You filled Chris in on the little bit you knew about the Wheelman script, while the two of you shuffled through takeout menus to decide on dinner. You were headed out of town for a few days and hadn't bothered to got to the store lately because of it. Waiting on some Chinese food to be delivered, Chris and Archie followed you to your room so you could finish packing for your next trip with Frank. While you folded clothes and piled them up in your little rolling suitcase, Chris sat on the floor, with his back against the wall under your window and Archie's head on his leg, watching and chatting with you. While he was talking, you picked up on him combing his hand through his hair a little more than usual and mentioned it.

"Something wrong with your hair?" you wondered. "You've been fussing with it a lot."

"Hmm?" He caught on to his hand being in his hair and gave it a curious look. "No. I don't know."

You had to snicker. "Dry scalp or something?" you checked.

"No," he shrugged. "It's just getting long."

"That's not long, hon," you shook your head.

"I know," he snorted. "It's just in that weird spot between short and long. You know what I mean?"

"I know," you understood. "Why don't you get it cut again? Probably due for a trim. Especially since you're going to Vegas for that Music Awards thingy."

He made a lazy groan and rolled his eyes. "I shoulda just shaved it off," he complained.

"Want me to shave your head?" you offered, with a chuckle.

"No," he emphatically said.

"I don't know," you playfully sang. "You with a buzzcut is pretty hot."

"Oh, yeah?" he perked up, with a mischievous smile.

You innocently shrugged, coyly averting your eyes and busying yourself with flattening a few items smooth in your luggage. "Mayyybe."

"I should let you cut it all off," he figured.
"Fine," you decided. "We'll do it now."

"Now?" he balked, his brow rising in doubt.

"Why not?" you shrugged. "It'd take like two shakes. Be done before dinner gets here."

"Two shakes?" he questioned.

"Yeah," you nodded. "Two shakes of a lamb's tail? You never heard that?"

"I've heard that," he chuckled. "Just haven't for a long time."

"My mom says it," you told him.

"Mine, too," he laughed. Chris bent his knee up a little, signaling Archie to move. "Well, let's do it then," he said, standing up and dusting a hand over the back of his shorts.

"You're gonna let me cut your hair?" you marveled.

Chris stopped, giving you confused look. "What? You just said you coul-"

"I can," you assured him. "It's just, you know, I haven't had anything to do with cutting your hair since last summer..."

"Worked out okay then," he reasoned, with a casual shrug and innocent grin.

And then there you were, clipping a towel around Chris Evans' shoulders and ready to go at his hair with a trimmer in hand, while he sat in one of your dining table chairs in the middle of your little kitchen. You were right. It didn't take long to do. In fact, you had just finished sweeping up the floor when the delivery driver knocked at your door. Perfect timing.
Chapter 62

Back on a plane, for the umpteenth time in the last few weeks, you debated trying to singlehandedly bring back the glamour of air travel, when Mad Men styles were in every seat and "stewardesses" wore little pillbox hats and gloves. Maybe that would make muscling your way through the busy terminal at JFK worth it. Okay, probably not. Maybe having a guy bump into you who smelled like soup couldn't be fixed with a drink with Don Draper and the gang. But the soft bounce as you fell back onto your hotel room bed could.

Stretched out over the mattress, with your feet dangling from one side and your arms reached over the edge of the other, it was a relaxing change from the NYC crowd you'd managed to run into just about every place you turned. It seemed like everyone was getting an early start for their weekend. You, on the other hand, had messaged Chris and Frank to let them know you got in alright.

In Frank's message, you set up dinner plans for later. With Chris, you texted back and forth about how your flight was and the upcoming weekend for both of you. Tomorrow, while you were making Frank look pretty for the AOL Build Speaker Series, Chris had plans for a guys night out. You were looking forward to seeing a couple people from the Kingdom cast and Chris was procrastinating packing a bag for a trip to Vegas for the Billboard party at the Wyn. There was a joke in there about waving to each other as your two planes passed in the sky.

You wouldn't be home before he left and, although a quick trip to fabulous Las Vegas sounded like fun, being packed into a party, surrounded by celebrity and picture hungry media, did not. You'd had your fill on the Civil War press tour and thought maybe a cooling off period from tagging along to appearances with Chris was best for everyone. No sense in pushing your luck. Besides, you had hours scheduled at the salon waiting for you on Sunday. A visit to the Big Apple would be just fine for you.

You went along with Frank to his appearance. Matt, Kiele, and Natalie were all smiles and hugs for seeing you. You watched their gig from a decent seat in the audience, while they talked about Kingdom. You snapped a pic of the group together with their producer Byron and one of Frank signing the wall, happy to hashtag and share with your followers on Twitter and Instagram. The photos racked up a healthy handful of likes and retweets almost instantly, with plenty of comments thanking you for sharing with the show’s fans. You were always happy to help. After all, you loved the show as much as any of them.

You joined everyone for an early dinner after the AOL studios event, laughing and chatting about the show and work in general. Talk turned towards Frank's upcoming projects and Kiele dug her phone out of her purse, saying she had to follow you on Twitter so she could see any photos you might post from your trip. You blushed a little at hearing she always saw your tags from things she was in from the Kingdom set, but didn't know why she never followed you. Her excuse, "No comprende the Twitter" had everyone rolling.

Later that night, sitting in your room with The Devil Wears Prada on tv and your phone in your hand, you laughed at seeing the internet meltdown over Chris' new haircut. Go ahead and admit it, you were more than a little mischievously proud to be responsible for that. Chris and Scott had gone to Topgolf with some of their pals and been interrupted by some fangirls. Chris had smiled graciously for a photo with the trio of young ladies and, once the photo hit Twitter, it was all over. Not that you didn't understand all the fuss. He did look good.
When you got home Friday afternoon, Chris was already touched down and checked in in sunny Las Vegas. You took Archie to the beach with you, playing a long game of fetch to make up for you sneaking off for a couple days. You broke it to him gently, telling him how action packed your summer was turning out to be and how he'd have to be extra good while he was at the sitter's. You'd just lobbed the tennis ball into the edge of the surf for Archie to splash after when you heard your phone ring. You smiled saying hello, happy to be hearing from Chris.

"Surprised to hear from you while you're in Sin City for your mancation," you teased.

"Ha ha, sassy," he groaned. "What are you up to? How was your trip?"

"Good," you nodded to yourself. "Smooth flight, landed on time. Now, I'm just sitting on the beach with my favorite guy. I have no complaints."

"You better be talking about Archie," Chris warned.
You laughed out loud. "Of course! Who'd you think it was?"

"I don't know," he playfully admitted, "but you know how you crazy redheads are..."

"I'm not really a redhead," you reminded him.

"That's true," Chris conceded. "Hey, listen. You're working Monday, right?"

"Yep," you confirmed, popping the 'P' sound in your answer. "Frank's doing this thing with Yahoo TV, but I'm still good for dinner."

"Okay," he awkwardly said. "I thought so. I kinda figured I was gonna be bailing on you."

"Bailing on me?" you repeated. "What are you doin'?"

"Kind of a last minute thing," Chris began. "There's this kid named Ryan. He lives down in San Diego and is real sick. There was this thing online, where he wanted to meet the Avengers, so me and Downey and Gwyneth are supposed to fly out there and see him. I don't know if I'll be back in town when you're done with Frank, if ya wanna try and do something a little later, but the kid got cancer when he was 3, babe, and he-"

"Ohmygod," you quickly interrupted. "No. Go to San Diego. Don't worry about hanging out with me. Oh, my god, what kind of asshole do you think I am?"

Chris barked out a laugh. "I don't think you're any kind of asshole," he promised. "I just didn't want to disappoint you by-"

"Oh, yeah," you exaggeratedly scoffed, "because you were visiting a sick kid isn't a good excuse for being late for dinner."

"I love you," he said. "You know that?"

"I may have heard that rumor," you smiled.

Late Monday morning found you back on the Kingdom set. Frank was doing a promotion with Yahoo TV for Instagram and you were, honestly, just kind of hanging out for the day. You got Frank styled for the shoot and basically wandered around after him and the Yahoo crew. You got the added bonus of running into Jonathan Tucker. Greg Jackson and Joe Stevenson were also on hand.
The guys were simultaneously filming Kingdom promo interviews throughout the day. There wasn't much of a need for touching up, but you enjoyed yourself on the set for the day and kinda ran around as Frank's assistant, getting him a bottle of water or keeping tabs on his phone while he was filming.

The guys were good company, when they weren't hamming it up with Frank, and everyone was excited for the premiere on Wednesday. You snuck a few extra peeks at your phone while you hung out behind the cameras and lights. Besides checking out the pics for Frank on Yahoo TV's account, Gwyneth was using her Instagram to post a couple of pics here and there to document her visit with Chris and Downey to San Diego. It gave you a warm fuzzy feeling, seeing the pics and knowing that your boyfriend was a real life superhero. What a sweetheart. Swoon!

The two of you did catch up for dinner, only slightly later than you originally planned. But it was worth it. You were proud to be dating a guy with such a big heart. It didn't matter that he shared it a few hours here and there with the world. The rest of the time, it was yours. And that seemed like plenty of time to you. Your humble hottie even blushed when you told him as much.

"Stahp," he shook his head, with a shy grin, turning his eyes down to the food on his plate.

"No, really," you sweetly assured him. "You're like a real life Steve Rogers. That's so cool."

"Okay," he groaned, his head tipping to the side, as he poked at his food. "That's enough."

"I mean it," you insisted, taking a pea from your plate to toss onto his to get him to look up. "This boy today, the videos you do, and the visits to Christopher's Haven. That means a lot to those kids and families. It's a good thing you do for them. Maybe it doesn't seem like much to you, but, to the rest of us, we're in awe. Look what you can do for them by just walking in a room. Might as well be a superpower. Look at all the attention you bring."

You'd been watching him and were pretty sure the pea Chris picked out to throw back at you was the exact one from your plate. "I know," he meekly conceded. "It's just weird hearing it. I don't do it for the attention."

He'd seemed a little tired after the trip and you could imagine why. "I know," you nodded. "It's for the kids. But the charities get a little bump, I'm sure, when you mention these good causes."

"Sometimes," he shrugged.

"Either way," you decided, "it still made somebody's day better. Kids still have a happy moment to remember, when it gets tough. That's all that matters. And I think it's pretty cool that I know the guy who's responsible for that."

There was that adorable humility in his grin again. "Thanks, babe."

Your smile beamed. You both went back to your food for a minute. You were trying to come up with something a little brighter to talk about than his trip to San Diego.

"So, I've got the Kingdom premiere on Wednesday," you offered.

"Wow," he realized. "That snuck up fast."

You nodded your wide eyed agreement, as you chewed. "Yeah, and then next Wednesday is the season's television premiere," you noted. "There's a viewing party over at Frank's place." You put on a coy smile, suggesting, "I could probably get you in the door, if you wanted to go..."

Chris snorted into his drink. "You'd get me in?" he checked, and you nodded.
"Yeah, I pretty much know, like, all of the cast," you arrogantly shrugged. "I'm kind of a big deal."

It took him a moment to stop laughing, but when he did, Chris worried, "Well, if you're sure showing up with some lowlife like me won't ruin your social standing..."

"I could survive the hit," you assured him.

You both sputtered into a good laugh. "Well, I'm just happy you let me follow you around," he joked.

You gave him a gracious bow of your head. "Anytime."

"Speaking of following around," Chris began, "any chance you changed your mind about coming out to Philly next weekend?"

"For the con? No," you pouted a little. "I have to be on set with Frank and the gang, remember?"

"Yeah, but that's Friday," he pointed out. "You could catch up on Saturday. Seb and Mackie'll be there. It's gonna be fun."

"I know." Because how could it not be? "But don't you think it'd be a little obvious, me at a con Frank wasn't appearing at?"

"That's true," he realized, with a thoughtful frown. "Sucks that he cancelled. Would've been nice to have you along."

"I'm sure there'll be other cons you guys end up scheduled together for," you figured.

The Kingdom premiere and party for the second half of season 2 were amazing. You started out the afternoon helping Frank and Wendy both with their looks. You tagged along in your own car to the Harmony Gold Theater. You felt privileged that being Frank's hair stylist on and off the show had gotten you a seat to the show as part of his entourage. If you and Rick counted as an entourage for the night.

