Heart Murmur

by Strump

Summary

"Out of every ward in the hospital, Laura's least favorite place to work was the ER." An accident on set brings some well known actors to Laura White's ER. She doesn't think much of it, but they keep showing up and she's starting to think it's not just coincidence.

Notes

Hey! This is my first work on this website, and I hope you guys enjoy it!!
This is entirely fiction. I don't know any of the actors in this story, I have never met them!
The only thing I own are the plot line and my original characters.
Chapter 1

Laura White had the same routine; she'd had the same routine ever since she started college. She would wake up at 7am on the dot and take her dog out. 'Out' meaning out of her small, one bedroom apartment, down six flights of stairs (the old building didn't have an elevator) and onto the rarely uncrowded sidewalk in front of her LA home. Her dog's name was Cherry, a pure bred sheltie. She'd bought Cherry on a whim, nothing but loneliness and depression causing the idea. But now, five years later, she wouldn't take it back for anything.

She'd had her job at the hospital for four of those, received it directly out of med school. The twenty six year old had graduated in the top ten percent of her class from the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA. Laura had been on the straight and narrow since she'd been young. Her parents held her to very high expectations; her father being a well off engineer that worked at NASA, and her older brother of ten years a very successful lawyer.

This Saturday morning was like any other morning. It was her day off, but her clock had her waking up at 7 am anyway. Her dog sat patiently by the door, mouth hung open and tongue lolling out of her jaws happily. Laura ruffled her fingers through her messy hair and opened the door, watching Cherry hurry in front of her as the girl shuffled down the narrow hallway. The complex was old, almost falling apart in some areas, but the rent was cheap, and the location wasn't bad. Laura exited onto the street, leaning against the rough brick wall of the stoop while her dog jogged down the steps and across the sidewalk to the only tree within three blocks. There was a heavy layer of fog floating over the city, muting her neighborhood in gray. There were only a couple people walking down the street in the pale morning, but the sound from the city center polluted the street. Laura scrubbed the sleep out of her eyes as her dog investigated a passing man.

"Cherry!" Laura called as the dog leapt up, licking at the man's hands as he struggled to push her off of him. "I'm so sorry, she just loves people." Laura dragged her dog off of the man, who was hurriedly shoving sunglasses onto his face despite the clouds that covered the sun.

"That's okay." His voice was barely above a whisper and he ducked his head, the hood of his jacket shadowing his face. Laura smiled brightly and pulled her dog away from him, inclining her head as he passed her.

Laura climbed into the shower at approximately 7:24am, and at 8:16 as she was sitting at her table eating a light breakfast, her phone rang in her bedroom. She hurried down the short hallway and ducked into the tiny room, yanking her phone off of the bedside table and effectively ripping the charger out of the port.

"Hello?" She swallowed the mouthful of yogurt, pressing the small device to her ear.

"Hey Laura, I know it's your day off but I need you to come in. The ER is short staffed." The girl tried not to huff a sigh as she ducked into her closet, yanking a pair of scrubs out of it.

"Sure." She hung up the phone, practically throwing it on her desk.

Out of every ward in the hospital, Laura's least favorite place to work was the ER. Among the several ailments and injuries that weren't actually injuries were gruesome scenes of car accidents, nail gun accidents, and the occasional fight victim. Laura was in the middle of pulling a nail out of someone's hand, after she'd taken a short lunch around 2pm, when Phoebe ducked her head into the room, claiming she was needed.

"I'll do this." She took Laura's place, smiling at the young man gently and gripping the end of the nail. Laura grimaced at the man's scream as she closed the door softly, hurrying to one of the rooms down the hall.

"Got roughed up in a movie set. He needs stitches." A pretty blonde nurse, Ashley, was just coming out of the room when Laura arrived. She nodded softly and ducked into the room, closing the door behind her.

"Alright, who's my victim?" She joked, yanking a pair of surgical gloves on her hands and looking up.
"That would be me." The man on the bed raised his hand, a bright smile beaming out from his face. Laura observed the long cut on his forearm, which a dark haired man was holding a towel to.

"Ah! Well, I'll have to be careful then. Can't be messing up the money maker anymore." She wiggled her eyebrows, receiving a laugh from the man on the bed. "Who's your lovely assistant, Mr. Evans?" Laura gestured with her head to the dark haired man as she flipped through his chart, observing his vitals. His heart rate had been elevated when he'd come in, and his blood pressure had been raised.

"Sebastian." The man replied, sending her a bright smile.

"You're both very chipper, seeing as you're basically covered in blood." Laura observed, dropping the chart on the counter and rolling her stool to the side of the bed.

"Occupational hazard?" The blonde haired man worded it as a question, a bright smile still dominating his face.

"Scale of one to ten?" She asked as Sebastian stepped away. Laura smiled as he moved to the end of the bed, still holding the towel.

"Maybe a six." He replied, chewing nervously on his lower lip as Laura prepared a thread and needle.

"So, how exactly did this happen, Mr. Evans? I thought they used prop knives?" She asked, glancing up at him. "This may sting." She warned as she poured some peroxide on a cotton ball and dabbed at the top of the wound. Chris hissed and winced.

"I went through a window...the wrong way." The man flushed and looked away, looking less like an internationally known actor and more like a chastised child. Laura repressed a smile and only nodded her head. They sat in silent for several minutes.

"You know, it's not every day that I get celebrities in here. I'm surprised my waiting room isn't filled with paparazzi." She glanced between the two of them with a joking twinkle in her eyes. "Do you want me to numb this?" She asked, jerking her head towards the cut on Chris' arm. He shook his head, smiling. "Your loss."

"You're the girl from this morning!" Sebastian suddenly exploded, almost making her jump as she prepared the needle and thread.

"Good lord." She gasped, jolting away from Chris.

"Sorry sorry." He apologized, smirking. "Your dog jumped on me. C-cherry?" He asked, cocking his head softly.

"That was me! That was you?" She asked, peering close to Chris' arm as she dug the needle into his flesh. He winced slightly, but didn't make a noise.

"That was me!" Sebastian imitated, flashing a wink at her. Laura chuckled, pretending not to feel the back of her neck heat up, and quickly finished stitching Chris.

"Well, Mr. Evans, Mr. Stan, seems like you're finished. I'm going to write you a prescription for some pain killer and I'll have Ashley bring in your discharge papers." She smiled, throwing her gloves in the garbage can.

"I never told you my last name." Sebastian spoke at her, a mirthful twinkle in his eyes and a small smile curled over his lips.

"Please, Mr. Stan, do you think I live under a rock?" Laura replied with a haughty snivel, but her eyes twinkled. "Try not to have any more window accidents, hey?" She spoke over her shoulder as she walked towards the door, meeting Chris' bright blue eyes.

"No promises." He replied with a wink. Laura chuckled lightly and exited the room, softly closing the door behind her and pretending that her heart wasn't hammering in her chest.

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When Laura left the ER, it was well past midnight. Her eyes drooped as she dragged her feet down the street, suddenly wishing she owned her own car. Her bus stop dropped her off a couple blocks from her apartment, and downtown LA wasn't somewhere she liked walking around in
alone at night. She could hear music pounding from a bar down the street and she hiked her backpack up further on her shoulders.

"Hey!" A call followed her as she hurried past the bar, head down and hands clutching the straps of her backpack. "Hey, wait up!" A hand landed on her shoulder and the girl yanked away from the grip, whirling around. "Relax, hon." A man stood behind her, arms crossed over a buff chest. He had long, dark hair pulled back in a pony tail and narrowed green eyes. His legs were wide, and if he wasn't leering at Laura she might have thought his sharp chin and strong jaw line attractive.

"Don't call me that." She snapped, spinning on her heel and starting to walk away.

"Come get some drinks with me and my boys." He called after her. She put her head down again and lengthened her strides, trying to keep distance between them as she could hear his heavy footfalls behind her.

"I'd rather not do that. Thanks." She stated in a hard tone.

"Oh come on, just one or two drinks! I promise it'll be fun!" She heard his footsteps start to speed up and she clenched her jaw, squeezing her eyes shut as an arm came to rest over her shoulders.

"Sorry I was late picking you up, babe." A voice spoke loudly, bouncing back over her shoulder and meeting the ears of the large man. Laura gasped, looking up with wide eyes. Chris held her tightly to his side, hand squeezing her shoulder protectively.

"Oh my god. Are you guys stalking me or something?" Laura demanded, relaxing into Chris' warm side. She felt more than heard the chuckle vibrate through him.

"Seb and I are renting a place nearby during filming." He explained as they stopped at a curb, watching cars pass by and waiting for the walk sign to light up. Laura looked up, surprised to see Sebastian sitting on the stoop directly next to hers, a lit cigarette dipping from his lips.

"You know, you guys could be rapists for all I know." Laura pointed out, looking up at Chris as they separated on the other side, finally past the danger of the bar.

"We could be." Chris nodded his head, taking the unlit cigarette that Sebastian held out to him and holding it delicately between his teeth. "If you'd like, I can take you back to that bar." He gestured with his head over his shoulder towards the loud music they'd left behind. Laura's lip curled.

"No thanks. I appreciate what you did for me back there." She inclined her head gratefully, the slightest smile curling on her lips when she noticed both Sebastian and Chris blowing the smoke away from her.

"Least I can do." He gestured ambiguously towards the stitches on his arm, clearly visible in his gray, short sleeve shirt. Laura bobbed her head with a slight chuckle.

"Well, it's pretty late and I have to be up really early tomorrow. It was fantastic to meet you guys, and thanks for helping me out back there. Good luck filming." She lifted her hand in a slight wave, blushing as they both sent her warm smiles.

"We never got your name." Sebastian spoke for the first time that night, standing up and dropping his cigarette butt on the ground. Laura watched as he pressed it out with his black boot before glancing between the two of them. Chris took a long drag of his cigarette, interrupting the brief silence between the three of them.

"Laura." She finally stated, waving once more before entering her own stairwell. After quickly checking her mail, the girl hurried up the stairs and opened the door. Cherry was patiently waiting near the couch, eyes twinkling expectantly, and Laura groaned.

Walking down the stairs was always easier than walking up them. When she opened the door to let Cherry out, Chris and Sebastian were gone. She eyed the next door stoop and the two lone cigarette butts that had been discarded. A soft smile twisted onto her face and she shook her head slightly. They were definitely something else.
Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

I'm really liking where this story is going so far!!! I hope you guys are too!