Away from the cameras, you caught up with Frank and the other cast members. You added to your growing collection of selfies with the stars of your show, posting them up between Twitter and Instagram through the evening to let the show's fans have a look. You traded compliments with Kiele, Natalie, and Joanna about everyone's styles for the night and what summer plans they had. You had plenty of laughs with the boys and were looking forward to the more casual viewing at Frank's house next week.

And time flew by to get to the next party. By 5:30, you were parallel parking into a space near Casa de Grillo. Chris had met you at your place and you drove the short trip a little further over in Santa Monica to Frank's house. Your mom had taught you to not go empty handed to someone's home, so you and Chris were each carrying a bottle of good wine for your hosts. Liam opened the door for you, giving you a looping wave of his arm to invite you in. You rustled his curly head of hair on your way by, smiling wide to say hello as Wendy was just rounding the corner to greet your arrival.

Wiping her hands on a dish towel, Wendy smiled between you and Chris. "You made it," she noted, giving the towel in her hand a quick flip toward Chris.

Chris smiled back, holding up the wine in his hand, noting, "And we brought a little something, in case anyone got thirsty."
She exaggeratedly rolled her eyes up to the ceiling, noting, "You obviously haven't been here for dinner before." She happily accepted both bottles from you guys. "This should hold us over for ten minutes," she quipped.

You and Chris laughed and Wendy nodded the way to the backyard, telling you, "Frank and Bryan are out at the pool with everyone else. We're just waiting on a couple more, I think."

"Can I help in the kitchen?" you offered, but Wendy shook her head.

"Nah," she winked. "We're all set. Go say hi and relax. We'll start dinner in about a half hour. You guys want something to drink?"

You shook your head and Chris politely declined for you both. He followed you through the living room, turning out of the way at the sound of Liam's stampeding feet coming up from behind to race out ahead of you. Outside, Frank bellowed his hello from the side of the pool, flinching away at the spray of water that shot up from Liam cannonballing into the water. The rest of the company smiled and waved.

You make a quick round of introductions for Chris. Sure, there probably wasn't a person on the planet that didn't recognize Captain America, but it was mostly for Chris' benefit to welcome him into your work world. He shook hands with Jonathan and his wife and with Bryan Callen and the man behind the show, Byron Balasco. He waved back to people too far away to reach or in the pool, nodding his greeting to Joe, Greg, and a couple other cast members and favored people of the crew and their significant others. It was gonna be a crowded house, by the time the show started.

You hung out with Chris' arm hooked comfortably around your waist, while the gang talked shop. The guys filled Chris in on what's been going on with the show, as he remorsefully admitted he hadn't seen it yet. A fact that Frank couldn't help but take some jabs at.

"Hold on," he said, raising an offended hand to stop the conversation from moving. "Your girl," Frank began, holding his open palm out to reference you before motioning his hand to his heart, "this angel, pours her heart and soul into a show for two years 'a her life..." He held up as many fingers in front of Chris. "And you haven't sat down to watch a single episode? The hell you doin' with your life, man? You too good for my girl?"

Chris was just opening his mouth to respond, when Callen appeared behind Frank's shoulder, with his own accusing scowl at Chris. "Her show not good enough for you, brah? Our show? What, you don't like quality television or something?"

"No," Chris laughed. "I just haven't had the time to-"

"Oh, now he doesn't have time for her," Bryan insinuated. "Is that it?"

"That's what I heard," Frank agreed, crossing his arms.

"You guys are awful," Joanna called from the chaise at the end of the pool. "Leave the poor guy alone."

Bryan jumped like he were trying to get past Frank, bumping into him as he yelled, "Hold me back, Frank!"

Frank fell into the gag perfectly, turning fast on Callen to literally hold him back as he swiped feebly at Chris well out of his arm's reach. "Bryan, no! He's not worth it!"

"Let me at him!" Bryan jumped. "He doesn't deserve her!"
"You're right!" Frank agreed and shushed his friend. "You're right. But Bryan, we said no more killing people in front of the kids." Frank swept a hand over at his boys laughing in the pool. "The kids, Bryan!"

Bryan looked around, wide eyed and looking a little startled, pushing a hand back through his hair, as he agreed, "The kids. That's right. I'm sorry, Frank."

"It's okay," Grillo promised, giving Bryan a pat on the chest. "It's okay, big guy."

Next to Chris, you were beside yourself with laughter. You ran the sides of your fingers under your eyes to wipe at the tears. Chris was a good sport. He took back his arm from you to hold up both his palms in surrender.

"Okay. I'm sorry," he offered. "I'll order it as soon as I get home."

"There. See?" Frank calmly pointed out to Bryan.

"You buy it now! It's available on iTunes!" Bryan dramatically demanded, rising on his toes and pointing an angry finger at Chris, as Frank held him back again. "Or subscribe to DIRECTV! It's on demand."

"Hey! Easy," Frank soothed Callen, stroking a hand down his arm. "He said he's gonna buy it, okay?"

"Yeah," Bryan nodded, his eyes locked on Frank's. "Yeah. Okay." Bryan pouted, telling Frank, "I'm sorry, Frank, it's just-" He held his hand up, helplessly. "I just get so defensive about the show, ya know?"

"I know," Frank sympathized, still petting Bryan.

"She deserves better," he insisted. Callen looked up at you, earnestly saying, "You deserve better."

"I know," you agreed.

With a smile and rise in his brow that begged, oh really, Chris gave you a tight nod. "That's cool."

"Hey," you shrugged, "I've seen everything you worked on..."


With a discerning squint in his eye, Chris wagged a curious finger at Jonathan, wondering, "Hey, weren't you the one that tried to lick her face in that picture?"

Jonathan's brow rose high and he put up his hands to back out of the conversation. "No, man," he promised, in all sincerity. "No, that was not me. I would never lick your girlfriend, sir. ...That would be Matt."


Raising a finger to vow, Jonathan said, "I would not lick his girlfriend," before turning his hand to point at Chris. "Have you seen the arms on this mother fucker?" You detected the faintest hint of pink come to Chris' cheeks, as he dropped and shook his head with a humble chuckle and Tucker went on. "I saw his movie. This bitch pulled a helicopter out of the sky."

"It's true," Frank nodded, with a thoughtful pout.
"Show us the guns!" Bryan insisted.

Chris was definitely a little embarrassed and you folded your hands together to hug onto his arm, giving him a warm smile. "No, I-

He was shaking his head and, you could tell, self-conscious as everyone jumped on the bandwagon with their own encouragements. Until Rio and Liam paddled over to hang on the side of the pool. Once the kids chimed in, Chris couldn't refuse. He straightened up a bit and curled up his free arm, putting his bicep on display. After a couple seconds of flex, he let it go with a self-deprecating laugh. You gave him an encouraging squeeze and smile, while some of the others applauded, clearly impressed. As they should be.

Jonathan nodded, pointing at Chris. "And that's why you don't lick his girlfriend."

Chris was saved when Wendy came out the door, with a large platter of meats and kabobs for the grill and Natalie in tow. "Let's get dinner started," Wendy told Frank, passing off the tray to his waiting hands.

You introduced Natalie to Chris and, thankfully, everyone had gone back to their own little conversations. You got a couple private nudges and "So, Chris Evans, huh?"'s. There was no denying it here. Yep. That was your boyfriend. You suspected Frank had given a heads up or something to the other guests, as no one really seemed surprised to see Chris, let alone with you. Or maybe they really were just that cool with it.

Chris got a few congratulations from people who had seen Civil War, while Frank and Bryan manned the grill. You got Chris a beer, figuring he'd earned one for putting up with the antics of your tv family...so far.

In a short moment of privacy, you quietly told him, "Sorry. Guess I should have warned you, there's some uhh..." You searched for the words. "-big personalities in the cast."

"That's okay," he grinned, before a sip of his drink. "These guys are fun." He gestured toward Bryan, with his bottle. "I used to love him on Mad TV."

What a relief. It was important to you that he was comfortable and having a good time. Some of the guys could be a handful by themselves, but together- Well, that was a different story. Breaks in between scenes on set could get a little rambunctious. While the humor helped long days breeze by, it might be a little overwhelming for someone from the outside to take in for the first time. You'd seen a few deer in the headlight looks from new crew in your time with the show. Everyone gets used to the style of humor and the unexpected jokes and pranks eventually. And Chris took it all in stride.

Dinner split the party into two groups, one on the patio outside and the other dotted around the kitchen island and the dining table. Plates were cleared with enough time to spare to pack everyone in to the living room in front of the television. When all the furniture was claimed and chairs pulled in from the dining room, people set up camp on the floor. You backed up to lean against Chris' legs as he had one of the chairs.

When the show was over, everyone broke in to a round of applause. Somehow, this was better than the formal premier. Maybe it was getting to share the show with Chris for the first time, or just the relaxed, family style atmosphere. As the credits rolled, people made a fuss over each other when their name showed up on screen. Chris gave your shoulders a squeeze and you looked up at him to see his warm smile down at you, when everyone raised a new ruckus for you. You raised your glass to the room to show your thanks and joined in for the next crew member to get their recognition. This was way better than the formal premiere.
A couple hours later, the party had wrapped up and you and Chris were back at your apartment. Archie had been for his last walk for the night and you were just climbing into bed with Chris. You flapped out the sheets to fall flat over you and snuggled into the space under his arm. Chris kissed the top of your hair in the dark.

"I really am gonna check out the show," he earnestly told you, completely unprompted.

You snickered, telling him, "That's okay. They were just teasing."

"No, I want to," he insisted. "It looks really good." You smiled, even though you weren't in a spot for him to see. "Besides," he added, "you've seen everything I've worked on. Why shouldn't I see everything you've worked on?"

"Well, there's a big difference between you doing something and me," you conceded. "It's apples and oranges. Besides, my list of television and movie credits is way shorter than yours. But I appreciate the offer."

"I do want to see the show, though," Chris assured you. "I can tell from tonight, it means a lot to you. To all of you."

"It does," you realized, nodding on his shoulder, with a fond smile. "I love all those guys. The real ones and their characters."

"It's a good group of people you got there," he approved. "I see why Frank wanted you back with the show."

"I'm glad I got back on the show," you noted. "I didn't know how much I missed it until I was back on set."

"So, what's next?" Chris wondered, his fingertips dragging lazily up and down your arm. "Some other show is taping on set, or something?"

"This UFC guy, Dana White?" you explained. "He's got kind of a travel show he's filming and they're coming Friday to see what the show's like. It's not like a big deal, but it's kind of a big deal because if you can get approval from guys like these..."

"It's like a badge of honor," he surmised.

"Exactly," you nodded. "I think we're all kind of secretly nervous. I mean, I know I am and I just do hair."

Chris gave you a squeeze. "It's 'cause you drank the Kool-aid," he laughed. "They got you hooked."

"How did I become this person?" you playfully begged. "I don't think I ever watched a fight or knew it was a sport before I got hired for the show."

"And now look at ya," Chris tutted. "Boxing at the gym with Frank, hanging out with MMA superstars..."

"I'm in deep," you happily admitted.

"Only thing that could save you now is an exorcism," he decided.
"I need a young priest and an old priest," you quipped.

Dana White and his team for "Lookin' For A Fight" rolled into town and on to the Navy St set late Friday morning. You and Frank quietly chatted with Byron, while you got Frank camera ready. It wasn't that there were eavesdropping ears in the otherwise empty hair and makeup trailer, it was just that you were right. Everyone was a bit anxious to know if the real deals of the MMA fight world were going to like what they saw.

You all had an inkling that they had to. How could they not? Frank and Byron poured their hearts and souls into the show. The whole cast did. They did every thing they could to make it real. Maybe that's why it seemed so personal. Everyone had made such an investment and all they wanted was for fight fans and pros to say they were doing it right.

Dana and his cohorts, Matt Serra and Din Thomas, were down to earth. You even got to snap a few pics for Frank and a selfie to share for yourself. But you could still feel the nervousness when the gangs from the two shows came together and the cameras came on. They did a lot of talking with Frank and, from the sidelines, you softly whispered your shared worries with Natalie and Matt, here and there. The guys got a good look at the set and talked fights for a bit. The anticipation was killing you. You could only imagine what it was doing to Frank and the cast.

When everyone all gathered around together again, you weren't sure you even blinked. Your arms were hugged tight across yourself, while you bit at your thumb nail and watched. Everyone was laughing, while Dana told them about how he'd flown out the DVD for Serra and Thomas to watch before they got there and recounted the messages he got from them while they binged the first season. It all seemed to be going well, but you still sensed some worry from Frank and the others.

And then it happened. You saw Dana's big smile and heard him say, "I'm pumped for you, man. It's good shit."

The air was lighter. The sun shown brighter. The heavens opened and the hosts of angels sang. And you could breath again.

You were so happy, and proud, for Frank and everyone else, you literally hid your mouth behind your hands to keep from squeeing in delight. Oh, thank god. This felt good. This is all you guys ever wanted. Frank went on, promising Dana how his mother was going to send him sauce and gifts for the rest of his life, and you could read the relief in Matt, Byron and Natalie's faces.

They taped a reaction piece with Frank, where he gushed about how much Dana's approval meant. You couldn't have agreed more. And when Dana's crew packed up and left, you all took a moment to celebrate. There were bear hugs, fist pumps, and joyful yells from all around. Before he left, Dana had invited the cast to join them at the fight the next night. Not everyone could go, on such short notice, so you scored a seat to UFC 199 with Natalie's unused ticket. Damn, you loved this job.

You were positively giddy when you talked to Chris, later that day. It was a little hard to hold back your enthusiasm, while you described how your afternoon went. He was happy for you, chuckling along as you excitedly told him how much the pros approved of the show and that you were going to be one of Dana's guests at the fight. He teased about how Frank cancelling and you not coming along seemed to have worked out in your favor. But he did assure you Sebastian and Mackie would still miss you. You assured him that someone would find trouble for them to get in to and you were confident the three of them wouldn't spend too much time moping around without you.

When Chris got home from Philly, you and Archie were waiting. You waved when you saw Josh's
car coming down the street, hopping out of your Jeep with Archie at your heels when Josh pulled up to Chris’ driveway. You said hello for a minute, while Chris got his carryon out of the trunk. It’d been awhile since you’d run into Josh and he reached out the window to pet Archie when you’d caught him on your arm to keep him off the side of his car. Honestly, sometimes Archie forgets his manners.

Inside with Chris, he headed off to the bedroom to drop off his things and you headed out to the yard with Archie. While he took off to run a lap around the yard, you took a seat on one of the chaises by the pool. Chris found you two a few minutes later. You heard the kitchen door open and Archie pranced back up to the patio again.

"Heads up," Chris warned, barely giving you time to clap your hands around the bright bag he tossed your way.

You pushed your pursed lips to the side of your mouth, giving him a quick frown of disapproval before you looked down and realized what you were holding. "Starburst jellybeans?" you gasped.

With an amused smile, Chris nodded. "A fan gave them to me," he explained, bending down to tousle Archie’s ears. "I saved them for you."

Clutching the bag of candy to your chest, you cooed, "Oh, you do love me!"

"You better share," he playfully warned, pointing a finger your way.

"I'll give you one of each flavor," you told him.

"One of each?" he scoffed, giving you a smirk. "Didn't your mom teach you how to share?"

"Yeah," you conceded, "but my brother taught me no take backs. These were a gift."

"So, I gotta go buy my own?" Chris chuckled.

"Like you can't afford it," you jutted your chin, trying not to smile. You tipped your head toward the pool. "You could fill that whole thing with jellybeans."

Chris’ eyes lit up as his smile broadened. "That'd be a helluva sight," he laughed. "Can you imagine?"

"It'd be like Scrooge McDuck's money bin," you agreed.

"But with jellybeans," he nodded along. "It'd be way better."

"My god," you marveled, tearing open the corner of the bag. "we're idiots."

"Maybe," Chris agreed, as you poured the bag to fill his hand with candy. "But we're idiots with jellybeans."

Between your salon hours and Frank’s schedule, your time was becoming a hot commodity. The month of June was burning by. You had a schedule and travel dates for filming Frank’s next movie, Wolf Warrior 2. You were leaving for China on the 6th of July and the shoot was planned into late August. You’d definitely miss your birthday, but Karen and the rest of your friends promised to make the wait worth it for you when you came back to the States.

June 8th had you in Texas for the Austin TV Festival. Frank met up with Byron, Matt, Joanna, and
Natalie for a panel for the show on Friday. You dined that night at Truluck's with Frank and Byron and some friends of theirs who were in town as well. Before the festival was over, the cast did a photoshoot for Entertainment Weekly, while they were together. You were back in LA Sunday afternoon and to work at the salon on Monday.

Looking over your bank account, the summer was turning out to be off to a good start. Your shifts were booked steady and full at the salon. Between the salon, tips, and the checks you got after each of Frank's appearances you worked, you were padding your account nicely. You still got your sweat on with Frank as often as you could. And you we're glad you did.

You and a group of friends had signed up months ago for a mud run. You were up at the crack of dawn to run the carpool with Victoria and Caitlyn from the salon. The rest of your little team met you two hours down the road in Temecula. Everyone checked in early and gathered nearby for a carb-loaded breakfast before your heat took off. You left Archie with Chris for the day. You'd stayed there the night before. He had a meeting to go to, but your pup wouldn't be lonely for long.

Your team had hit its fund raising goal and picked out technically matching outfits. Unfortunately, nobody could stop your buddy Brian from sporting his speedo...again. Sigh. Dammit, Brian. The rest of you had a little bit of class, with the girls in their matching hot pink tanks and sports bras over their matching black yoga shorts, the guys pinked it up with matching bandanas with their black tees and shorts. But everybody's tube socks were on point, pulled all the way up.

You all huddled up for a clean faced "before selfie" in the parking lot. This was the first year your schedule let you participate in the event. It was the third running for your group. You were all doing it, unfortunately this year, in memoriam of your mutual friend who had put up a hell of a fight, but ultimately lost to ALL last year. You hadn't known Craig as long as some of the others before he passed, but he was a magnetic and fun loving soul who had been a burgeoning special effects makeup artist you'd met through another industry friend. By the time new friends had joined the cause, like your girls from the salon looking for an adventure, your team rounded out to 11. Craig's lucky number 9 was emblazoned over the four leaf clovers, of his design, on the back of your team tops and tattooed on biceps or thighs with a pair of skin safe markers by one of your fellow mudders pre-race.

Running, hopping, swinging, leaping, climbing, sliding, and crawling your way past obstacles and slogging through mud, you all laughed it up as you made the 5k journey together. You weren't in it for any personal records. You were all in it for the comradery of the mess and fun. At the finish line, you all hoisted your free beer to your friend. You shuffled to the edge of the crowd, to make room for the constantly arriving runners, and proudly posed with your finisher medals for the dirtier, but no less enthusiastic, "after selfie". You were only a couple swills into your drink, when you felt a familiar wetness at the back of your knee.

With a mouthful of beer, you turned to look down and find Archie feverishly sniffing the mud smeared on your legs. Knowing your pup didn't have a valid driver's license and was shite with a map- He failed more than once to tell you about an exit to take the one time you road tripped home to Cincinnati. -you looked up for his chauffeur. Chuckling at what had to be one of your most confused faces ever was Chris, just a few steps away. You grabbed Archie's leash off the ground and swallowed your drink before you might spit it out in surprise. After all, one should never waste free beer. It's not civilized.

"Hey!" you smiled, eyes and mouth open wide in surprise.

Your instinct was to hug him, but his was to stay clean. Chris put up his hands and leaned back, saying, "Whoa, easy there, mud pie."
Looking down at yourself, it was hard to find a clean spot. All you could do was shrug, happily resigned to being a legitimate human disaster. With Chris low keying it under a plain ballcap and sunglasses, you shook your head, dumbfounded for how he got there. You had to ask.

"What are you doing here?"

He casually stuck his hands into the pockets of his cargo shorts and shrugged, nodding down to Archie. "Thought we'd come cheer you on."

"When'd you get here?" you wondered, scratching Archie behind the ear with your fingers. The fuzzy little guy had already brushed against you more than once and needed a bath beyond the damage a few pats on the head could do.

"Just before you started," he said. "You were already getting drawn on before your race started. I figured we'd just stay out of the way and surprise you at the end."

"I'm surprised!" you admitted, with a laugh. "But I thought you had a thing today."

"Moved to next Tuesday," he said.

"It moved," you wondered, "or you moved it?"

Chris just smiled innocently and shrugged again. Aww! Whether or not it was his idea, you chose to think it was. It was sweeter that way.

"Thanks for coming," you grinned.

"So, what's with that tat?" he asked, pointing to the barely visible team emblem on your leg. "I thought runners wore their numbers on their shirts."

You brushed a disinterested hand at your race bib. "Nah," you frowned. "I don't think this sort of race is official enough that anyone cares about that." You wiped some of the dirt away from the drawing on the outside of your right thigh. "Besides, this is way cooler."

"It is," he agreed, with a grin, and you turned around for him to see the bigger design on the back of your shirt. "Nice."

"You want a beer?" you offered, jerking your thumb toward the stand behind you. "My treat."

"Victory has you feeling generous, eh?" Chris smirked.

"It was a hard earned victory," you assured him. "This was harder than it looked. It was awesome...but I'm whipped."

"I'll bet," he nodded. "You shouldn't have worked the day before."

"Probably," you conceded.

"At least you're off tomorrow," Chris reminded you, and you emphatically nodded.

"You should join us on the next one," you eagerly suggested.

Chris made a face, wrinkling up his nose at the idea. "I don't know," he winced. "Maybe I'll just donate again; save all the mud for you."

"You donated?" you checked, barely able to see past the hearts in your eyes.
"Well," he shrugged, "I did it anonymously, of course, but yeah. Why not?"

"Aww, thank you," you beamed, bouncing up on your toes to peck a kiss to his lips.

Chris chuckled, wiping his fingers down his mouth and bearded chin, looking at the traces of dirt he saw. "No problem."

"Oops," you winced, shrinking into your shoulders. "Sorry."

"That's okay," he smiled, returning the kiss to you to prove it.

You giggled and then realized there were a couple faces Chris hadn't met with you. You gestured over your shoulder with your drink, cheerfully offering, "You wanna come say hi?"

Chris gave you a warm grin and nodded. "Sure."

After introductions to most everyone, a couple guys had strayed to try and spit their best game at what they hoped turned out to be some attractive ladies under all that mud, Chris joined your group for a beer and listened in to everyone recounting their favorite part of the run. Being his usual charming self, Archie continued to collect dirt and mud. No one can resist the happy tail wag of a good doggo. Chris joked that Archie, like you, weren't allowed in his car anymore, but Archie was happy to soak up all the love from the other racers.

Towed off as best as you could be, you and your carpool buddies did change into old pairs of shorts and t-shirts for the trip home. As if you had any shame, nobody really cared about changing in the parking lot. You all had been savvy enough to wear bathing suit bottoms as part of your sporty ensembles. Your team parted ways, victorious. You told Chris you'd catch up with him at his place later, after you dropped off your friends.

You'd made the argument that you needed to stop at your apartment to clean up before you and Archie headed over to see Chris, but he'd insisted you could just make a pit stop for clean clothes and shower at his place. Scott was coming over to hang out and throw some food on the grill. It'd save time if you just went to Chris', he figured. He managed to convince you his plan was better and you paused on your way through Santa Monica to run in for a fresh set of clothes, a pair of sandals, and some shower essentials.

You spied Scott's car already parked at the curb in front of Chris' house. You pulled in behind him and grabbed your bag of clean clothes. Archie pranced along by your side across the street and up to the gate. The gate buzzed open, after you rang the bell, and you let yourself and Archie in the front door. Letting Archie off his leash, your keen detective skills told you to follow him to where the people were. He led you to the kitchen and out the back door, but you stopped to drop your small tote and car keys on the coffee table.

In the backyard, Chris was just setting down a bottle of beer to fire up the grill. He stopped to welcome Archie with a face wrinkling noogie and Scott called out to you from his chair by the table. You waved hello, shrugging when Scott helpfully pointed out you had a bit of mud on you.