"Are you ever going to settle down, Laura? Find yourself a nice man, get out of that stuffy hospital." Laura rolled her eyes, her teeth meeting the plump flesh of her bottom lip as she bit back a groan. The hot LA sun beat down on her and she closed her eyes against the heat. A contented sigh escaped her lips as she wiggled her bare toes on the hot pavement of the stoop.

"Mom, it's not that stuffy. I really like the hospital, and besides, I just don't have time for a boyfriend right now." She pressed the phone closer to her ear as a fire engine roared by, sirens blaring.

"Don't you ever get lonely?" Her mom demanded, speaking briskly to someone away from the phone directly after the question.

"I have Cherry to keep me company. I'm usually too tired to feel lonely, anyway." Laura huffed, leaning back against the white door of her stairwell.

"Are you a lesbian?" Her mom asked suddenly.

"Jesus Christ mom, I'm not a lesbian." Laura exclaimed, earning herself a few odd looks from people on the side walk. It wasn't the first time she'd ever had that conversation with her mother.

"Are you sure? Because it's okay if you are, I'll always love you!" Her mom continued.

"Mom!" Laura cried, tangling her free hand in her auburn hair and closing her brown eyes.

"You're nearly twenty seven, Laura. You don't have a lot going for you, I'm just worried!" Her mom defended.

"I'm a doctor, mother! I'd say that's a lot! Can we not talk about this, please? How's dad been doing?" Her mom went strangely silent then. "Mom? How's dad?" Laura demanded, voice hardening.

"Not as well as we'd hoped." Her mom admitted, voice shaking slightly. "The cancer is progressing faster than we'd expected."

"How long?" Laura asked, standing up and dragging a hand down her face.

"They're saying six months, at the most. But that could change tomorrow. Listen sweetie, I have to go now, your brother and Annie are landing in an hour and the house still isn't clean. I'll call you later, okay?" Her mom changed the subject suddenly.

"Sure thing, momma. Tell daddy I love him, okay? And tell Hunter he needs to call me! I love you momma. Bye." Laura pressed the end button on her phone, dropping the small device into the pocket of her baggy shorts and leaning against the wall behind her.

When Laura was fourteen, her father had developed pancreatic cancer. He'd been on treatment for it, and chemo had cleared him of any signs. But it had come back with a vengeance earlier that year, and he was steadily declining.

"This must be the famous Laura that I've been hearing so much about!" A boisterous voice dragged the young girl from her musings. She turned to see Seb and Chris walking down the street, each with an ice cream cone in their hands and ball caps over their heads. In between them was another man, with dark skin and a voice that Laura recognized easily.

"Only good things I hope." She hopped down the two stairs to street level and curtsied dramatically.

"I'm Anthony. I keep these two in line." He joked, receiving two loud scoffs from the men on either of his sides.
"More like the other way around. Don't let him fool you, Laura." Seb's eyes twinkled as he sent her a wink, which made Laura turn visibly pink. Seb's mouth quirked into a cute smile and he licked his ice cream.

Sebastian and Chris had been living next to her for three weeks, and they had met her at the bus stop every night without fail. She hadn't been called in to work in the ER since the first day she'd met them and had resumed her normal schedule at the ICU, where she went in at eight and got out at eleven. She'd been startled the first couple nights when she'd climbed off of the bus to see them standing at the corner, both with considerate smiles on their faces. Some nights, it was just Chris, and other nights it was just Seb, but they never left her to walk the couple blocks alone. Laura couldn't believe how caring and compassionate the two men really were. She'd started to get to know them on their nightly walks. Not the actors, or the people she always saw in interviews, but Chris Evans and Sebastian Stan. Just two boys who'd followed their dreams. They were down to Earth, they both loved their fans to no end, and they were incredibly family oriented. Chris had told her about his dog, East, who had recently passed and Sebastian had explained his move from Romania to the states. Laura had always held celebrities to some sort of pedestal, as everyone did, but when Chris told her about the time he crashed his car because he'd swerved to avoid a raccoon, she was reminded that they were only human. Sebastian and Chris were some of the nicest people she'd ever met, always concerning and caring, always asking how her day was and if she was feeling okay.

She always kept the focus on them; every time one of them would ask her a question about her life or her family, she'd head them off with an ambiguous answer and another question. It wasn't that she was secretive about it, but she knew their jobs had them moving around a lot, and it would just be easier for them to leave if they didn't know a thing about her.

"I hope you didn't forget one for me, because that would just be rude." She gestured to the ice cream all three of them were holding and watched as their eyes widened and they all shared glances between each other.

"Well, we didn't know what flavor you wanted." Sebastian tried to stammer, flushing. Laura giggled and shook her head, waving away their stuttered excuses.

"I was only joking, relax. It must be your day off." She deduced, flopping to sit on her stoop again.

"Yours too." Sebastian replied, beaming brightly at her. Laura's breath hitched and she pretended to busy herself with something on her phone.

"I have the next couple days off, yeah." She nodded her head, glancing up. Her eyes roamed over the three actors before meeting Chris' blue pools. He looked concerned.

"Is everything okay, Laura? You seem kind of...distant." He asked. Laura huffed a sigh and dragged a hand through her hair. Now that Chris had pointed it out, Seb and Anthony could see that she was clearly distressed.

"Oh, it's not anything you have to worry about. I'm like an open book, easy to read!" She tried to play off, forcing a smile onto her face.

"You know you can talk to us, right?" Sebastian spoke quietly, pausing his endeavor to eat his ice cream before it melted on the sidewalk to stare at her with those slate blue eyes that always seemed so concerned for her. "We've opened up to you, but it always seems like you're scared to tell us about yourself. Honestly, is everything okay?" Laura almost wanted to cry at the worry peering from Sebastian's eyes like a bright beacon.

"It's really okay, you guys. I seriously appreciate it though." She beamed up at them before standing up again and stretching her arms over her head. "It's pretty hot and I've been out here for a while. I'll see you guys later, okay?" They all bid her a goodbye as she entered her stairwell.

Lord knows Laura wanted to talk to them. She wanted to tell them all about her dad, and how worried she was that she'd never get to say goodbye to him. But it didn't feel right to her. They were famous, and only in town for four more months, if filming ended on time. That's what Chris had told her the previous night, at least. Something felt wrong to her about burdening them with her problems when they obviously had better things to do. So Laura did what Laura always does when
she's sad. She threw on a sappy love movie and curled up under a mound of blankets with a cup of hot chocolate and a tub of ice cream, and cried.

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"You're telling me that they come get you every night and you somehow think they're just going to forget about you when they finish filming?" James demanded, hurrying next to her in the hallway with his white coat billowing behind him. Laura huffed, rolling her eyes at the flamboyant doctor and nodded. "That's bullshit and you know it, sweetie."

"They don't even know my last name. They don't know a damn thing about me!" Laura replied, dropping her chart on the counter at the nurse's station. Jackie took it, glancing up between the two doctors before rolling away to her computer.

"That's because you're scared to get close to them! Girl, from everything you've told me, they're really trying, and you keep avoiding them." James shook his head in exasperation. "Eventually, they're going to give up, and then they really will leave you like you're so scared of."

"Excuse me?" Laura demanded, eyes widening wildly. James rolled his eyes.

"I know that's what you're scared of. That you'll get close and then they'll leave you alone." James accused. Laura tried to sputter out an answer, but James only patted her shoulder with a kind, if knowing smile. "Just...give them a chance. Give Sebastian a chance." Laura wasn't sure why he'd called out the dark haired man by name, but before she could ask her pager went off, calling her away from the conversation.

"You're an ass." She called as she hurried away. James' boisterous laughter followed her down the hallway.

It had been a couple days since Laura had last seen the boys. She'd assumed that filming had picked up since their day off, but couldn't help the flash of disappointment that struck through her when she climbed off of the bus and there was nobody waiting for her. She shook her head with a wistful smile, reminding herself that they were famous actors and she was a mere doctor that they happened to be staying next to. She's struggled to not get close to them, but it was nearly impossible when they were all smiles and compassion.

The girl sighed and hiked her backpack higher on her shoulders, hands tightening around the straps. She ducked her head low and strode down the sidewalk, trying not to let her imagination make shapes in the shadows of the alley. She'd done this thousands of times alone, she could do it again.

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"Are you sure Laura is going to be okay?" Sebastian called over the music, hand tightening on his beer of its own accord. Chris turned to him with a smile, throwing back the shot in his hand. The tawny liquid slid down his throat, burning a path and curling fire in his stomach, and his head swam.

"She's fine Seb, would you quit worrying? Have some fun, man! We deserve it!" Chris laughed loudly and bumped his friend in the shoulder, harder than he'd probably meant to. Sebastian tried to laugh, but even to his ears it sounded forced. Chris was too drunk to care, moving away into the crowd.

Downey had decided to throw a party in the large apartment he was renting for the time being. Most of the actors that worked on the third Captain America movie were there, as well as several of the makeup and hair stylists, camera crew, and stunt men. Sebastian was leaning against the counter in the kitchen sipping the beer in his hand softly. He'd had it in his hand for over an hour and it was barely half gone. He couldn't help it, his thoughts were too occupied with his short, auburn haired neighbor. She was small, probably only about five feet tall, and her build was slight. There was no way she'd be able to fight off an attacker if something were to happen. Her face
flashed in his mind, brown eyes sparkling as she laughed at something stupid he or Chris had said, freckles on her cheeks shifting as her mouth stretched into a large smile.

"Fuck." He groaned, dropping his beer on the counter with a clatter. Renner glanced up from where he was rifling through the fridge.

"You alright, man?" He asked, a laid back smile curling on his face as he kicked the fridge shut and moved towards Sebastian. The Romanian man huffed a sigh and dragged a hand down his face.

"Just...thinking." He gave a noncommittal shrug, glancing at his beer forgotten on the counter.

"Sounds like you need to get fucked up." Jeremy shoved some sort of mixed drink into his hand and winked before moving away. Sebastian eyed the drink before deciding that Renner and Chris were right and threw the liquid back.
"You're kidding?" Laura threw back the last mouthful of dark beer left in her bottle, trying not to curl her lip at the sour taste before dropping the empty glass bottle on the sticky bar top. Her walk back home the previous night alone had shaken her more than she'd cared to admit, so James had decided the two of them needed to go out after they'd gotten off of their shifts at the ICU. So Laura was standing in front of a bar on a Friday night wearing her tight skinny jeans that made her ass look amazing and a V-neck shirt that emphasized her decent sized breasts, both James' choosings. She'd lost count of the amount of drinks she'd had and her vision was starting to swim. James had moved away sometime in the last hour and she was now leaning against the bar in front of a tall man. She couldn't tell if he was attractive, she was too drunk and the bar lights were dim.