"Gee, thanks, Captain Obvious," you smirked.

"What can I say?" he begged, standing up to come over. "Superheroes run in the family."

"Nobody's proud of Captain Obvious, though," Chris added, ahead of a swig of Stella. "Why don't you get cleaned up. Food's going on the grill in about twenty minutes."
"Did you get a medal?" Scott wondered, putting his hands on your shoulders to twist you from side to side for inspection.

"Yeah," you laughed, swatting him away. "It's in the car."

"Oh," he frowned, apparently disappointed you didn't have it handy. "I wanted to see it now," he pouted.

"I'll go get it," you told him, rolling your eyes at the way he had whined.

Scott lit up when you turned to go back inside. You grabbed your keys off the table and hurried outside. You left a sandal in the gate to keep it from closing behind you and locking you out. With your medal in hand, you backtracked inside, putting your shoe back on and heading out to give Scott a look at your prize.

"Do they give them to you muddy, or are they supposed to be clean?" he asked, holding the medal out at arm's length.

"It's muddy now," you told him, with a proud grin.

"I can only imagine the places you have mud," he shook his head, with a hint of a wince in his expression, bringing the medal back to him to turn over in his hands.

Chris almost spit out his drink and you barked out a laugh. "Thankfully, it was mostly muddy water and not too much mud, mud," you assured him. "I think I'm gonna be okay."

"I'm sure you'll find out the fun way later," he teased, with a mischievous wag of his brow at you.

"You're terrible," you scolded him, giving him a halfhearted smack on the arm. You stepped over to Chris, pecking a kiss hello to his cheek, telling him, "I'm gonna hit the shower."

"What about him?" Chris asked, nodding down toward Archie and the dusty patches on his usually shiny, black coat.

"You've got a hose," you shrugged. "I'll get him after dinner."

"Just throw him in the pool," Scott casually suggested, patting the side of his leg to coax your dog over.

"Don't throw him in the pool," you frowned. "He needs a real bath."

"Get him a little soap on a rope and a rubber ducky," he figured, hanging the medal around Archie's neck. "No problem."

You crouched down to wave Archie over to you. "Don't you listen to him," you warned, hugging your dog close. "He's a terrible human being and a corruptor of souls."

Scott cocked his head, thoughtfully rubbing his chin at your assessment. "I like that," he decided. "Can I use that on a business card?"

"Be my guest," you smiled, giving Archie one last rustle of his ears, before taking off the medal to set aside on one of the chairs nearby.

"Go get a shower," Chris reminded you, with a shooing flip of his hand at you. "Food. Twenty minutes."
"Here," Scott said, offering you his hand to help you up. "I got ya."

You didn't have more than a fraction of a second, realizing too late that Scott's pull up was more of a come along. You didn't stand a chance to catch your balance or stop yourself from going off the side of the pool. The limb locking flinch and flail you did to try and save yourself had to have been hilarious to see, because by the time you surfaced, both of those damned Evans boys were beside themselves with laughter.

Chris' beer was foaming while he was doubled over, grabbing his chest in a fit of face reddening laughter. Scott braced his hands on his knees, almost in tears. At the edge of the pool, even Archie was in on the gag, barking down at you in the water and wagging his tail. You swiped your hand across the water, whipping it up at Chris and Scott. They recoiled, flinching at the water that soaked their shins and shoes.

"You son of a bitch!" you cried foul at Scott.

But it didn't matter. He was wayyy to proud of himself to feel any remorse. A moment later, Archie hopped into the pool, coming up to paddle beside you as you wiped your hand down your face at the splash he'd made. It only fueled the guys' fit of laughter. Scott fell backward on his ass, pointing at you in the pool, damn near sobbing as he noticed, "Look! It's like Pigpen from Charlie Brown!"

You looked down, noticing the faint hue of tan spreading out around you and Archie from the diluting mud that was still on you. "Ha ha," you frowned. "Very funny."

Their laughter began to subside and Chris pointed out, "Well, he was right. He got ya."

You swam to the shallower end of the pool, shaking you head. Archie followed you and, when the water was shallow enough for you to stand, you scooped Archie up to set back on the patio. You climbed out and wrung out your hair. By the time you made it back to those two idiots, they had managed to compose themselves. Aaand Archie had managed to jump back in the pool again, much to the amusement of Chris and Scott.

"That's your problem now," you told them, pointing at Archie swimming around. "Good luck with that."
Chapter 64

By the time you got out of the shower, steak kabobs were on the grill and Archie was out of the pool. For how long was anyone's guess, but for the time being, he was drip drying on the patio in the afternoon sun and looked quite content. Chris and Scott welcomed you back outside with smiles. Chris was manning the grill while Scott was messing around on his phone. You joined him, taking the seat in the chair across from him at the table.

"Well," he grinned, "aren't you all fresh and clean."

"No thanks to you," you said, with an accusing point of your finger.

"I helped," he argued. "I got that first layer of dirt off of ya, anyway."

You nodded, conceding, "Something like that." Scott smiled, proudly, and you mused, "Not the way I thought using the pool for the first time would go..."

"With him around," Chris said, pointing at his brother, "that's pretty much the way everyone uses the pool."

"That's not true," he argued.

"Want me to start listing names?" Chris offered, turning back to the grill.

Scott was suddenly quiet, pursing his lips and shifting his jaw to the side as he stared at his brother from behind his sunglasses. "Bitch."

You and Chris both laughed and you noted, "It did feel pretty good after this morning, though."

Scott threw his upturned palm out to you, sarcastically saying, "See? Helper."

"Alright," Chris groaned. "Why don't you help by getting me a plate. Food's almost done."

With a quick flip of his middle finger at Chris, Scott got up to go back in the kitchen for a plate. You made your way over to the grill, rising up on your toes to hook your chin on Chris' shoulder and see how your food was progressing. Chris turned his head to peck a kiss at your temple.

"Feel better after a shower?" he wondered.

You hummed, happily. "A little bit," you shrugged, picking your head off his shoulder and moving over to visit Archie in the sunshine. Rubbing his belly, when Archie rolled over, you told Chris, "I'm kinda wearing down."

"You had a busy morning," he reminded, you with a smile. "Bet you sleep like the dead, tonight."

"Guaranteed," you nodded. "But first, I'm starrrved."

Chris snorted at your melodramatic moment, which coincided with Scott reappearing from the house with a plate for the food. "Just in time," Chris noted, taking the plate from his brother. ".[Y/n] is starving."

"Oh, yeah," Scott facetiously agreed, with an exaggerated nod, bending to poke a finger into your side. "She's practically wasting away."
You gave his hand a smack as he withdrew and stuck your tongue out at him. Chris playfully scolded you both, with a paternal sounding "Kiids, play nice," and told you both to go inside to wash your hands or you were grounded. Walking with you, Scott gestured you in ahead of him and Archie followed along when Chris brought in the food. You were pleased to see Archie may still be wet, but he wasn't dripping in the house.

The three of you made up your plates. It was warm out, but not unbearably hot. You dined outside, enjoying the subtle breeze. You greedily dug into your food, helping yourself to seconds. Hey, you worked hard this morning and lunch was delicious. Go on. Treat yo'self.

After the dishes were all inside, you slumped into the couch with Chris and Scott took the armchair nearby in the living room. The Red Sox game ended up on TV, naturally, and in between the action you caught Scott up on all the goings on in your busy summer schedule.

"He's got an appearance on The Talk," you counted off on your fingers, "then Conan, and New York for the premier and appearances for Sirius XM, GMA-"

"Blah, blah, blah," Scott cut in and you giggled.

"Exactly," you agreed. "And then, after the 4th, Beijing for filming."

"You need one of those world maps on the wall," Scott suggested, splaying his fingers out through the air and reaching his hands out in front of him for you to picture it, "with all the little push pins in all the places you've visited."

"At this point, I think it'd just be a bunch of pins in New York and a few here and there," you giggled, already thinking about the places you'd have pins.

"Well," Chris said, sitting up to reach for his drink on the coffee table, "you can start with London, Singapore, and Beijing." He took a drink and went on. "Cincinnati, Rhode Island, and Boston."

"I was there for a baseball game," you pointed out. "I didn't technically visit."

"Still counts," he disagreed.

"I concur," Scott seconded.

"Besides," Chris shrugged, "You're going there later. You'll definitely earn a pin then."

"Where else ya been?" Scott wondered, with a quizzical pull down in his brow.

You thought for a moment. There were several places you'd gone for family excursions when you were little and you named them, not really expecting them to know some of the day trip places you ventured to in nearby states. There were a couple places you could add from summer trips with friends, like Cancun, too. You heard about some of their family vacation destinations, as well, and you all shared a few fond memories from adventures. And, of course, you could add a pin in California for your mud run down in Temecula today.

"See?" Scott smiled. "You're more worldly than you thought."

"I guess I am," you beamed, proudly crossing your arms.

"So, when do you leave for China?" he asked.

"On the 6th."
"You coming to the 4th of July?" he wondered, and it got Chris' attention as well.

Good question. Truth was, you hadn't actually committed to any plans for the 4th. The salon was closed and Frank didn't have any work for you. You had a couple different offers for barbecues with friends and, of course, there was a gathering at Chris' house, too. You shrugged, giving the invitations a quick moment of consideration. You might actually be able to squeeze in two parties.

"What time does it start?" you checked.

"4," Chris answered.

With a thoughtful pout, you realized, "Yeah. I can still hit up Karen's and catch up with you by then."

"What time's Karen's thing?" Chris asked.

"Starts at noon," you said. "I was thinking I could give her a hand for a bit. They have the pool open for all the kids, so it's kind of an all day, come and go as you please thing. Wanna go?"

"Me?" Chris repeated, pointing a finger back at himself.

You nodded. "Yeah."

"Wait," Scott frowned. "Karen...the dragon lady?"

Your mouth gaped and you smacked a hand on Chris' knee. "You do not call her that, do you?"

"Ow! No," he promised, rubbing his knee. He flipped his hand at his brother. "He did."

Scott preemptively winced, drawing his feet up onto the cushion of his seat and guaranteeing he was out of your reach. "What?" he innocently begged.

"You're so mean," you told him, shaking your head.

"Ay," Chris lazily pointed at Scott. "Shoes off the furniture."

His shoulders pulled high near his head, Scott put his feet on the floor again and held up his upturned palms to motion at Chris. "He said she gave him the stink eye and tore him a new one," he plaintively explained. "Put a finger in his face and everything. Dragon lady."

"Well," you gave an excusing shrug, "he was asking for it that day."

A quick glance at Chris saw a sheepish smile on his face and a small shrug with an accepting nod, before he conceded, "Karen's actually a pretty fun lady. She's pretty cool."

"Okay, fine," Scott put up his hands in surrender. "I stand corrected."

You tutted, giving him another disapproving sweep of our head. "Terrible."

"But still," Chris looped back around, "a house full 'a kids?"

"I don't know how many kids," you admitted, "but I'm sure they'll be a few people Sophie's age there."

"Sophie?" Scott questioned. "Like, Sophia Loren?"

"You should go to little Sophia Loren's pool party," Scott decided, pointing a finger at Chris. The two of you laughed, but Chris shook his head. "I can't," he said. "I gotta be here, get the house ready..."

"Booo," Scott frowned. "You're gonna make little Sophia Loren cry."

"She doesn't even know I was invited," Chris argued.

Scott cocked his head, conceding his point. "But when little Sophia Loren hears that you could have come, you just didn't want to..." he judgmentally trailed off.


"You don't have to go," you reminded Chris, with a laugh. "I was just putting it out there."

"But think of the street cred that kid gets from having Captain America at her 4th of July party," Scott teased. Chris made an uncomfortable groan, twisting his chin up and to the side, like he were struggling with the idea, but Scott mercifully changed the subject...with a smack onto the side of your thigh. "Speaking of street cred..." he said, while you sat up like a bolt and yelped in surprise.

"Dafuck?!" you cried, pressing your hand over the stinging spot on your leg.

Scott was smirking proudly, pointing at your legs and asking, "What happened to that boss tattoo you had there, Hardcore?"

You balled up a fist and put a shot into the side of Scott's leg for your revenge. "I washed it off, you jackass."

Chris barked out a laugh, seeing his brother hike up his leg and complain, "Oh, my god. Ow! Oh! Charlie horse!"

"Common peroneal," you casually explained, with a smug waggle of your head.

"Fuck!" Scott wailed, rubbing at the side of his thigh. "You brute."

"Don't start none, won't be none," you shrugged, while Chris doubled over in laughter.

"She fuckin' nailed you!" Chris more than happily pointed out. He put up his hand for you to high five.

"I don't have to take this abuse," Scott assured you both.

"Yes, you do," Chris nodded. "She was bound to get back at you sometime tonight."

"Yeah yeah," Scott grumbled.

Not surprisingly, Scott was a little more well behaved after that. He went home after the ballgame, and so did you. Archie needed a bath still and you were wearing down pretty fast. You thanked Chris, before you left, for a tasty meal and for coming out to spectate at your little event. He assured you it was no trouble and confirmed what you already knew, that Archie was a good road trip buddy.

You mustered all your energy to plop Archie in the tub and give him a bath before bed. Tomorrow
you'd scrub the tub. Tonight you could barely think of anything else but sleep. There was no time like first thing in the morning to get started on your list of chores to start getting your apartment in order. After all, you had a busy couple of weeks coming up, before you were headed back to China. As you would be doing plenty of laundry, you figured leaving your large suitcase open in your room, that you could add clothes to as you went about your weeks, would keep you from procrastinating about packing.

You rolled out of bed with a groan, feeling a little achy from your muddy adventures the day before. With a little bit of stretching and some ibuprofen, you were ready to face the day. You called Karen while you were on one of your breaks between appointments to RSVP for her 4th of July soirée. You offered to bring along a dessert for the party and told her you'd be there a little early to help set up. She was looking forward to the visit, and appreciative of the help.

You puttered around your place, doing a bit of housekeeping when you'd come across it. You were just drying your hands off from doing the dishes, when you caught a look at the time on the clock on the stove. You smiled down at Archie laying on the kitchen floor. "Time to get ready to go."

Archie followed you into your room, finding a spot to curl up while you dug out a few bathing suits from your dresser drawer. Looking over your options, you snickered at the idea that you'd lived so close to the beach for so long now that you had almost as many swimsuits as you did regular clothes. Between actual bathing suits and your stash of rash guards and other surf attire, you might not actually be wrong. There was a blue on ivory paisley print bikini that you hadn't really worn too often. With its spaghetti thin tie backs and low rise bottom, it wasn't the most functional suit for what you usually did at the beach. But it was adorable and you felt the same wearing it. It'd be the perfect one to wear for an afternoon by the pool for Chris' birthday.

You put on a loose fit tee and a pair of distressed denim shorts to travel in. You made an attractively messy knot of your hair at the crown of your head and grabbed a pair of sunglasses, as you stepped into your sandals by the door. Archie was ready to party, looking handsome in his Captain America collar you insisted he should wear for the event. He didn't seem to have an argument.

On your way up to Chris' place, you stopped at a Hallmark to pick out a card. You weren't usually this bad at buying birthday cards, but you'd been so busy lately. If this was the one thing that escaped you, you were okay with that. Besides, it's not like you didn't have a gift in hand. You'd noticed Chris had a couple of books by Eckhart Tolle on the book shelf in his office. If that didn't tell you he had an appreciation of the man's work, the fact that Chris had a tattoo of a line of text he wrote was a dead give away. On a trip to a bookstore, you'd happened to see a little book that caught your eye. The illustration on the cover reminded you of the style of Sunday paper comic strips you read when you were little. Thumbing through a few pages, you were charmed by the drawings and surprised when you closed the book and saw it was written by Tolle. You snatched up the hardcover version of Guardians of Being and stashed it in your apartment. Chris had insisted he didn't want anything for his birthday, just to hang out with everyone, but you couldn't resist.

You arrived at Chris' house to find the party off to a good start. As soon as you were inside the gate, Archie was off his leash. You followed behind, as the curious pup hurried ahead to sniff out what all the noise was about. Music drifted through the empty house through the open doors to the backyard. You followed the sounds of laughter and conversation, and the occasional splash of water. By the time you caught up outside, Archie had already found the birthday boy and Chris was craning his neck to look past people to try and find you. He smiled, catching sight of you coming out the kitchen door, and worked his way past a few friends to greet you.

"Happy birthday!" you beamed, meeting his hug and kiss.
Chris gave you a tight squeeze that pulled you up to your toes. "You made it," he noted, letting you go and taking a step back to see you. "I was starting to worry."

"I'm only a few minutes late," you told him.

"30," he corrected.

"Hey," you argued, pointing a finger up at your face, "a look like this doesn't happen like that."

Chris chuckled, obviously caught on to your poor excuse as you weren't actually wearing any makeup. "Sure," he smirked. "Is it another guy?"

"No," you blushed. "Just irresponsible me being irresponsible." You held out the small pile of his gift and card in both your hands to him. Chris looked down at the items in your hands and back at you, as you explained, "Had to stop for a card."

Chris snorted and shook his head, sounding a little shied as he reminded you, "I told you not to get me anything."

When your hands were free of his prizes, you waved a dismissive hand through the air, promising, "It's nothing. Just a little something I thought you might get a kick out of. It's nothing, really. Open it later."

With a warm smile, Chris agreed and gave you a kiss, stepping around you to put the gift and card inside. "Go say hi to everyone," he told you. "I'll be right back."

You waved hello to a couple friendly faces in the pool and said hi to the ones you knew on dry land. A couple of Chris' friends had girlfriends with them for this visit and they introduced them to you. Scott was out in the yard, with a few of the guys, playing a game of cornhole. He begged you over with an overhead wave of his hand and you obeyed. You were welcomed with a hug, while he waited for his turn in the game. He told you you looked cute and pointed out where to find drinks and told you there were margaritas in the kitchen, noting a particularly tasty one that he insisted you try a sip from his own cup for.

Chris found you again, belting his arms around you from behind, while you watched the game. He asked how you slept and you assured him an earthquake couldn't have woke you. Feeling the laugh in his chest at your back put a smile on your face and he asked if you needed anything to drink or eat. You wandered away with him back to the patio by the pool for a drink. Someone was grilling up burgers and chicken breasts, while people ate from plastic plates and chatted wherever there was shade.

You made yourself a grilled chicken sandwich and filled up your plate with chips and someone's homemade coleslaw. The early summer weather was perfect, with the sun shining warmly through wispy clouds. Everyone had good stories to share and the music was lively. Archie puttered around, licking up snacks that fell off plates and getting a chip or piece of fruit here and there, when he managed to guilt a treat out of someone by flashing his best puppy dog eyes, as if he'd never been fed his breakfast. What a con artist.

You took a dip in the pool, but mostly you hung on the side to ward Archie away from the water. You didn't want him to be too much of a nuisance for the other guests. Of course there was a large sheet cake that came out in the evening, after everyone had had their fill of food. The gang all sang a wonderfully out of tune rendition of "Happy Birthday" for Chris, while you made a video on your phone you could make some pics of later. Chris blew out the candles in one go, to the applause of all his friends. By the time the sun was setting, the cake was almost gone and the crowd had dwindle
down to a handful of friends who didn't have to be up for work in the morning.

Someone had bought some fireworks and randomly set them off for the next hour or so, so the air wasn't too smoky. You and Scott played with some sparklers, drawing shapes and writing your names, while you both channeled your inner child. When it was all over, it was just you, Archie, and the Evans boys. Scott helped you clean up what was left of the food in the kitchen, while Archie followed Chris around as he walked with a garbage bag to collect any plastic cups and such that he found.

Together again in the living room, Scott said goodnight to you both. He gave Chris a hug, kissing his cheek and wishing him a happy birthday again. They were going to catch up again tomorrow, on his actual birthday, to hang out. Unfortunately, you'd be at work. You got your own hug and kiss, before Scott left, and let out a loud, tired sigh when you and a Chris were alone and the house was quiet.

"Wow," you grinned. "What a weekend."

Chris snuffled a laugh, agreeing, "You've been busy. Probably sleep through another earthquake tonight."

"Wouldn't be surprised," you smiled, sinking into a seat on the couch. "Wouldn't complain either."

Chris disappeared to the dining room for a moment and came back with his card and gift from you. He sat down next to you on the couch and pulled open the envelope from his card. You went middle of the road, picking out a card that was affectionate yet silly. Chris laughed at the card and set it up to stand on the coffee table in front of you. He tore into the wrapping paper on his gift and turned the book over in his hand to see the cover. He snorted when he saw what it was. He put aside the wrapping paper and thumbed open the book to skim over a few pages.

"Told you it was nothing," you meekly grinned. "I just saw it in the store and made me think of you. Thought it was cute. Just something that maybe would give you a laugh."

"No," he smiled, looking over the pages. "This is great. Thanks."

Honestly, you'd thought the book was pretty endearing, but you didn't want him to think you were too sappy. And you could admit, he might think the book was a bit beneath him for its simplicity. It was definitely on the lighter side of spiritual fare. But there was a fondness in his smile and the way that he said it that made you think he might be as charmed by it as you were and you got the sense that'd you'd done a good job. Chris shut the book and gave the cover another admiring once over.

He leaned over to give you a kiss, smiling, "Thank you, baby."

"You're welcome," you proudly grinned. "Happy Birthday."
You burned through the week, working your schedule at the salon and doing little chores here and there at home. The closer it got to July, the more excited you got for your work-cation, as Scott had dubbed it, to China with Frank for his next movie. The trip popped into your head at the oddest moments and had you Googling things on your lunch break, like "Does it rain in China?" Of course it does, you big dummy. But all of a sudden you found yourself searching the average rainfall of Beijing in July and August and other weather facts to read on Wikipedia. After all, you had to know how to pack.

But before you jetted off across the ocean, you had work to do at home. You were on hand for Frank's Conan appearance. You hadn't put much thought into it, when you grabbed a t-shirt to wear with your distressed denim shorts and low top Chucks to the studio, but you couldn't have been more pleased with the selfie that wearing the Navy St tee got you, when Conan O'Brien himself was sporting one of a different shade. He'd called the two of you "twinsies" and suggested the pic, when he came in to say hello to Frank before the taping.

You might want to consider publishing a coffee table book of your selfies with celebrities, because you were building a hell of a collection. The posts on your twitter and Instagram accounts always got a ton of "likes", when you put up your photos after each brush with greatness you had from being in proximity to Frank. Sure, you work hard, but, man- What a life!

Having dinner with Chris, after the Conan taping wrapped, Chris had teased you about your selfies, saying, "You're like your own paparazzo."

"Well," you humbly shrugged, "when you're a hot commodity like me, everyone wants a picture."

You both had a laugh. And another one, bigger than before, when Chris dug his phone out of his pocket to take a selfie with you on his couch. You gave him a playful shove for being a smartass, before he hooked an arm around your shoulder and smooshed up close to you. You two looked like idiots, with goofy, laughing smiles squished into an inescapable hug, but he said he was going to keep the picture, so that he could say he knew you when, after you turn into some big shot stylist. It was a funny moment to remember driving yourself to the airport for your flight out to New York for the press events and premier for the next Purge movie.

There was a busy week ahead of you in the Big Apple. You were scheduled every day in the gym with Frank. He trained hard all the time, but he'd been putting in a little extra effort ahead of filming for the stunt work. He'd told you, just because you got your mud run medal didn't mean you could slack off. The man was a living motivational poster. Frank Grillo is a sweaty blessing.

Mornings started early at the gym. Nights ended with dinners with Frank and his friends and family. And in between, you shuttled around the city with Frank, making him look good for his appearances. You called or face timed with Chris to share your day's adventures and to check on Archie. That big softie of a boyfriend of yours was dog sitting for the week. Not surprisingly, the two handsome men seemed to be getting along just fine without you.

It was kind of a crazy week, but you had been having so much fun, you didn't realize how busy you really were until you were winding down at the party after the premier Friday night. You actually fell asleep on your mid-afternoon flight back to Los Angeles. At least you didn't wake up on the shoulder of the grey haired business traveler sitting next to you. That would have been awkward.