"So you're a doctor, right?" He changed the subject from whatever they'd been talking about previously, which Laura couldn't remember. Laura bobbed her head, ignoring the way it pounded in time with the music when she did so.

"I work in the ICU." She slurred, giggling as she lost her balance slightly and the man reached out. His hand met her shoulder, gripping her harshly. "Ouch." She giggled, trying to struggle away from the tight grip. "That hurts." She thought she saw the man smile, but couldn't be too sure.

"Do you wanna get out of here?" He leaned in to ask, coming into view better. Laura's eyes widened at the face, a face she'd seen before, and tried to yank herself out of his grip.

"Let me go." She could feel her head starting to clear as she took in his electric green eyes and dark hair pulled back into a ponytail. The man that had asked her to drink with him and his friends the first day she'd ever met Chris and Sebastian. Except, Chris wasn't here this time to save her as he led her out onto the sidewalk. Her eyes searched for James uselessly in the crowd before the door closed behind them, muffling the noise from the bar.

"I knew it would be fun. Come on, my car is right over here." His grip was surprisingly gentle as he guided her towards a silver, expensive looking car. Laura's heart pounded and panic spiked at the darkened windows.

"Fuck you." She grunted, struggling to remember the little self defense training her older brother had given her when she'd first decided to move out to LA and attend college there. The man laughed like she'd said something funny. Laura's heart pounded wildly in her chest as one of the door opens and another man stepped out of the car, a sultry smile curled lazily across his lips. His tongue darted out of his mouth, licking his lips slowly like she was a delicious piece of meat that he was about to devour.

"Stop struggling, honey. It's gonna be okay." The man holding her bent over, his warm breath caressing the back of her neck. Laura bit out a whimper and the man's breath hitched. "I like that." He whispered, his hand coming to clutch her butt. She squealed and tried to leap away from him, but he was too strong.

"Please stop." She whispered, blinking tears down her cheeks as his lips pressed to the back of her jaw. Normally, that was one of her pleasure spots, but there was nothing pleasurable about what was happening. The man's tongue darted out, sliding up her neck. With sudden ferocity, his teeth clenched down on the sensitive skin of her neck. Laura held back another whimper, squeezing her eyes shut and wishing it would end.

"The more you cry and struggle, the more turned on I get. Just an hour. An easy five hundred dollars. There's no way you can turn that down." He bragged. Rage curled in Laura's stomach and her eyes snapped open. She took a deep breath, struggling to keep herself from trembling, and jabbed her elbow as hard as she could into his gut.

"Jesus!" He grunted, ducking away from her as his large arms wrapped around his middle. Laura took her chance, launching her foot into his groin. "FUCK!" He dropped to his knees, eyes wide, and Laura could almost swear there were tears swimming in them. She snatched her purse off of the ground, which she hadn't noticed he'd taken until he'd fallen, and spun on her heel,
practically sprinting down the street. She had no idea if the other man was following her or not.

The chilled air cleared her head as she ran down the street, ignoring the do not walk sign and hurrying across the street. She glanced at her door and then down at her trembling hands before taking a chance and rushing into the stairwell next to her. She ran up the steps to the top, banging on the only door in the place.

The door swung open to reveal a frazzled looking Sebastian, wearing baggy sweatpants and a loose t-shirt. Laura suddenly realized that they'd probably been asleep, it was nearly three am.

"Laura?" Sebastian's eyes widened at the sight of his small neighbor standing in front of him. Her hair was a mess, makeup smeared under her eyes, and there were messy tears traveling down her cheeks. She was panting and he could see her shoulders convulsing with trembles.

Without thinking, Laura launched herself at him, grasping at his shirt. His arms came around her, a cage of safety and comfort.

"Hey hey, calm down, you're okay." She hadn't even realized that she was making sound, but as Sebastian pulled her back into reality, she realized she was dragging in rough breaths. Sobs erupted from her chest, loud and guttural. She was practically screaming as she pressed herself closer to him, trying to escape the fear that still hammered in her chest.

"I'll get water." She barely registered Chris' voice, still gravelly with sleep, as she heard the door click softly behind them.

"Lock it! Lock it please!" She begged, fingers spasming into Sebastian's dark blue shirt.

"Okay, hey, I'm going to lock it okay?" He took her face in his hands, forcing her to meet his slate blue eyes, wide with concern. "You're okay. I promise." His words held a weight that she knew she could trust, so she nodded. Sebastian reached behind her, watching the girl visibly relax as she heard the low click of the lock. "Come on." He led her softly to the couch, sitting her down on the soft cushion. She kicked her heels off and drew her knees up to her chest, squeezing her legs tightly.

"You're safe here, Laura." Chris promised, sitting on her other side and pressing a cold glass of water into her hand. She took a shaky sip of it before leaning forward and setting it down on the table.

"I'm so sorry." She whispered, shaking her head wildly. "I didn't...I didn't know where else to go." Her voice trembled and she tightened her grip on her legs.

"Please don't apologize, it's okay." Sebastian assured her, watching her rock back and slowly softly. "Can you tell us what happened?" He asked, hesitantly placing his hand on her shoulder. She flinched away softly, her wild eyes sliding over to meet his. He almost cried at the fear in them.

"He just...I was at the bar and I was really drunk, Sebastian. I was really really drunk, and he..." She shook her head. She knew they couldn't understand what she was saying; she could hardly understand what she was saying.

"Did it...did he?" Sebastian's heart broke as she looked up at him, lips trembling. "Did he assault you, Laura?" The dark haired man almost breathed out a sigh of relief when she shook her head.

"He didn't get that far. I was just so scared." Sebastian's breath hitched as she stared up at him with such raw panic. In that moment, he wanted nothing more than to protect the small, young girl in front of him. His heart clenched as she hesitantly leaned towards him, her head softly coming to rest on his chest. He slowly put his arm around her shoulders, noticing the way she tensed before relaxing into him.

"You're okay now, Laura." Sebastian promised, carding his fingers through her tangled hair.

"I'm sorry for waking you up so late." She whispered, not noticing Chris stand up. He inclined his head at Sebastian and ruffled his hair before padding back into his bedroom and leaving the two in the living room.

"Don't. Please don't apologize. I'm so glad you came to us for help, Laura." He whispered, smiling as she adjusted her position, arm lightly resting across his stomach as her legs curled under her. She was asleep in a matter of seconds and Sebastian followed soon after.
Laura's bed was too soft, and the sun was sprinkling her face. She groaned, rubbing her eyes softly. Her bedroom window didn't receive sunlight. The thought made her eyes shoot open, taking in the unfamiliar room. She glanced down at herself, eyes wide as she noticed she was wearing a large shirt and sweat pants that didn't actually fit.

"Oh my god." She looked around, eyes wide and breath shuddering in her chest. Blurry memories from the events of the previous night swam in her mind, fragmented and dull. She remembered the man at the bar, but only fuzzy fragments of the rest of the night could be recalled.

"Glad you're awake." She gasped at the voice, looking up with wide eyes. Chris was leaned against the doorframe, arms crossed over his chest with a light, sympathetic smile. "How's your head?" He asked.

"Um...it's fine. Kind of hurts, I suppose. Chris, what happened last night?" She asked, climbing out of the bed and tightening the draw strings on the light gray sweatpants. The cool, hardwood floor felt almost frigid on her bare feet.

"Seb can probably explain better. He's making breakfast." He smiled and led her out of the bedroom. She followed him down a short hallway and they took a right into a decent sized kitchen.

"Sleeping beauty awakes!" Sebastian joked, but Laura could see the tense concern underneath his playful attitude. Something had happened last night and both of the guys were worried.

"What happened last night?" Laura demanded, sitting at the kitchen table and smiling gratefully when Chris gave her a glass of water and two small white pills. She threw them back with a gulp of water.

"You showed up at our door around three AM. I don't know the details, you were really out of it. But you were terrified...you said something about a man trying to assault you." Sebastian replied in a tight tone, dropping a plate of eggs and bacon in front of her. "Finish that water, you're probably dehydrated. Seemed like you'd been drinking quite a bit." She looked down feeling like a chastised child. Sebastian was clearly upset with her, and though she'd never experienced anything but caring concern from him, she knew that being on his bad side was not a place a person wanted to be.

"Sorry." She whispered softly, taking a sip of water.

"You fucking should be!" Sebastian exploded, making her jump. Tears rose to her eyes and she ducked her head, allowing her auburn hair to curtain her face.

"Seb." Chris placed a placating hand on the shorter man's shoulder from where he was standing, setting his cup of coffee down.

"Do you have any idea..." The Romanian trailed off, spinning around and taking a deep breath while he tried to reign in his temper. His hands clutched at the edge of the counter so tightly that the skin pulled white over his knuckles. "I was worried sick, Laura. When you showed up...banging on our door, practically screaming. What were you thinking, going out to drink alone like that?" His teeth were obviously clenched. Laura looked up, eyes wide in surprise.

"What?" She asked, bewildered. "Wait, you're mad because I was out drinking? Not
because I showed up at your place at a god awful time in the morning?” She demanded, hands clutching the glass of water. Her food sat untouched in front of her, but the smell was making her mouth water with hunger.

“I don't give a fuck about what damn time it was, Laura!” He almost shouted, spinning around. Laura stared at him with wide eyes, startled to see the panic and concern flaring from his eyes. "You can't just...you can't go out alone like that, okay?” His shoulders seemed to droop and he ran a hand through his already distressed hair. "Please, don't do that anymore.” His voice lost all fire and he leaned against the counter.

"I wasn't alone." Laura stated in a voice barely above a whisper.

"Excuse me?” That was Chris, who until this point had only been sipping his coffee and watching the encounter transpire. Laura glanced at him, realizing with slight bewilderment that Chris look just as angry as Sebastian did.

"I wasn't alone last night. I was with my coworker, James.” She confirmed, hefting a fork into her hand and jabbing it into the eggs on the plate.

"Where was he during all of this, Laura?” Chris asked, managing his temper much better than Sebastian had. Laura shrugged, jabbing a forkful of egg into her mouth and moaning in delight.

"Fuck, these are amazing!” She groaned whorishly.

"Where was James during all of this, Laura?” Sebastian reiterated Chris' question in a hard tone, eyes narrowed and dark.

"I don't know." She replied in a soft voice. "He left me alone at the bar." The memories of the previous night were starting to clear as she continued to scarf down the eggs. Sebastian almost smiled, and then remembered why she was there in the first place. His mouth dropped back into a straight line.

"What the fuck was he thinking?” Chris demanded, more to himself than anyone else. "Jesus Christ, Laura, do you understand what could have happened? This is serious.” He exclaimed, surprisingly frustrated by her lack of concern for herself.

"I understand exactly what could have happened. Those men tried to pay me five hundred dollars for an hour of sex. They tried to get me in their car. So yeah, I know exactly what could have happened, but it didn't. And I'm okay. And I'm sorry for bothering you guys with it.” She shook her head, pushing the now empty plate away from her and taking a large mouthful of water.

"They tried to pay you for sex?!” Sebastian's temper flared again and Laura quickly swallowed the water. "Jesus fucking Christ!” He put his hand up to his head, yanking at his hair with understandable frustration.

"Why are you so upset about this?” Laura asked, glancing between the two of them. Sebastian turned to her with an almost bewildered expression on his face.

"Excuse me?” He demanded, crossing his arms over his chest. Laura tried to ignore the way his biceps flexed with the motion, instead training her eyes on his. "Have you been listening to anything I said?” He exclaimed.

"Yeah, but why?” She asked again. "I don't get it.” Sebastian could see that she was telling the truth and almost threw his hands up in exasperation.
"We care about you, Laura." Chris replied, taking a seat at the table as he felt himself start to calm down. "You really scared us last night." He said to her. She frowned, staring down at the worn varnish of the wood table that had obviously come with the apartment and fiddled with her thumbs on her laps.

"I didn't mean to." She admitted.

"We know that." Sebastian replied, coming around the table and resting his hand casually on the top of her head. "And I'm really glad that you came to us for help. If anything had happened to you..." He trailed off, shaking his head. He wouldn't, couldn't, think about that.

"I appreciate that you guys are so concerned about me." She glanced up at Sebastian from under his hand as he softly raked his fingers through her hair. "Aren't you like...working today?" She asked suddenly, glancing at the two of them with wide eyes.

"No, we're not needed on set today." Chris replied, brushing her arm softly with his hand as he strode past her with a declaration of hitting the shower thrown over his shoulder. Left alone, Laura turned full in her chair towards Sebastian.

"I'm so sorry, Sebastian." She apologized.

"Stop apologizing. It wasn't your fault." He replied, stepping back leaning against the counter to take a large gulp of coffee. "I shouldn't have yelled." He sighed heftily. Laura shrugged carelessly and stretched her arms over her head.

"I probably look like hell right now." She snorted, ruffling her hand through her tangled hair. Sebastian chuckled over the rim of his coffee mug.

"You look beautiful." He replied, so soft that Laura was sure it was just a trick of her mind. She glanced up, startled to see his slate blue eyes staring straight at her, sparkling with an emotion that she couldn't decipher. She swallowed harshly, unable to look away from his mesmerizing face. His eyes flickered down to her lips and his breathing seemed to hitch.

"Do you drink shower gel or something? We're out again." Laura jumped, startled as Chris stepped into the kitchen wearing only a pair of sweatpants, and tore her eyes away from Sebastian. Chris was ruffling his wet hair with a towel and Laura looked away from his bare chest, turning bright red.

"No. Could you put on a shirt?" Sebastian stated in a flat tone. Laura glanced over at him, watching him glare at his roommate. Chris chuckled and shoved his shoulder with a wink, a gesture that Laura didn't understand, before exiting the kitchen. He came back half a minute later wearing a shirt and missing the towel. His wet hair hung in front of his face and he pushed it back, letting out a frustrated huff.

"Are you ready to get back to brunet?" She gestured to Chris' hair as he flopped onto a seat at the table with a grin.

"You know it! I really hate blond." He admitted, scratching his cheek. "And I miss my beard. I think it makes me look hotter." He winked at Laura, a friendly sparkle glittering from his eyes. She chuckled, brushing a strand of her own auburn hair over her shoulder.

"Alright, well. I'm gonna go get dressed. You should probably head home, Laura. Your dog's been alone all night." Sebastian detached himself from the counter, not looking at Laura as he headed for his bedroom. She watched him retreat, gnawing her bottom lip in confusion as his
bedroom door practically slammed shut.

"Did I do something wrong?" She turned to Chris, eyes wide in confusion. "What just happened?" He was shaking his head, running a frustrated hand through his still wet hair.

"He's moody. Don't worry about it. But he's probably right, your dog is probably hungry." He smiled and stood up, Laura following suit. "Here." As he led her to the front door, he jabbed a small scrap of paper towards her.

"What's this?" She asked, carefully unfolding the piece of paper.

"Our numbers. If you need anything and we're not here." He gave her a friendly smile and ruffled her hair. She beamed up at him and shoved the piece of paper into her pocket.

"Thanks for everything, Chris." She smiled gratefully and grabbed the door knob before hesitating.

"Is everything okay?" Chris asked, noticing her hesitation. She beamed up at him, her eyes becoming distant.

"You just...remind me of my older brother." She shook her head with a giggle and opened the door and hurried down the stairs. The sun was beaming brightly when she exited onto the street, shielding her eyes as she dug for her keys in her purse.

When she entered her apartment, her dog was waiting at the door. Laura sighed and let her out, following her down the stairs and out onto the street. Cherry did her business before they headed back inside.

Laura flicked on her shower back in her apartment and thought back to her strange encounter with Sebastian in the kitchen. She shook her head with a small sigh and tried to erase his intense blue eyes from her mind, but nothing she did could stop the array of feelings that ran through her at the imagination of his face.

"I'm so fucked."
Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

Just some Laura and Chris friendship development! :)

Laura liked LA. She liked the proximity to other people. She liked knowing that there was always someone near. The near constant bustle of the city was relaxing to her. She liked knowing that she wasn't the only one that was awake into the late hours of the night, that insomnia didn't leave her nearly as alone as she felt it did.

She liked that it was two am and it was still warm. She sat on her stoop, watching the cars pass by on the street and listening to the wind rustle through the buildings and sparse trees. Laura had been plagued by insomnia for as long as she could remember, but there was no better place to suffer from it than LA, she decided.

Her phone vibrated softly against her leg. She looked down at the pavement where the expensive device was laying and a soft smile curled on her face, despite the aching sadness that curled anxiety in the pit of her stomach.

[From: Chris, 2:06am]

Want some company?

[From: Laura, 2:06am]

Sure :)

She hadn't spoken to Sebastian since her late night escapade from the bar two weeks ago. She'd passed him several times on the street, but his shoulders were always hunched and his head was ducked. He obviously didn't want to speak to her. She'd texted Chris, asking if his dark haired roommate was feeling okay. Chris had replied with a 'dunno', and then invited her to dinner. She'd graciously accepted. That had been three days after the incident. They'd seen each other, in some capacity, every day since then. Chris had never once let her walk home alone from the bus stop again.

"Hey sweet cheeks." Chris threw himself onto the stoop next to her, tossing his arm around her shoulder. She immediately leaned into his comfort, accepting the silent friendship he offered. Chris Evans reminded her of her older brother, Hunter, in a lot of different ways. Physically, the two were nothing alike. But the warmth that Chris radiated was familiar to her, comforting, because it was the same compassionate energy that rolled off of Hunter in waves. The tall brunette-turned-blond that she'd started to confide in always seemed to know when she was upset, in pain, or need. He knew that she would be awake every night until approximately 3:45am. He knew that she got the saddest between 1:30 and 3:00. He liked to give her time and space to work through anything that she needed to, but he'd without fail offered his companionship to her every night for almost two weeks. Some nights, she accepted with no hesitation. Other nights, she would thank him for the gracious offer and politely decline. Chris respected her decisions every night with quiet
compassion and eyes that told her he would never judge her.

"Did you know that cats sleep for 70% of their lives?" Laura murmured, nestling her head under Chris’ chin. He squeezed her shoulder softly, a chuckle reverberating through him. Laura always had some strange fact to tell him when he joined her on the stoop.

"I did not." He replied softly, pulling a pack of cigarettes from his pocket. A frown played at Laura's lips, but her eyes showed understanding. She didn't approve of his smoking habit, but she too suffered from awful anxiety. She'd turned to different coping mechanisms, and she knew that if he could quit he would.

He lit the small stick and shoved the pack back into the pocket of his sweats. He placed the cigarette loosely between his lips and took a large drag before exhaling the smoke, turning his head away so that Laura wouldn't have to breathe it. She hummed softly.

"What's on your mind, kiddo?" Chris inquired, turning his head and fluttering a small kiss onto her forehead. She reveled in the comfort, eyes sliding shut blissfully. If she could spend eternity in this moment, wrapped safely in Chris' arm, where nothing would ever go wrong, she would.

"Just thinking." She mumbled in reply, fiddling with her hands on her lap. Chris glanced down at her, but didn't press her. Her eyebrows drew together and her lips puckered as her eyes descended towards the sky. He immediately recognized her thinking face. "About my dad. He hasn't been doing too well. My mom says it could be anywhere between a week and a couple months." She shrugged softly under Chris' arm. It tightened around her shoulder, but he didn't say anything. She appreciated the silence more than she thought she would. The two sat in silence until Laura started to drift to sleep on his broad shoulder. He smiled down at her before softly shaking her awake.

"Bed time, sugar." He pressed another kiss to her forehead and bid her a goodnight, waiting until she was safely inside the stairwell before taking the couple steps back to his own stoop. He entered the apartment softly, but it didn't matter. Seb wasn't home. Seb was rarely ever home anymore. Chris heaved a sigh and dragged his hand down his face before falling onto the couch. He fell asleep where he lay, barely able to make sure the alarm was set on his phone before he drifted into dreamland.
Chapter 6

"Are you sleeping okay?" The question jolted Chris from his daydreams, causing him to straighten immediately. Sebastian leaned against the door of his trailer, a concerned expression drawing his eyebrows together.

"Of course." Chris replied earnestly. Sebastian's expression showed his disbelief easily. Chris sighed, allowing his shoulders to droop. "Why won't you come home?" Normally, Sebastian would have made a joke about him sounding like a domesticated housewife whose husband spent way too much time at 'work'. But the dark haired man didn't crack a joke. He stepped into the trailer and closed the door behind him, taking a seat at the small kitchen table.

"I can't...see her." Sebastian replied honestly, running a hand through his hair-grown long for his role as Bucky Barnes. "It's...too much for me. I can't put her or myself through this." He shook his head, licking his lips and taking the time to gather his thoughts. His best friend sat on the couch, staring at him with a patient expression. Chris was always patient. "Our job, it doesn't leave time for a meaningful connection like that. I can't...allow myself to feel these kinds of things for her. Chris, I like her. I think she's fucking amazing, and I can't do a damn thing about it." The Romanian grew agitated, hands clenching on the table. He stared angrily down at his shoes, like he was trying to burn a hole in the floor with his temper.