After landing in LA, you made the hellish drive through lunch hour traffic up to Chris' place. You
were going to spend what was left of the holiday weekend at his house. You groaned, telling him how tired you were, after Chris welcomed you back and asked how you were. He laughed and took your little suitcase to the bedroom for you, while you flopped down on the couch. Archie snuggled his head into your side and you hugged him close to give him some scratches.

"Did you eat lunch?" Chris asked, coming back into the living room from the hall.

You had to think for a minute, calculating the time zone change to see how you felt about calling your next meal "lunch". You decided, "I could eat. Whatcha making?"

"Making?" he snorted. "Hell, I don't know. Probably a sandwich."

"A sandwich?" you pouted. "That's it?"

"Ay," he leveled his eyes at you. "You hungry, or not?"

You snickered. "I could go for a sandwich."

Chris pointed at you and then flicked his wrist toward the kitchen, telling you, "Well, then get up. I'll get everything out, but you're making your own food. And you're eating in the kitchen like a grown up."

"Fine," you grumbled, rolling off the couch to literally drag your feet into the kitchen.

That is, until Chris gave you a swat on the ass to move you along a little faster. You slapped your hands to cover your butt with a yelp and scurried along. As promised, Chris pulled all of the fixins for some tasty sandwiches out of the refrigerator and put it all out along the counter. He handed you a plate from the cupboard and settled in beside you at the counter of the kitchen island to make lunch.

"How was Archie?" you asked, spreading some mayo on your bread. You kind of worried. It was the longest your dog had been left with Chris. "He wasn't too bad, I hope."

"No," he said, with a small pinch of insult on his face. "He was great. Is he ever bad?"

"You know those Skechers sandals I have, with the lil palm tree on the side of the strap?" you wondered.

"I think so..."

"I've owned them three times now," you noted, "because someone-" You looked accusingly at Archie by the end of the island. "ate them the first two times I bought them."

Chris snuffled a laugh, trying his best to convince you, "That's terrible."

You elbowed his arm, concluding, "So, yes, to answer your question, he can be bad."

"Sounds like a real badass," Chris nodded.

"Shut up," you smirked, bumping your hip into his, as you put the top piece of bread on your sandwich.

Chris smiled, a little too proudly for being a shit. "Hey," he piped up, as you walked around to the other side of the island, "about the 4th..."

"Yeah?" you invited, scooting back a stool to sit on.
"I thought about it," he was nodding, "and I thought, if you still want me to go, I'll go with you to Karen's 4th of July thing tomorrow."

"Really?" you checked, around the mouthful of sandwich you were chewing.

"Yeah," he shrugged, "Why not?" Chris took up his plate to join you. "I mean, I can't stay too long, 'cause I gotta get back here for my party, but..."

You swallowed your food, giving him a big smile. He and Karen hadn't seen each other since you and he had your "break". Not that there'd been an occasion for them to, but it was important to you that everyone got along again. You didn't think it'd be a real problem, though. After all, it was Karen who extended the invitation to Chris when she had talked to you about the holiday.

"That's okay," you assured him. "Oh, but we need to go a little early because I said I'd help."

Chris nodded, to stall while he chewed. "That's fine. I'll just stand there and supervise."

"Yeah, right. I'll find something heavy for you to move," you smugly told him. "And when you put it down, I'll tell you how it needs to go someplace else."

"I'll probably just wait in the car then," he nonchalantly shrugged.

Your laughter sputtered out of you, while Chris took a large bite of his sandwich. "Oh," you remembered. "And I'll have to borrow your kitchen."

"My kitchen?" he questioned, with a confused wrinkle in his brow.

"I promised to bring something tomorrow," you explained. "Since I'm here, I need your kitchen to bake."

You had his interest when, he repeated, "Bake? Bake what?"

"I dunno," you admitted. "I'll figure it out when I go to the store. Something patriotic, I'm guessing."

After lunch, you headed off to the store, before the motivation left you. There was no way you could imagine getting up early in the morning to bake. The morning was for sleeping in. You loafed around in the baking aisle way too long. Everything sounded good...and the pictures on the boxes looked even better. You decided to keep it simple, going for cupcakes and brownies. Traditional. Simple. Always crowd pleasers.

You walked in to Chris' kitchen with a couple bags in your hands. You didn't know what he might have in the cupboards, so you just got everything you needed. Better safe than sorry. He took a lazy walk through the kitchen, eyeing your supplies you were lining up on the counter, on his way to get a drink from the fridge. He walked back out the same way. You gave him a suspicious look, watching him slowly wonder back out to the living room. Weirdo. Archie followed him, prancing happily behind.

You came up with a plan of attack. Cupcakes were first. You could have them cooling, while the brownies went into the oven. While the brownies were in the oven, you could whip up some icing. You knew a recipe for your own butter cream icing. The store bought stuff was just as tasty, but it got too thin when you added food color to it.

You were a baking fool. Mixing this and pouring that, you were pleased with how well everything
was moving along. While one tray of cupcakes was in the oven, you had the little stars and stripes paper wrappers of the next tray filled and ready to go in when the timer rang. You washed dishes to move on to mixing the first batch of brownies. Turns out, you're a pro at this assembly line stuff.

Brownies baked and cupcakes cooled, you'd already divided your homemade icing into three different bowls and colored them. One red, one blue, and the other left its natural off white. You alternated icing the cupcakes to set up in your tray so they lined up red, white, and blue. You finished them off with a sprinkling of silver sugar crystals and some candy stars. They looked pretty adorable, if you did say so. You folded down the foil edges on top of the plastic lids of your disposable pans and put them aside, preparing to ice and cut the brownies. You were surprised by how long it took Chris to come back to the kitchen.

"Good lord," he marveled, looking at the two trays of cupcakes.

"They look okay?" you wondered, dipping into the tub of chocolate frosting to start icing the brownies.

"They look great," he nodded. "It's cute. Very patriotic."

You smiled proudly. "Thanks."

"They smell delicious," Chris noted, starting to pick at the edge of the foil tray to open the lid.

You smacked his hand and he recoiled with a protesting, "Hey!", with you pointing a finger at him. "No. Those are for tomorrow."

Rubbing at the back of his smarted hand, Chris pouted. "You've been in here for like two hours," he pointed out. "I can't have one cupcake? What about quality control?"

"Quality control?" you scoffed.

"Yeah," he shrugged, gesturing a hand out toward all your naked goods. "What if they suck? You don't want to ruin everyone's 4th of July."

"You just said they looked great," you reminded him.

"Looking good and being good," he explained, holding up a finger to make his point, "are two very different things."

You stared. Literally, all you could do was stare. Knife dipped in the tub of chocolate icing, frozen still, staring. "Really?" you flatly asked.

But he stuck to it, nodding before giving you a helpless shrug and saying, "I'm just trying to help you out."

"My hero," you rolled your eyes. You tipped your head back toward the counter behind you, telling him, "There's a couple that didn't fit in the container. You can have one."

"Where?" he questioned, rising up on his toes to look past you.

With a groan of a sigh, you put down your knife and turned around to the counter behind you, taking an extra, red cupcake off the plate to hand to him. When you turned around, Chris' finger was in his mouth. His brow was high and his eyes were wide with guilt. He pulled his finger back out and flashed a toothy grin to try and prove his innocence, when you noticed the drag mark through the tub of frosting.
Swiping at him, meaning to swat his arm as punishment, Chris flinched away, laughing. "Christopher Robert!" you frowned. "Did you really?" His continued laughter was his answer and you put his cupcake back on the plate, out of his reach. "You're terrible."

"What?" he whined. "My hands are clean." He jerked his thumb behind him. "I just went to the bathroom. I didn't even pet the dog on my way in here."

You clicked your tongue and shook your head. "Terrible," you swept your head.

Chris walked around the far side of the island and to the counter to get a cupcake for himself. While you went back to work, he peeled back the paper wrapper of his treat and took a bite. He hummed as he chewed, giving you a thumbs up, until his mouth was empty enough to speak.

"These are really good," he told you, with an approving nod. "Really good."

"And I needed quality control, huh?" you smirked.

"Babe, c'mon," he said, with a cocky tilt of his head. "I don't do this dangerous work for myself. I do it for the people."

Pointing with the length of your arm, and the chocolate covered knife in your hand, you ordered, "Out. Get out of my kitchen."

Walking around the island to leave, he smugly reminded you, "This is my kitchen."

"Then you can do the dishes when I'm done," you didn't miss a beat.

"But you can use it," he decided, before he disappeared through the wide doorway.

*How fair and considerate of him.* You snickered, shaking your head for no one to see, as you went back to your work. You finished icing the two trays of brownies and put on the last lids. You'd been trying to clean as you went, so the mess to clean up at the end of it all wasn't too big. You washed the dishes you'd made and moved the trays to the corner of the counter and out of the way until tomorrow. On your way to the living room, you sent a quick text to Karen telling her what you were bringing for tomorrow.

Chris had long since finished his taste test cupcake. You grinned at the wrapper balled up and sitting on the corner of the coffee table. You smiled at Chris giving Archie a nudge to send him from his place on the couch next to Chris. He smiled up at you, giving the recently vacated cushion next to him a pat to invite you over.

"There she is," he beamed. "Cupcake Boss."

"Ha!" *Dork.*

"All done?" he wondered, his eyes watching you take a seat on the couch and swing your feet up to stretch your legs across his lap.

"All done," you said, with a well deserved nod of satisfaction.

Chris smiled, giving your knee a pat before smoothing his hand down your shin to rest there. "So, how was your trip?" he asked, leaning forward to grab the remote off the table and turn down the volume on the TV.

"It was fun," you told him, with a fond smile. "Went to some new places for food. Met some of
Frank's family. Don't get me wrong. We worked. I mean, the schedule was pretty full, but I didn't really spend any time bored at the hotel, which was nice."

"Good," he smiled. "Hopefully, Beijing's the same way."

"I hope so," you agreed. "I can't wait. What do you want me to bring you back for a souvenir?"

"A souvenir?" he chuckled. "I have no idea." He paused to think for a moment, before he decided, "Just don't lose your passport, so you can come home when it's over. How about that?"


"But it's all I can think of," he admitted.

You felt your cheeks warm. What a sweetheart. "You'll have plenty to think of," you promised him, "when you're back in Boston. You'll see your family all the time. Think of all the Sox games you can see..."

He shrugged, with a fond grin at your suggestions. "That's true."

"Aw," you cooed, picking up on the mopey undertone of his reply and giving his arm a soothing rub. "You'll be okay, tough guy."

Chris snorted, his head ticking back in amusement of your cutesy pity. "I know," he nodded. "I'm just sayin'."

"I know," you understood. "It'll be a long seven-ish weeks for me, too."

"Don't say ish," he insisted, with a small grimace. "Don't say anything that could make it longer."

You had to laugh. You hadn't thought about it that way. And now, all you were thinking about was hoping the shoot stayed on schedule and, at the very least, you could count on being home before August ended. You bent up a knee, putting your bare foot onto Chris' knee to give him a gentle shake, trying to be cuter than the sentiment was sad. It seemed to work and he managed a lopsided grin, poking a finger under your foot to tickle you.

You jumped, letting out a tiny shriek of surprise, and flinching to bring your knees up and hide at the end of the couch. Yeah, he definitely wasn't sulking too much anymore. You gave him a quick push with your heel at the side of his leg and stuck out your lower lip in protest. Chris just laughed, apparently proud of himself.

"Meany," you frowned.

"I'm sorry," he promised, as sincerely as he could when he was chuckling.

Chris leaned over, tipping your knees over a bit so that he could fit between them and the back of the couch. He craned his neck, stretching to meet your lips for an apologetic kiss. You gave his hair a rustle, telling him it tasted like he still had icing on his lips. He gave his lips a quick lick to see if it was true. He put a wrinkle of concentration in his brow, telling you he wasn't quite sure if you were telling the truth.

"Better try that again and find out," he decided, inching up to you again.

Giggling at his cleverness, you tried to stifle your amusement before his face reached yours. When he was close enough, you pressed a kiss to his lips, parting your lips to swipe your tongue across his
lower lip, checking for any lingering hints of the sweet taste of your frosting. You kissed again and pulled your head back. With a small shake of your head, you reported that, sadly, you thought it was gone.