"Why not?" Chris asked. The question wasn't angry. It wasn't a probing question meant to infuriate Sebastian. But the dark haired man grew irrationally volatile at it.

"Because I just fucking can't, okay? Because it worked so fucking well last time right?" He practically shouted, looking up to glare at Chris. Those calming blue eyes stared back at him, a thoughtful expression smoothed across Chris' features. He was used to Sebastian blowing up like this. He'd known the other actor long enough, was close enough to him, to know when it was real anger, and when he was just really scared. This was one of the times where he was just afraid.

"This is about Caitlyn." Chris deduced. Caitlyn had been Sebastian's last girlfriend. Not an actress, or a musician, not famous at all. Much like Laura. Caitlyn had been sweet, so very sweet. She'd loved Sebastian, and she'd loved the cast of the Marvel movies. And they'd all loved her. But the pressure got to her, the threats on the internet from Sebastian's loyal fan base, the falsely spun tales vomited up by the media, and she'd cracked. She'd left Sebastian, gotten on a plane one night and gone to live with her mother in Berlin. Sebastian had been crushed. It had taken Chris six weeks just to get him out of those stupid fucking sweatpants, the ones she'd bought him from her trip to Jamaica. Even now, after over a year of being without her, Chris knew that Sebastian could still feel the pain from the loss reverberating deep within his soul. He'd really loved Caitlyn, had been in love with her since the very beginning. He'd even bought her a ring.

"Of fucking course it's about fucking Caitlyn!" Sebastian exploded, tugging his hand through his hair again. Chris frowned deeply. Most of Sebastian's fans, the media, the news outlets, they only saw him at his best. When he was sweet and caring and so kind that it made grown men cry. But Chris knew that Sebastian loved too deeply, felt too strongly. He empathized too much, and he bore a burden that nobody could carry because of it. Sebastian was one of the most caring, amazing, compassionate people in the world, but that kind of emotion always came with a high price. Because of this, Sebastian was prone to violent outbursts which almost always ended with him curled in a tight ball with sobs tearing out of his chest that hit Chris like a semi truck. He hated it. He hated seeing his best friend, his brother be reduced to such a state. Sebastian was far too kind to deserve that kind of pain. "You think I liked being like that? That...that
zombified version of me?? That's not me, Chris! I don't want to go through that again! So yeah, I think Laura is fucking amazing, but no, I'm not going to do shit about it! I'm going to finish filming this movie, and then I'm going to go home and I'm going to forget about her, and she's going to forget about me!" Sebastian panted heavily, wondering when he'd jumped to his feet, and there was sweat dripping down his face. Chris stared at him with the same level gaze, the gaze that said 'I accept what you just said, but you're dead wrong'.

"Guys, we're ready for you." There was a call through the door from Chris' PA. The blond stood up, stretching with a cat like movement and brushed past the still-panting Romanian.

"Calm down, Seb. You're okay." He patted his best friend's shoulder as he passed, and as fast as Sebastian's anger had boiled out of his chest, it flattened. He followed Chris out of the trailer feeling like he'd just run a mile, but there was a heavy weight lifted from his chest. He smiled a little easier that day.

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"Oh fuck you!" Laura squealed, dodging James as he darted towards her with his hands outstretched. Mark stood in the corner with a bottle of beer and a small smirk playing at his lips as he watched his boyfriend and his best friend run around the small apartment. He'd only been dating James for a month when the doctor had demanded that they go to Laura's for dinner. James had promised great company and amazing food, and Mark could never pass up free food of any kind. So he'd dawned his favorite button down shirt, with the sleeves rolled up, a pair of skinny jeans and his sharp black dress shoes that James loved. Laura had lovingly invited them into her quaint apartment, the delicious smell of chicken mixed with lemon wafting into the tight hallway as she ushered them into the homey place.

"I don't swing that way, sweetheart!" James howled after her, diving forward and slamming her onto the couch. His fingers jabbed into her sides, making her squeal and squirm under him, slamming her fists uselessly on his chest. James cackled maniacally. A sudden message tone went off, making the two on the couch freeze. They glanced at each other, an evil glint glowing in James' eyes. Laura's widened.

"JAMES NO!" She squealed, but he'd already lunged for the coffee table and snatched her phone into his hand. He stood, holding the phone above his head while he read the sender's name.

"OOH! WHO'S CHRIS?!" He squealed, narrowing his eyes down at the girl in front of him. "Are you keeping secrets from me?"

"Please give it here, James." She begged. James peered into her eyes, seeing the joking twinkle replaced by something else. It seemed almost sad to him, so he ruffled her hair and dropped her phone back into her hand.

[From: Chris, 7:18pm]

You busy?

[From: Laura, 7:19]

Everything okay??

[From: Chris, 7:19pm]

Come over.
"Hey, can I duck out for a second? A friend of mine needs something." Worry pounded in her chest, and James could clearly see the distress in her eyes, so he nodded with a smile. "Thank you, I'm so sorry. Make yourselves at home!" She called, slamming the door in her haste to get to Chris.

His apartment was unlocked when she entered. The lights were all off and an eerie, unsettling silence blanketed the place.

"Chris?" She called, softly closing the door behind her and turning on the lights. They flickered for a moment before illuminating the living room softly. It was clean and orderly, something she hadn't expected from Chris and Sebastian. She ventured further into the living room, glancing into the impeccable kitchen. There was a sudden sound from the back hallway, a slight whimper. Laura hurried towards it, ducking into the bedroom on the right side of the hallway. The floor lamp was on, dimly lighting the bedroom. Her eyes searched the floor, a frown deepening on her face as she saw the bottles, emptied and half full alike, scattered around the floor like some sort of whiskey massacre. Chris was huddled in the corner of the room staring out at her from a cocoon of blankets, face streaked and puffy.

"L..." His voice hitched and a sob hiccupped from his chest. Her face dipped, tears rising to her eyes at the shattered sight of one of her closest friends curled in a broken mess of tears.

"Oh, Chris." She dropped to her knees in front of him, wrapping her arms around his blanketed shoulders and drawing him towards her. "It's okay, sweetie. It's okay." She whispered, rocking the actor like he was a child.

"L-Laura..." He gasped, voice muffled by her shoulder.

"What do you need?" She asked gently, stroking her fingers through his hair softly. He seemed to relax under the gesture.

"S-Seb..." He hiccupped again, hands reaching up from under the blanket to grasp her hand. She could feel his phone pressed into her hand.

"Okay, dear." She took the phone and adjusted her position so that she was leaning on the wall next to him. He dropped his head into her lap, heaving sobs as she scrolled through his contacts until she found Sebastian's name. The phone rang as she pressed it to her ear, praying that he would pick up.

"Hey." Sebastian's voice finally picked up. She was relieved that he sounded sober—she didn't know what she'd be do if they were both drunk.

"Hey Sebastian, it's Laura." Sebastian stiffened in his seat at the bar, the bottle of beer he'd been nursing immediately forgotten. If Laura was calling from Chris' phone, then something was wrong. Dread took a hold of him and his hands got cold, sweat making them clammy and slick. "Can you come home, please? Chris..." She trailed off, struggling for the words. "He needs you." She finally stated lamely.

"I'll be there in five." Sebastian ran. He ran like he was being followed by banshees. He ran like he'd never ran before, and by the time he was bursting through his front door his chest was heaving and his shirt was stuck to his back with sweat. "Laura!" He yelled wildly, slamming the door shut a little too hard behind him.
"Back here." Her voice called back much softer. Sebastian hurried towards Chris' bedroom, coming to a scene of depressed chaos. Chris was cuddled in her lap like a toddler, shoulders trembling with silent sobs. Laura looked up at Sebastian with a helpless expression. He took a step forward, foot accidentally kicking something on the floor. He looked down, suddenly noticing the multitude of beer and whiskey bottles scattered around the room. His heart sank.

"Chris." He made his way over to them, throwing himself down next to Laura so that their shoulders were pressed together. Chris looked up at him, snot and tears mixing trails down his face. Sebastian's heart constricted. "What's going on, buddy? What happened?" He asked softly.

"M-my mom is in the hospital." He whispered, voice shaking. Sebastian held in his gasp, knowing it would only aggravate the situation, and reached over to squeeze what he thought was the other man's shoulder. He couldn't really tell in all of the blankets. "T-they don't know what it is. She just c-collapsed. I talked to her on the phone...she sounded weak. But she told me not to come. She told me to stay here and finish filming...Scott is with her..." He stuttered, reaching up and grabbing Sebastian's arm. The other man leaned forward, keeping his hand tightly on Chris' shoulder. Laura stared down at Chris in empathy, a gleam in her eyes showing that she understood exactly what was going through his mind. She'd gone through the same thing when her father had gone back into the hospital with his cancer.

"Chris..." Sebastian trailed off, clearly at a loss. He didn't know what one would usually say to that kind of news. I'm sorry to hear that? It'll be okay? Sebastian almost shook his head. He couldn't tell Chris that it would be okay. Sebastian didn't make promises he couldn't keep.

"When I was really young, my dad used to sing me to sleep," Laura spoke in barely a whisper, her voice mesmerizing and soothing. Chris turned his terrified eyes towards her. She ran a nail softly down his cheek before raking her fingers through his golden hair, damp from sweat. "Do you want me to sing you to sleep, Chris?" She asked, watching the actor give a brief nod of confirmation.

Sebastian looked on in awe as she sang. The song wasn't one he recognized, and the words seemed meaningless in the shadow of her beautiful voice. It soared over their heads and entered their hearts in a way only the rise and lilt of music can. Chris relaxed—Sebastian felt it under his hand—and soon, the distressed and drunk man was fast asleep.

Sebastian slowly and carefully maneuvered Chris off of Laura's lap and the two of them managed to haul him onto his bed together. She pulled the blankets tighter around him before pressing a kiss, soft and loving, to his damp forehead. Sebastian exited the room first, with Laura following closely behind. The door shut behind them and the girl followed the dark haired actor into the well lit living room.

"Laura...I really appreciate you being here for him." Sebastian turned, startled to see the tears trailing down her cheeks.

"Sebastian...can I...?" She trailed off, biting her lip unsurely. Sebastian looked away for a moment, knowing that if he complied to her request he was going to be fucked forever. With a final huff of decision, the Romanian stepped forward and enveloped the girl into his arms. She threw her arms around his waist and pressed her face into his chest. "I haven't...heard that lullaby in a long time." She offered as an explanation. Sebastian didn't reply, only squeezed her softly and tried to ignore the pounding in his chest. "Thanks...for everything." Her voice was so vulnerable and raw. Sebastian wanted to hold her close and make sure nothing would ever hurt her again. And that was the second he knew he was going to fall head over heels for the doctor from LA.
Filming ended on a Thursday. The wrap party was on the Friday, and the boys were packed and ready to leave by Saturday afternoon. Their planes were to depart on Sunday, Chris heading back to Boston and Sebastian returning to his home in New York. On Saturday evening, Laura sat on their couch as the two of them took their pictures from shelves and erased any trace that they'd lived in the apartment. She felt strangely at peace with the two movie stars leaving. She'd been preparing for it for a week now, readying herself to say goodbye to them and knowing that she would deal with the ache of loneliness when she sat outside on her stoop and Chris wasn't there, or when she got off of the bus and Sebastian wasn't waiting with a bright smile that always lit up the night sky.

But she'd known from the beginning that it was just a temporary stint. They were by no means attached to her, at least not steadfastly. Their friendship was flexible, easily stretched and manipulated, like taffy. She sipped her whiskey, puckering her lips at the burning liquid, as Sebastian yelled to Chris from his bedroom to ask if he had any more of the cardboard boxes they were planning on mailing.

"You'll call, right?" Chris demanded as he dropped another cardboard box on the growing stack near the door. Laura smiled lazily and hefted her shoulders in a shrug. Chris poked his tongue out at her and ruffled her hair as he passed. "You'll miss us and you know it." He called over his shoulder, smiling when Laura's giggle drifted after him.

"Maybe I will. Maybe not." She shrugged nonchalantly, allowing her eyes to drift shut as the late afternoon sun dappled the living room and warmed the small girl. She only half listened to the two bulky men move around the apartment with grace that she'd never expect them to possess. A smile quirked on her lips gave away the peace she felt within and Sebastian couldn't help the glowing grin that broke out on his face at it. He'd been scared that she was going to cry, that she was going to beg for them to stay and make it harder. But she was accepting. She didn't push. She sat on the couch in the apartment sipping the last of their whiskey and enjoying the sun.

"You know, that hoodie that you gave me last week is staying." She called, tearing Sebastian out of his thoughts. His expression folded into one of playful offense and he put a hand over his heart in mock injury.

"My dearest Laura...a thief?!" He cried indignantly. Laura snorted and stood up, stretching her arms over her head lazily before brushing past him and dropping the plastic cup into the trash bag that was puddled on the kitchen floor.

"It's big, and mine all have holes in them. I'll take good care of it." She smiled innocently, showing her sparkling white teeth. Sebastian's heart skipped a beat and he reached out, shoving her lightly.

"You better, punk. I'll kick your ass if you don't." He pointed a threatening finger at her, laughing as she batted it away with an eye roll.

"I think we're done." Chris heaved a sigh as he dropped the last box near the front door and sauntered into the kitchen. "You're sure you don't mind mailing those, sweet cheeks?" He asked with wide, earnest eyes.

"I'm sure, baby cakes." Laura snorted, shoving his shoulder.
"Here, at least take this. To pay for it. This is a lot of stuff." He reached into his pocket and stuffed a wad of cash into Laura's hand.

"Chris this is like five hundred dollars." She stated incredulously, flicking through the bills with wide eyes. "I'm sure shipping isn't going to cost that much!" He only smiled and shrugged.

"Go buy yourself something nice, then. A late or early birthday present from us." He gestured between himself and Sebastian. Laura shoved the bills into her pocket with a bright smile, eyes twinkling.

"Fucking movie stars!" She laughed, throwing her arms around Chris. He squeezed her tightly and planted a solid kiss to the top of her head.

"I'll miss you, Laura." He murmured sadly, internally frustrated with himself for allowing her to grow close to him.

"Jesus Chris, I'm not fucking dying. This isn't the last time you're ever gonna see me, lighten up will you?" She punched his chest lightly and he couldn't help but laugh. "You're such a sap." She shook her head and wrapped her arms around him in another hug.

"You love me anyway." Chris snorted a reply before stepping away. "I'm gonna start loading my bags into the rental car so we can just laze around before we have to leave tomorrow." He jerked a thumb over his shoulder before leaving the apartment. Laura turned to Sebastian with a smile playing on her lips.

"You know, Chris and I try to make it a rule not to get close to anyone while we're filming." Sebastian stated as he stepped close and wrapped her into a hug. Where Chris's hugs were brotherly in nature, Sebastian's made her skin tingle and her heart beat faster.

"Fuck your rules." Laura replied, her voice muffled into his chest as her hands wound into his shirt. He threw his head back and laughed loudly, the sound echoing around the empty kitchen.

"We're gonna miss you, Laura." They stepped away from each other, just enough to see faces. "I'm gonna miss you." He stared down at her, tongue darting out of his mouth to lick his lips - a habit he'd had since he was a child. Laura smiled softly before she stepped away and pushed his shoulder, breaking the moment.

"I'm gonna miss you guys too. You're both saps, you know that?" She giggled and reached onto her tippy toes to press a soft kiss to Sebastian's cheek.

The next day, Sunday, Laura would never admit it, but her heart hurt when she looked at the clock during her lunch break and realized that she would be all alone again when she got home. The ache came with a vengeance, a sharp pain that took her breath away and made her falter in her eating. Tears rose to her eyes and she blinked them away hurriedly, glancing around to make sure nobody had noticed her strange behavior. But nobody at the hospital ever noticed Laura White. There, she was just another doctor.

She floated through work with her head in another world, and when she stepped off of the bus that night she hiked her back pack higher on her shoulders and walked with her head held high, trying to imagine that Sebastian's arm was slung over her shoulders and he was telling her some stupid joke.

Her phone rang, startling her. She yanked it out of her pocket, almost dropping it on the hard pavement in her rush, and a smile curled across her lips.
"I'm glad you made it safe." She answered jovially, trying to sound happier than she was feeling. "How was the flight?"

"Uneventful, for the most part." His voice sounded breathless, his Romanian accent coming through heavier than normal. "Am I too late?" He asked, making Laura cock her head in confusion.

"Pardon?" She asked, gnawing on her bottom lip.

"I can't be there physically to walk you home from the bus stop, but that doesn't mean I'll let you do it alone. I got distracted, and when I looked at the clock I was worried that I was too late and you'd already be home." Her heart clenched. He was so sweet that it gave her cavities.

"The bus was running late tonight." Laura replied, trying to shove the goofy smile off of her face. "I just got off."

"Good." He blew out a breath of relief. "Tell me about your day."

"I had one patient die on me today." Laura admitted softly, a frown tugging the corners of her mouth down. "A car accident patient. He'd been recovering so well and then...he just crashed." She shook her head, dragging her hand down her face in exhaustion.

"Laura, I'm so sorry." Sebastian uttered sympathetically.

"That's okay. This job...comes with its hardships." She replied, balking as she heard a female voice in the background, words unintelligible to her. "What are you up to?" She tried to mask the tension in her voice, but Sebastian knew her better than she even knew herself.

"Hanging out with a friend." His voice faltered on the word friend and, though Laura would never admit it, her heart clenched painfully in her chest. "It doesn't matter." Lie. "Are you home yet?" He heard the door closing on the other side of the line, and a shuddered breath that made him wince.

"Yep!" She chirped cheerily. Too bright. Sebastian ran a hand through his hair angrily. This is why he didn't want to get close to her. Because it was too easy to hurt her when she was on the other side of the country. She was too vulnerable to him. "Hey, Seb..." She trailed off unsurely.

Sebastian sat up straighter in his bed, motioning Victoria away from where she was nibbling on his neck.

"What's up, doll?" He asked softly, concern making his heart beat faster, every bad scenario running through his mind. He'd only been gone for a couple hours, but a lot could happen in a couple hours.

"Nothing, I was just gonna say that I missed you guys." She tried to play it off, laughing almost breathlessly. Sebastian sighed miserably.

"I miss you too, doll." He replied softly, pushing Victoria away from him once again. "But what were you really going to say?" Her breath hitched and he hoped, prayed, to god that she wouldn't start crying.

"I was just...you don't have to call me...every night...if you don't want to." She finally stammered out. Sebastian could practically feel her self-deprecation through the phone. He wished he was there, so he could smack some sense into her.

"I want to." He assured instead. "I already miss seeing that beautiful smile." He said it so easily, but as soon as the words were out of his mouth he wanted to shove them right back in. She
couldn't know. He couldn't tell her.

"Oh...were you seeing someone else while you were here?" Her tone was joking, but Sebastian felt the lack of self esteem under it. He frowned in misery, indignantly shoving Victoria away again when she tried to clamber onto him and straddle him. She whined slightly, but he barely even heard it.

"Ha ha, funny." He replied in a sarcastic tone. "You sound beat, girl. Try to get some sleep for me, okay?" He asked softly, switching his phone to his other ear.

"I'll try. Thanks for calling, Sebastian. It...means a whole lot to me. Goodnight!" She called. He bid her a goodnight and hung up the phone, trying not to feel guilty when Victoria bit his neck and caused his groin to tighten. It was just a fling, he tried to reason with himself as he removed Victoria's bra. Adults had flings all the time, and besides, he and Laura weren't an item. These were his mantra as he indulged in meaningless sex with a woman he'd barely even known for an hour. It did nothing to ease his conscience. It wasn't enjoyable, and he wondered why he'd even done it as Victoria exited his New York apartment, effectively leaving him alone in the dark to stew over his own thoughts and misgivings. He needed to forget about Laura. So he did the only thing he knew would cause memory loss. He got shit faced drunk and passed out in his bathtub.
So, my laptop is kind of dying right now, so I'm really sorry if my updating gets spotty, I'm trying to keep my computer alive for a while longer. It's kind of ghetto fixed with tape and sticky notes right now, but I have to be really careful with it.

Laura awoke on Thursday morning before her alarm feeling like death. Her head pounded and swam as she planted her feet on the floor, and a hot flash spiked through her. She ran her hands through her tangled mane of hair and stood up, immediately stumbling. Her stomach rolled under her and she clenched her nausea down. Fuck. She could not be getting sick.

"Fuck fuck fuck." She spat, scrubbing at her burning eyes and tripping into the bathroom across the hall. "Fuckity fuck fuck fuck! I can't afford to get sick. Stop it!" She snapped at herself, staring at her dead eyes in the mirror and trying to ignore the huge bags under them, and the way her face looked pale and drawn. "This is no time to be getting sick, Laura. Just...stop that." She pep talked at her reflection, splashing some water on her face and yanking a brush through her hair.