"You sure?" he doubted, arching up one curious eyebrow. "We should check one more time."

"If you say so," you shrugged, as if it were some kind of inconvenience or hardship.

You put your hands on his cheeks, pulling his face up to yours, giving him a firm kiss. You lost out to a grin, smiling into the kiss when you couldn't take yourself seriously anymore. You felt him smiling as well, and he put his elbow into the cushion to scoot up closer to you. His hand palmed over your belly, curling around your side to hold you, as you draped your arm behind his neck.

It'd been awhile since you two had made out on a couch, and you took the opportunity to say so when he turned his chin away to nibble kisses along your jaw and down your earlobe. He mumbled what a shame that was, against the side of your neck, and you felt his hand slip down to slide up underneath your t-shirt. You pinched at the back of his arm, when his featherlight touch tickled your side. He whispered an apology, as his nose traced the shape of your ear.

"Just to be clear," you began to wonder, hooking your finger into the collar of his shirt to give his neck a little bite, "are we just foolin' around here, or is somebody getting laid?"

Chris lifted his head from your shoulder, his hand pausing its journey up to your breast, his brow knitted in confusion. "So, you're saying you wanna fuck?"

"Um, yeah," you nodded. "I'm on a plane to China in, like, two days. We should be while we can, right?"

His face relaxed and his eyes softened, sincerely telling you, "That's so hot."

"Get off of me," you snorted, giving his shoulder a shove and clambering off the couch.

"Where are you going?" he whined, the confusion back in his expression.

"Bedroom," you noted, stopping at the end of the couch to point down the hall. "Duh."

You started for the hall and Chris sat up on his knees, turning to climb over the back of the couch, somehow pulling it off gracefully. He followed behind you, reaching up from behind to poke his fingers into your sides to hurry you along. By the time you made the corner into his room, he was already pulling his t-shirt off overhead. You got a condom out of the drawer of his bedside table and flipped it to him. He caught it, clapping it between his palms, as he toed off his shoes.

You'd already tugged off your shirt, trying to catch up with him, when he unzipped and dropped his shorts. He bit the corner of the foil wrapper in his teeth, freeing his hands to pull his underwear off, while you shimmied your shorts and panties down your legs to save time while you worked on your bra. The two of you simultaneously realized how ridiculous you must look and giggled at how frenetic the situation had become.

Chris came over to wrap his arms around you, reminding you both, "We have all night."

He turned your back toward the bed, still shaking his head at himself, while you finished undressing and hopped back to land on the bed. You scooted back from the edge of the mattress and Chris put down a knee, crawling after you. He got an arm around your waist and gave you a tug, pulling your bottom from the bed and upsetting you backward. He stretched out over you, nudging a knee between yours and capturing your lips for a long kiss.
His fingers combed up into the hair under your ponytail and his other hand moved down between your legs to stroke and circle your clit and warm you up. You let out a sigh, massaging your hand into his hair, when his mouth strayed from yours to lick and suck at your breast, while he ran a pair of fingers up and down your folds before dipping them inside of you. Neither of you needed more than a moment to be ready for the other, and Chris leaned back to roll on the condom.

Chris lowered himself over you, as you pulled up your knees and turned out your heels to open up for him. You welcomed him back, folding your arms around his neck, your tongues twisting as he sank into you. He drew out a few achingly slow pumps, at first, but he quickly picked up the pace.

He rolled his hips and you tilted yours in reply, moving against him to get the friction just right. Chris dove deep, till his hips pressed against the backs of your thighs and you bucked at the feeling. He tucked his arm under your knee, folding your leg and opening you a little wider. His voice was a little muffled, with him licking and sucking his way across your chest, but he told you how beautiful you are and complained, "God, I'm gonna miss you."

Your fingers carded into his hair, as he inched up, his beard scratching at your shoulder and his lips leaving a trail of wet kisses along the curve of your neck. You promised you'll miss him, too, and whispered at his ear that you love him, before you nipped and tugged at his earlobe. It was all he needed to hear for his hips to start fucking into you with a new fervor.

There was that familiar feeling, the heat building in you belly and reaching out. You wrapped yourself around him, turning your face to his for a kiss that was just as hard as it was loving to the both of you. You broke away, only to breathe, holding him as tightly as he hugged you to him, your walls clenching and squeezing around his cock, as you came together. Chris moaned into your neck and your breath panted over his shoulder.

"Fuck," he muttered, nuzzling his face on your chest, as you tucked your chin to plant a lingering kiss in the top of his hair. His own breath was ragged, but it didn't stop him from wondering, "$\text{Maybe we could just cancel the 4th and do that till you leave?}"

You gave him a playful swat on his shoulder, as he belted his arms underneath you and squeezed. "No," you sighed. "$\text{We promised. And I made all those treats, remember?}"

Chris lifted his chin, turning his face up and stretching his lips to kiss under your jaw. "$\text{We could just make love and eat cupcakes all day,}" he suggested. "$\text{We wouldn't even have to get out of bed.}"

"That actually sounds pretty amazing," you considered. "$\text{But people already made plans.}"

"I know," he groaned, pulling back and coming in for one last thrust, that coaxed a gentle gasp out of you and had you biting at your lip, before he backed off the side of the bed to go clean up. "$\text{Can't blame me for tryin', though.}"

"No, I can't," you agreed, with a smile.
When you and Chris finally stopped pawing at each other, you were on your way to Karen's. It was kind of a cute picture of the two of you, walking out to your car with aluminum trays of goodies stacked in your arms. Your apartment wasn't too far off the path, so you stopped by to grab a bathing suit along the way.

At Karen's house, her husband, Allen, greeted you at the door. He shook hands and traded names with Chris, while he took the containers off of your hands to free you up for Sophie. The little girl hugged as high as she could get on you, and you pointed out Chris to her, saying he was your boyfriend and he was an actor. Sophie shook his hand and Allen directed Chris to follow him to the kitchen to put down the cupcakes with the rest of the food. You followed along, led by Sophie by the hand, to find Karen in the kitchen slicing up fruit.

"Hi, guys," she smiled, glancing up from her work. With her elbow, she pointed to the only empty counter space available, saying, "Just stack them over there, till I can find something to put them out on."

"Where's Archie?" Sophie frowned.

"Oh, honey," Karen told her, "they're not staying all day. He's at home."

"But next time," you promised.

"Besides," Karen smirked, "she brought Captain America to your 4th of July party. Isn't that better?"

Chris waited for her decision, with a patient grin, while Sophie gave him a once over. She stared at his bearded face a moment and seemed to see who he was under his unemployment disguise. Her eyes got a little wider and her cheeks picked up a tinge of pink.

"Tony kept the shield," she frankly told him.

Chris didn't miss a beat, humbly nodding and then winking, "I let him keep it."

"She's a little bit Team Iron-Man, lately," Allen said, quietly adding, "Peer pressure."

"Ohh," Chris understood, his brow rising at the revelation. "I see."

"Because the boy she likes in her class is Team Iron-Man," Karen explained.

"Mo-om!" Sophie cried, her face pinching in embarrassment.

The adults shared a snicker, as Sophie stomped out the door. "She's actually really excited you're here," Allen assured Chris, and you all shared a laugh when everyone looked out the door to Sophie and saw her peeking back in at Chris.

Hungry eyes panning over the snacks and treats spread out over the counter tops, you marveled, "This all looks so good."

"Thanks," Karen grinned. "Do you mind helping Allen in the yard with the tables and chairs?"

"Not at all," you assured her, absconding with a couple blue berries meant for the fruit salad.

You guys followed Allen out the back door to the yard. While Chris and Allen unfolded tables and
set up extra chairs, you and Sophie hung up red, white, and blue swags and bunting on the privacy fence around the yard. You and Sophie got the pool floats and toys from the garage and threw them in the water. When the backyard was all set up, you went back inside and Allen went to the store to get gas for the grill and pick up some last minute things.

While you washed up to help in the kitchen, Sophie give Chris a hard stare, her chin braced in her hands as she sat on her shins on a stool at the counter. "Are you really Captain America?" she wondered.

"I am," he nodded.

"Prove it," she demanded.

Chris played along, asking, "How?"

You and Karen watched from the other side of the kitchen island, where you were helping cut up peppers for the grill.

"How come you have a beard?" Sophie asked.

"Because I'm off right now and shaving isn't very fun," he answered.

"Why didn't you just kill Iron-Man so he couldn't chase Bucky anymore?"

Chris turned a jaw-dropped look of shock to you and Karen. "How old is this kid?" he begged, jerking a thumb at Sophie.

"She'll be 30 next spring," Karen dryly said, shaking her head.

Chris turned back to Sophie, and you smiled proudly when he told her, "I don't want to kill anyone. I just don't like bullies."

"Are you strong?" she pressed. "Captain America is really strong. Can you do push ups? He can do a lot of push ups."

You snickered, pressing your lips together to keep quiet, as Chris checked, "How many is a lot?"

Sophie thought for a moment, before suggesting, "Like 20?"

"Can you do 20 push ups?" he asked, squinting along a finger pointed at her.

"Yeah," Sophie nodded, but her voice lacked the confidence she probably meant it to have.

"How about this," Chris decided. "If I can do 20 push ups, will that prove I'm Captain America?" Sophie nodded, and he added, "But you gotta do 'em, too. And if you can do 20, you can be Peggy Carter. Deal?"

Sophie looked to you and her mom for help, but you both just shrugged. Karen waved her hand, shooing her daughter away and saying, "Don't look at me. I'm not doing them for you."

"Well, if you can't do it..." Chris sighed, putting his hands on his hips and shaking his head, disappointed.

Sophie slid off the stool and scurried to the empty floor space between the open kitchen and dining room. She kicked off her sandals and Chris joked, "Oh, this is getting serious."
They both climbed down on all fours and Chris told her they had to count them out loud, warning her not to cheat. You peeked over the edge of the counter to see Chris and Sophie propped up on toes and arms. He told her to say when to start and she eyed his frame to make sure she was doing them right and mirrored him perfectly. When Sophie was ready, they started together, counting out each rep, although Chris was finishing his a little faster than Sophie was. About halfway through, the "struggle" began.

Chris made it look like he was wearing out, shaking his head, complaining, "Whew! I don't know if I can do it. You might beat me."

The news was exciting to Sophie, who herself was actually wobbling her way through the back half of their little game. But Chris cheered her on, and you and Karen cheered for them both. He had slowed down his pace, waiting in the up position so he didn't get ahead of the little girl. When they both reached 20, Sophie collapsed on the floor, flopping over with a dramatic sigh and waving her arms, whining that they felt like jelly. Chris laughed, standing up from the floor and reaching down a hand to congratulate Sophie and help her up.

"You believe me now?" he wondered, and Sophie nodded.

"So, now we have to call you Peggy," Karen noted. "I'll tell your dad when he gets home."

"You're friend's will be so jealous," you smiled. "I know I am. Gettin' to be Cap's right hand gal."

You had thoroughly embarrassed Sophie again and she ran off, probably to hide in her room until her friends showed up and she had reinforcements. Chris sat down on a stool and leaned onto his arms folded on the edge of the counter top, snuffling a laugh and shaking his head.

"Push over," Karen muttered, glancing up at Chris to give him a grin.

"I've got to start doing push-ups again," Chris decided, with a sweep his head.

"Looked like you did alright," you winked, and he gave you a shy smile.

Chris pointed down the hall, checking, "Did I see a bathroom that way?"

Karen nodded, giving him a direction with the jut of her chin. "First door on the right." Chris excused himself for a minute and, the moment he was out of earshot, Karen turned to you, noting, "This seems exceptionally normal."

You grinned, happily, confirming, "This is normal."

"And when I say normal, you know I mean this is still weird, right?" Karen checked.

"Very," you agreed, with an exaggerated nod. "I mean, seriously...how did I end up with this guy?"

"Because you're good enough, you're smart enough, and, gosh darn it," she smiled, running the backs of her fingers lovingly down your cheek, "people like you."

"Oh, stop," you rolled your eyes, giving her an embarrassed grin and a gentle shove in the arm. "I'm still waiting to have this Dallas moment and wake up to find out it was all a dream."