She stood at the fridge several minutes later perusing her sparse offerings for breakfast, but the thought of eating anything made her stomach coil. So she brewed herself a cup of instant coffee into a traveling mug and threw her backpack onto her shoulder, trying to ignore the swelling and burning of her throat. If she refused to acknowledge it, maybe it would go away. Even Laura knew that was a stupid thought.

"There's nothing more we can do for your son, I'm so sorry." She stood in the hospital room glancing at the clock. 10:48. She was almost off. The family nodded, plastered smiles on their faces despite the brain dead family member on the bed, and thanked her for all of her help. Laura gave a professional, sympathetic smile and tried to pretend that there weren't black dots dancing in her vision as she turned around and strode out of the room. She couldn't wait to get home, draw a hot bath, and relax her aching body.

Her phone rang as she was stepping out of the hospital. She smiled and swiped her finger across the answer button.

"Chris Evans, it has been far too long!" She cheered, despite the raging headache that made her step falter as she headed down the artificially lit street to the bus stop.

"You're sick." Chris stated, not greeting her with the same amount of enthusiasm.

"No big deal. What's up, sweet cheeks?" She asked, flopping onto the bench and watching the cars rush by loudly.

"I just...needed to hear a familiar voice." It was only then that she realized how beat down and broken he sounded. She could just imagine him, sitting at his kitchen table with a bottle of beer in front of him, running his hands through his hair-grown longer since the end of filming-with his phone pressed to his ear and bags dominating his face.

"You wanna talk about it?" She asked sympathetically. Chris hummed slightly and seemed
to think before clearing his throat.

"Um, not really." She could imagine him shrugging, taking a sip of his drink and dropping the sweating bottle back onto the table.

"That's okay. I can tell you about my day, if you'd like." She offered. Chris chuckled meekly and hummed again. "What's going on, Chris?" Her voice lowering as the bus pulled up. It was empty, save an elderly gentleman sitting in the first seat. He tipped his hat at her as she got on and she flashed him a polite smile before heading for the back of the bus.

"Press tours have started. I just...struggle with anxiety, you know? Getting up in front of those crowds, it's not easy." She hummed in what she hoped was understanding.

"I can only imagine, buddy. I'm sorry that you have to deal with that." She offered her apologies. Chris made a noise as if to wave off her apology. "How's your mom?" She asked.

"She's doing a lot better. Dad helps out more around the house, and Scott moved back in to help take care of her and the kids." Chris seemed to perk up at the mention of his mom, and Laura could vaguely remember him telling her on one of their late night talks that he was a real momma's boy. Her lips curled up into a smile, interrupted by a hacking cough that made her vision fuzzy. "Laura, you sound like shit." The words should have been harsh, but Chris seemed so concerned for her well being that her heart felt like it was going to explode.

"Gee thanks." She snorted sarcastically, watching as the elderly gentleman exited the bus with a small wave to her.

"Is that Laura?!" She faintly heard Sebastian in the background.

"Yeah!" Chris replied, fiddling with the phone before Sebastian's voice and the clear noise of traffic suddenly got much louder.

"Hey doll! How was work?" Sebastian asked, as per usual. Laura hummed softly, much like Chris had been doing only minutes before, and stared out the side window melodramatically. "That bad, huh?" He asked sympathetically.

"I think I'm getting sick." She finally replied, voice scratchy. Sebastian whined softly.

"Doctor's can't get sick." He moaned in empathy. Chris snorted, rolling his eyes.

"What, like they're impervious to diseases just because they work in health care?" Chris asked rhetorically. Sebastian seemed to think for a minute before responding with a 'shut the fuck up'. A short scuffle ensued. Laura giggled and both men smiled widely.

"Don't worry, your laugh is still as magical as always." Chris reminded her, a bright grin on his face.

"Awe, Chris Evans, you killer." She winked, though she knew they couldn't see her, and let their laughs curl around her head in a sweet symphony of comforting sound. Her chest ached. Her entire body ached (a symptom of the flu virus), but just the sound of the two men laughing together in almost-perfect harmony made her feel better than any amount of sleep or rest or fluid could.

"Who are you talking to?" A voice suddenly asked, one that Laura recognized immediately.

"Mack attack!" She cheered brightly. She'd only met Anthony Mackie a handful of times. Sebastian told her that he actively sought to keep the boisterous man away from Laura, if only for
the sake of his pride and dignity. But he was charismatic, and someone that Laura had easily gotten along with the few times she'd talked to him.

"Lo-rider!" Mackie replied back. "What's up, little sister?!" He cried. "You keepin' these two losers in line?" He demanded, and Laura could almost see him jabbing his thumb over his shoulder in their direction.

"Of course!" She replied, waving to the nightly bus driver (Jake) as she climbed off at her stop. The bus drove away, leaving her on her fairly quiet neighborhood street.

"Are you walking now?" Sebastian asked, as he always did when he heard the noise level change. Chris glanced at Sebastian with a confused look creasing his eyebrows together.

"Yeah. It's quiet tonight. It's kind of nice." She replied, shoving her open hand into the large pocket of the hoodie she'd jacked from Sebastian. "It reminds me of when you guys were here. And you'd walk me home from the bus stop every night." She smiled nostalgically, like the memory she was pulling to the surface of her mind had been so long ago, instead of just a couple days ago.

"Fuck Laura, you act like we haven't seen each other in weeks. It's been like three days." Chris joked laughingly. She snorted.

"You guys didn't get much of a break before they sent you out on press tours, did you?" Laura asked, a frown playing at her lips.

"Unfortunately, no we didn't." Sebastian replied, a hard edge to his voice. "As much as I love working with Marvel, and don't get me wrong, I really do love it, I wish they wouldn't push so hard. We're going to be doing these stupid press junkets and Convention panels for months." He groaned, reverting from 'Sebastian who's always happy-go-lucky' to 'Sebastian who's exhausted and wants to sleep for seven weeks straight'.

"That really sounds horrid." Laura uttered sympathetically as Sebastian heard her fumbling with her keys, muttering a soft curse before her door squeaked open loudly and shut behind her. Sebastian smiled at the sound.

"Ah, it's not so bad." Mackie replied nonchalantly. "These two though, they get worn out." He frowned, glancing between his co-stars. "More so than any of the rest of us. Especially since this new movie is mainly about them. We all sympathize with them." He clapped Sebastian on the shoulder.

"Awe." With just one simple word, Chris and Sebastian felt all the comfort they needed. She just...understood. She didn't question, didn't try to pretend she knew things she didn't. She was just so compassionate, so empathizing. It made Sebastian's heart soar. "Hey, I heard this really funny joke today, you wanna heard it?" She suddenly changed the subject, something that all three of the men were used to. Laura was something of a scatterbrained woman, and she had to grab onto thoughts before her quick mind would shuffle to a different thought. This usually made for random subject changes in the middle of a flowing conversation. At first, it had thrown Sebastian and Chris off, but now they rode with it easily, like it was second nature to them.

"Lay it on us, doll." Sebastian quirked a smile, and even though she couldn't see it, she could hear it clearly present in his voice.

"Okay okay, so are you ready?" She asked, as if building them up for some sort of spectacular joke.
"I'm turning eighty over here, hurry it up." Mackie joked. Laura made an indignant sound from the back of her throat, but snickered afterwards.

"How do you talk to a fish?" She asked.

"How?" Chris asked, a soft smile twisting across his face.

"You...drop him a line!" She laughed, like a legitimate laugh. Sebastian's face twisted into one of utter amusement and he couldn't stop the shortle that erupted from his chest. Not at the joke. It was an entirely horrible joke. But he found it cute that Laura was so entertained by it. The three men started laughing, not because of the joke but because Laura's laugh was so infectious.

"You're right, that was pretty great." Chris chuckled, brushing his hair out of his eyes.

"Thanks, I know." Just as she spoke the sentence, a sudden hacking cough exploded from her chest. It went on for almost a full minute and left all three men standing in tense worry as she caught her breath. "Sorry, that was disgusting." She snorted.

"Are you sure you're feeling okay?" Sebastian replied in a no-nonsense tone. He could practically feel Laura rolling her eyes over the phone.

"I'm completely fine, Seb. Stop worrying so much." She muttered in reply. "So, guess what happened at work today?" Another subject change, but this time it was on purpose. Chris and Sebastian exchanged glances but didn't ask about it.

"What happened?" Chris asked curiously.

"I got asked out on a date by one of the radiology technicians, Jack." She sounded excited, even through the crap in her chest. Sebastian's heart dropped to his toes and his breath hitched.

"Are you going to go?" Chris asked, glancing at Sebastian with a sympathetic expression. The dark haired man only shrugged and dragged a hand through his hair.

"Probably. Not until I start feeling better, though." She giggled. Chris laughed, though it seemed slightly forced. If Laura noticed, she didn't comment. "Well, I hope that you're feeling a little better, Chris. I'm going to take a bath and go to bed. It was nice to talk to you all, and I'll talk to you tomorrow Seb!" She called, coughing slightly.

"Night Laura. Talk to you tomorrow." Sebastian replied. The other two bid their goodbye's and Chris pressed the end button.

"You talk to her every day?" Chris asked with a suggestive peak of the eyebrows and an unreadable glimmer in his eyes. Sebastian glanced between Chris and Mackie before rolling his eyes and shoving the brunet haired actor's shoulder harshly.

"Fuck off." He muttered, stalking away. Chris watched after him, a smirk playing at his lips. Laura had him wrapped around her little finger, and he didn't even see it.
"How are you feeling, kiddo?" Chris's voice was like a breath of fresh air. Laura groaned and rolled over in her cocoon of blankets, tugging the several piles of comforters closer to her chin.

"Death's carriage is here. He's just waiting for me to get my good shirt on." She muttered, her voice barely a whisper.

"Shut the fuck up, you're so dramatic." Mackie's joking voice could be heard in the background.

"Be nice to me, I'm sick!" Laura whined, sniffling loudly to prove her point. Mackie snorted and muttered something that sounded like 'whatever'. Laura chose to ignore it, muffling a giggle.

"What are you guys doing today?" She asked, running her fingers through her sweaty hair.

"Some convention. We're in Philadelphia." Chris replied, the frown evident in his voice.

"Why the long face, bud?" Laura asked softly, sniffling and reaching to her bedside table to yank another tissue out of the box. She could practically feel Chris' sympathy over the phone as she blew her brains into the white square.