"Don't even say it," she groaned. "One, it's a terribly unimaginative plot twist. And two, sometimes Hollywood gives you happy endings. Don't jinx the chance for yours by talking shit."

"You think?" you genuinely wondered.
Karen shrugged, moving around you to put the fruit salad in the fridge. "Stranger things have happened," she reasoned. "Besides, I hear good things from you, he seems genuine enough again," she shrugged again, with a thoughtful pout. "Sounds better, looks better. Everything just might turn out okay."

"I wouldn't complain," you admitted, feeling a little optimistic about you and Chris.

"Of course not," she smirked. "You'd be crawling into bed every night with that fuckin' Adonis. Why would you complain? How could you complain?"

"True," you conceded, with a mischievous smirk.

The two of you straightened your faces, hearing footsteps coming back toward the kitchen. There was still some time before guests would arrive and you sat around the dining table with Karen and Chris, chit chatting to pass the time. Allen came back from the store and it was time to start putting out some snacks. A few minutes later, the first car pulled up in the driveway and Sophie ran to answer the door.

"This isn't going to get weird, is it?" Chris quietly asked, tipping his head down to yours for privacy.

You shook your head, "No. It'll be cool. Besides we're not here that long." Chris nodded and you added, "But if we need to go, the signal is...caw caw!"

Chris sputtered, trying not to laugh and bowing his forehead to your shoulder. "Good to know," he nodded.

Karen's party built up slow. Which you were thankful for. It was probably best for people to trickle in and for you, and Chris, to feel out how it was going to go when people saw Chris Evans was at the party. Naturally, people did double takes and had their share of "no ways" and "oh shits", but once the initial awe was over, people were surprisingly polite about their enthusiasm to meet him. His ego was surely stroked by plenty of compliments from his "big fans" and he took it all in stride. Mostly you figured everyone was pretty chill about the whole scene because of the cool points it got the parents in attendance to say they knew Cap.

After a little while, the other guests just seemed to get used to it, bullshitting and laughing, as if it were any other barbecue. Like you, Karen had a lot of friends in Hollywood jobs. That probably helped people from fangirling too hard. Sophie managed to overcome her shyness, pointing out Chris to the little group of friends she had and bragging about how he called her Peggy Carter. You'd mentioned overhearing her to Chris and he made it a point to call her Peggy when he went over to tell Sophie her mom was looking for her. Sophie's cheeks turned as red as the stripes on the flag and you thought for a minute she might actually swoon.

You stuck around for lunch, before apologizing for having to get on to the next event. Chris thanked your hosts for the invite and sent a wink goodbye to "his Peggy". Karen thanked you for your help, sending you both off with a hug each. You left with a smile, for seeing everyone get along again. Chris left with a cupcake for the road.

At Chris' house, Scott was already there when you arrived. He'd opened up the door to let Archie run loose in the yard and had been puttering around, straightening up and setting things out. Chris wasn't much for decorating the house. Parties at his place were more about the people making the atmosphere. But there were fireworks and sparklers for later and a few touches of red, white, and blue around.
This time, you were there to help welcome people in. You took dishes from friends who'd brought snacks and treats to set out in the kitchen and offered drinks as people arrived. Archie mingled, sniffing and nudging his introductions on his own. By now, you were familiar enough to know everyone who was there and they knew you. It was kind of like you were at your own backyard barbecue. ...If your backyard had a view like Chris'.

You floated in the pool, laughed and sang along to the music with Chris' friends, and ate more food than you'd probably care to admit. But, damn, it was good. Totally worth it. Besides, isn't that what holidays are for? Of course the shield came out of the closet to be passed around. It wouldn't be a party without it. You messaged some pics and holiday greetings back and forth with your family back in Ohio, telling them to pass on your love to everyone at their gathering and smiling at their replies.

The party wore on into the night. There were plenty of drinks and some dancing, some acrobatics into the pool and a couple of small shows of fireworks. You felt the lingering heat of the sun on your shoulders and pouted at the pink skin you saw there on one of your trips back inside after the sun set. Archie disappeared to somewhere in the house, when the loud noises started, but tiptoed back out in the lulls. You and Scott drew little designs with sparklers, trying to catch the smearing light in photos for Instagram. When you guys weren't setting off your own fireworks, the ones going off across the wide view of the valley from Chris' yard were a perfect backdrop to the nighttime festivities. All in all, it was one hell of a successful 4th of July, if you did say so yourself.

The night ended on a bit of a low note for you. Scott was one of the last to leave. His sulking about your leaving for the next several weeks had you frowning. He gave you a bear hug that squeezed the air out of you, making you promise to send him pictures and bring him back a panda, before he would let go of you. You weren't sure how you'd be able to smuggle a panda back through customs, but you figured you'd be able to find a toy one in a shop somewhere in China.

"I am partied out," you declared, flopping backward across the bed.

"You're sunburned," he pointed out, grinning at your exhaustion.

You turned your head over on the bed, tucking your chin to see your shoulder and frown. "Yeah," you mumbled. "Too much pool." Looking over at him by the dresser, you noted the faint redness across his neck and back, adding, "You too."

Turning his shoulder into the mirror to see, he conceded, "Little bit."

"Worth it, though," you decided.

"Definitely," he smiled, walking around to the far side of the bed to sit down and kick off his sandals. "D'you have fun today?"

"I did," you nodded, tipping her head backward into the mattress to see an upside down version of him behind you. "You?"

"I did," he parroted, twisting to swing his feet up on the bed to lean against the headboard and snickering at you contorting yourself to watch him.

"Thanks for going to Karen's with me," you offered, rolling over onto your side to see him. "It was a big help."

"It's no trouble," he assured you. "They're nice people. Allen's a neat guy to talk to. It's kind of funny. I've played some of the games he's worked on. Small world, huh?"
You giggled. It was a small world. How else could you explain how your two worlds had synced up together? Sometimes you had to stop and take stock of everything that's happened in the last year or so. From getting the contract for Atlanta and meeting Chris, Sebastian, and Mackie to actually dating Chris Evans, to falling back in with your Kingdom family and getting the job as Frank's stylist and all the travel and work opportunities it opened up to you. Wow. Just wow. Like, no shit. This is your life! How??

"Yeah," you agreed. "I like 'em."

"I was kinda surprised Karen let me come over," Chris admitted, with an awkward grin, as you scooted around to use his knee for a pillow.

"Nah," you waved a hand, trying to make light of his former worry. "You're okay. It's the girl code. As long as I'm happy, she's happy."

"You happy?" he checked, reaching out to comb his fingers through your hair.

"I'm happy," you smiled up at him.

Chris smiled back, nodding. "Good."

You were back home the next morning, sitting at your table, looking over the list of things to do and pack for your trip and drawing lines through tasks you'd finished. You arranged to forward your mail back home, when you traveled for such extended jobs like this. Your mom sorted through it all, using your online banking password to pay the bills that came and letting you know about any important correspondence. It would all be bundled up and sent back to you when you returned. You put a post-it note on the door to remind you turn off the water under the cabinets and leave a couple windows open, just a crack, so the air didn't get too stale while you were gone.

The last load of laundry ran, while you finished tidying up the place. Your luggage was just about ready to go and you had been meticulous about your packing, confident that you had the right clothes for the weather possibilities and every other whatnot you would need. Archie was all packed up, ready for his stay with his sitter. Chris was leaving a few days after you, heading back to Boston for awhile. Yep. Everyone was about to have their own adventure.

You were counting down the hours for your trip. There was one more day at the salon and then, let's be honest, panic mode. You'd been so good, so prepared...and yet, you couldn't stop little nagging thoughts from popping up in the back of your mind at the darnedest times. Shampooing a customer's hair- did I pack away the long cable to charge my phone yet? Eating lunch- do I need a heavier jacket? Stuck at a traffic light- should I get one of those neck pillows? Man, you worry about the silliest things.

But your forgot all about your nonsensical stressing when your last customer for the day came in. You gaped, staring like an idiot when Elizabeth Olsen walked across the salon to your chair. Nobody had told you, but then again, maybe no one knew. You picked your jaw up off the floor, shaking your head clear enough to smile back while she set her purse at the side of your counter and giggled, "Surprise!"

"Well, yeah," you blinked, holding up your empty hands at her, a little uselessly. Which was fine, because Elizabeth laid her hands into yours, leaning in to kiss your cheek. Recovering, you motioned to your chair, saying, "Wow! Please, sit down. What brings you in?"
Elizabeth was just looking for a trim and some highlights, nothing drastic. But she had had the whim and decided to see where you worked and if you were busy. She'd called Chris and he gave her the skinny on your day job, warning her that you were headed off to China tomorrow. Lizzie figured she'd see if you had an opening and was lucky enough to snag the last appointment for your schedule.

"Thank goodness you didn't leave yet," Liz smiled, while you secured the cape over her. "This is so fun, right? It's just like Atlanta again."

"It is," you happily agreed.

The two of you chatted and giggled, while you colored, washed, and styled. Elizabeth didn't go completely unnoticed in the salon, but she didn't seem to mind. She was so laid back and cool. She was interested to hear what you'd been up to working with Frank and about China. And she told you about a couple things she had in the works, one of them with Jeremy Renner. When her hair was dry and styled, you puckered up for a kissy face selfie, cheek to cheek with Lizzie in your chair. It was great catching up and, after you tidied up your station real quick and packed up some things to take home, you even went down the street with her to get a frozen treat from Starbucks before parting ways. She wished you a safe trip and thanked you again for her freshened up hairstyle.

Chris smiled along at dinner, listening to you tell him about your day and your surprise celebrity client. You'd met at his house after you left work and picked up Archie. It was one last hurrah for your pup, too, before he went to the sitter's tomorrow on your way home. Your flight had a late departure and you figured Archie would want to spend a little extra time with Chris. Didn't everybody?

Cuddled up under Chris’ arm on the couch, you watched the Red Sox-Rangers game, happily enjoying some quiet time together. Well, as quiet as Chris could be, trying not to get worked up over the Rangers’ early lead. During the seventh inning stretch, you went to the kitchen for a soda and to check Archie’s water bowl. You made it back before the end of the commercial break and dropped into your seat next to Chris, cracking open your can of cola, when Chris held out a small rectangular box wrapped up in birthday paper and a tiny bow.

"What's that?" you questioned, taking the box of his hands, curiously.

"Early birthday present," he grinned.

"Super early," you noted, looking over the angles of the box and putting your drink down on the coffee table. "What is it?"

"You have to open it to find out," he told you, inclining his head toward your prize. While you picked off the bow to stick on top of Archie's noggin and tore a seam of the paper, Chris shrugged, "Just a little something."

Putting the torn paper aside, you eyed the flat velvety box, a little suspiciously. "Hmm."

Lifting the lid, you saw a silver pendant sparkle in the lamp light. You pulled the velvet pillow the necklace was wrapped around out of its box for closer inspection. The pendant was actually a St. Christopher medallion, made of white gold to match its delicate chain, according to the tag you spied in the bottom of the box. It didn't escape your notice that it was a fancier version of the same medal Chris wore all the time.

You were a little dumbstruck, but Chris spoke up so you didn't have to, telling you, "It's a St. Christopher medal." You turned the trinket over in your fingertips, knowing what it was but listening
anyway, as he explained, "He's the patron saint of travel. My mom gave me one before I moved out here." He reached over, taking the necklace off its display pillow, opening the clasp to put it on you, while you swept your ponytail up in your hand and out of his way. "I figured," he shyly said, "with all the traveling you're doing now with Grillo, goin' overseas and stuff, maybe you could use one to keep you safe and help you always find your way back home."

Aww! You could cry. If you weren't busy sucking face with your ridiculously handsome and all around wonderful boyfriend. Good lord. This man is...just... Damn, he's so sweet and thoughtful. Swoon.

When your kiss finally broke apart, he wished you a happy birthday, as you settled back into your snuggle at his side. You fidgeted with your new necklace here and there, touching it and smiling absently while the rest of the ballgame played out. The Sox didn't win, but Chris didn't complain too much. He seemed a little preoccupied with you, dotting a random kiss into the top of your hair, tracing a line up and down your arm, or giving you an occasional extra squeeze for no apparent reason. You catalogued every little gesture, saving them to help get you through the next several weeks.

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