"How can you tell?" Chris replied, only partly serious. He'd given up trying to figure out how Laura could always read him and Sebastian. In his eyes, she was just an emotion wizard. "I'm just feeling kind of burnt out. I love the fans to death, don't get me wrong, it's just..." He trailed off unsurely.

"I get you." Laura replied, saving him from being required to finish his thought. "It'll be okay." She assured him.

"I know." Chris replied solemnly. "Anyway, I gotta go. I just wanted to call and make sure you weren't dead." He joked. Laura gave a miserable laugh, sniffling once again and trying to ignore the fire in her throat.

"Not yet. Deep breaths, okay? Love you." The words slipped out, making Laura freeze. The other end of the phone was silent for a few moments before Chris replied.

"Love you too, kiddo. I'll have Seb call later tonight." He hung up the phone, leaving Laura with a warm pit curling in her stomach. She really did miss the brotherly compassion that Chris gave off, and she could say without a doubt that she loved him. Not romantically, never romantically, but he'd become a sure part of her family, and a hopefully permanent resident in her life.

The girl slept on and off, getting up once to let her dog out and make herself some tea. She knew she had to eat, but before she was able to even find anything, she managed to fall asleep on her couch again with some stupid gossip show playing on the television, the volume muted. When she woke up again, it was dark, save the flash of the TV and the small screen of her phone lighting
up. She blearily read Sebastian's name as the device vibrated annoyingly and couldn't help the
goofy smile that rose on her face.

"Hey Seb!" She cheered, taken aback by the volume level in the background of the call.

"Hey, Laura." He replied, sounding distracted. "Chris told me he talked to you earlier, said I
should call."

"Yeah, but you didn't have to." She replied. He hummed, making it clear that he was only
half paying attention to what the young girl was saying. She sniffled slightly and gave a rough
cough, whining as it sent fire down her throat. That seemed to get Sebastian's attention.

"Have you been drinking plenty of fluids? Resting?" He asked, suddenly focused on her as
he listened to her shuffle uncomfortably on the other end. "For god sake Laura, don't tell me you're
laying on your stupid old couch?" He asked as she grunted again.

"I didn't meant to fall asleep on it this time, it just happened okay?" She defended herself.
Sebastian rolled his eyes, but couldn't help the small smile that rose on his face as he imagined her
sitting in a cocoon of blankets, her flushed face barely peeking out from them with that determined
sparkle in her eyes. He shook his head from his thoughts, reprimanding himself.

"You just need to burn that piece of garbage." He snorted, taking a sip of the beer and
suddenly hating the loud music of the hotel bar. He didn't know why he'd let Chris, Renner, and
Mackie convince him to come down and drink.

"You need to burn your face." She muttered weakly in response.

"That doesn't even make sense." Sebastian pointed out, a small smirk curling on his lips.
"Can you get some more rest for me please? On your bed, preferably." He elaborated. She giggled
and he felt a flash of red heat up his neck.

"Yeah yeah, fine. Thanks for calling Seb. I like hearing your voice." Sebastian decided it
was just the delirious sickness talking and smiled softly.

"Anytime, darling. Get some sleep. Goodnight." He bid softly, listening to her whine in
response before the line went dead. "Fuck!" he practically shouted, throwing his phone down onto
the bar and downing the rest of his beer in one swig.

"No fucking way, Sebastian Stan? I haven't seen you since high school!" A voice suddenly
切 through the noise of the bar. "I'd recognize that drinking stance anywhere." A girl took the seat
next to him and he turned to observe her. She had a pointed chin and a narrow face with high
cheekbones. Bright blue eyes glittered at him from under dark, heavy lashes, and black hair curled
around her face and fell over slim shoulders.

"Alyssa? Holy fuck!" He exclaimed, immediately recognizing her plump lips and wrapping
the girl up in a tight hug. "It's been like, what, seven thousand years?" He joked in exaggeration as
the two former classmates pulled away from each other.

"Feels like it, doesn't it? Wow, you look really great, Seb. Not that you didn't in high
school, but you've really filled out. I'd ask what you've been up to, but I keep up with you pretty
well," she sent him a friendly smile, pushing her curled bangs away from her face and leaning over
to order a mixed drink. Sebastian allowed his eyes to wander, taking in the entirety of his former
high school sweetheart.

There had been a time that Sebastian once thought he was going to marry Alyssa Marlon.
He'd been so head over heels for her, to the point that he'd had the engagement ring picked out. But the two had ended their relationship on mutual, but rough terms, a few months before graduation.

"Jesus, you look amazing." He muttered, nodding gratefully to the bar tender when another bottle of beer appeared in front of him. "What have you been up to?" He asked, leaning forward to hear her better.

"Just rattling around. I work for a law firm around here, and we had a big corporate meeting today. A couple of the ladies from work thought it would be good for us to go out and let loose. My friend Bailey knows Ted here." She nodded at the bar tender, who lifted his hand in a wave before moving away to the other end of the bar.

"Wow, so you ended up going to law school, huh?" He asked interestedly, taking a sip of his beer. Alyssa beamed at him and nodded excitedly.

"Harvard, just like I always dreamed." She sighed dreamily.

"Wow, Als, that's awesome. Good for you!" Sebastian celebrated, enjoying the feeling of being with someone he was already so comfortable with. "Got any special someone waiting for you at home?" He asked, taking a sip of his beer. Alyssa narrowed her eyes slightly at him, but could tell the question was harmless.

"Just my cat and dog." She replied with a shrug, brushing her hair out of her eyes with an irritated huff. "I hate these damn things." She muttered, fingering the bangs.

"You never were one for bangs." Sebastian replied with a bright smile, one that Alyssa couldn't deny made her heart flutter slightly. "As for me, I have nobody waiting for me back in New York." He stated, taking another swig of his beer. "Not even a dog." He pouted dramatically. Alyssa laughed, reaching out and punching his arm lightly. The gesture was very familiar to him, something she'd always done when she found something funny. He grinned at the endearing quality, relieved she hadn't lost any of her personality or spunk working for a law firm. In a sudden urge, Sebastian reached out and captured Alyssa's bangs between his fingers, rubbing her silky hair between his thumb and pointer finger softly. "You look really amazing, Alyssa." He told her earnestly, a genuine smile lighting up his face. She blushed softly. "And you still look just as beautiful when you blush as you always have. Really, Pennsylvania is treating you well." He assured her, dropping his hand back to his lap.

"I really appreciate that, Sebastian." She smiled back and reached out to put her hand on his shoulder, squeezing his arm softly. "It's kind of loud in here, do you want to go take a walk and maybe catch up?" She asked suddenly, a shy smile curving her lips upward.

"Absolutely." Sebastian replied, nodded excitedly and leaving his half drunk beer on the bar with a fifty. She took his hand, lacing her fingers with his in a grip that felt so familiar and nostalgic to him that it made his heart ache. He squeezed her hand, grinning over at her, as they exited the hotel out onto the street. It wasn't too busy, save the cars on the road, and they meandered at a lazy pace.

"So, any awesome relationships after we broke up?" She asked suddenly, balking to herself and wondering where the hell that question had come from. Sebastian seemed slightly taken aback before he chewed nervously on his bottom lip.

"Just one. A girl named Caitlyn. She broke up with me because she couldn't handle the pressure of the fame. Nothing that I could have done about it, but I seriously loved her." He shrugged his shoulders. "How about you?" He asked, bumping her shoulder softly. "You're so
damn gorgeous, I bet the boys were like vultures on a carcass after we broke up." He stated softly. Alyssa giggled, covering her mouth with her hand. Sebastian's grin widened at the gesture. "Glad to see you still do that when you're embarrassed." He squeezed the hand he was holding, her right hand. The hand he always held.

"A couple, none really serious. You're so sweet, Basha, you kind of ruined relationships for me." She replied truthfully. Basha. The name sent an ache through him, so harsh that it almost made him lose his breath, and his step faltered. She was the only one who ever called him Basha.

"Nobody calls me that anymore." He murmured, swallowing harshly.

"It's my name for you. I should hope nobody calls you that." Alyssa replied easily with a shrug of her shoulders. "Listen..." She hesitated and he pulled them to a stop, turning so that he could face her completely. "I really wanted to get in touch with you, for a really long time after we stopped talking. But I never knew how to do it."

"I was always just one call or text away, Aly-cat." He replied softly, reaching out with his free hand to tenderly brush his thumb down her cheek.

"The truth is, I've really missed you, Sebastian." She stated, worrying her bottom lip with her teeth. A habit she'd picked up from Sebastian himself. "I was cut up about our break up for years afterwards, and after that, it's just like..."

"This pit of nothingness in your chest." Sebastian finished the sentence. "And you know what can make it go away, but you're not really sure how to get there." She nodded in awe, looking up at him with her lips slightly parted, eyes wide and sincere. "Trust me, Alyssa, I know exactly what you mean. It's been the same for me. But, after everything that happened, I wasn't sure you'd want to see me." He shook his head, cupping her cheek softly with his hand.

"Basha..." She breathed, just loud enough for him to hear. The two of them stepped closer and he ducked his head, lips parted. She hesitated softly, eyes searching his for something, before a soft smile curled on her lips and her eyes fluttered shut. Her lips were as soft and plump as he'd remembered them being, the same kind passion from their high school days locked away. The kiss tasted of nostalgia and alcohol. The two stepped away.

"Did you feel it?" Sebastian asked, dropping his hand from her cheek. She pulled her hand out of his other hand, a friendly smile curling the corners of her mouth up, and shook her head.

"Nothing." She replied.

"You know, you'll always be my best friend." He offered, a bright beaming smile lighting up his face. Alyssa giggled and nodded, throwing her arms around his neck and pecking him on his cheek. "Here, let me give you my new number. You can call or text whenever you please." He grinned as she handed over her phone, allowing him to type in his contact information. "Can I walk you to your car?" He asked, gesturing behind them towards the parking garage. "You're sober, right?"

"Of course I'm sober, you fool." She shoved his shoulder, a bright smile making her beam. "Come on." She grabbed his hand again and the two of them took off for the parking garage, Sebastian unable to keep the large smile off of his face. And for once, his thoughts weren't occupied with the brown eyed, auburn haired beauty that haunted him.
Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

Ugh, I'm so sorry this has taken so long. To be honest, I hit something of a block, but have finally managed to get over it!

She first saw the pictures scrolling through Facebook on her phone. She'd started feeling slightly better, and it had been a couple days since her last contact with Chris and Sebastian. She wasn't hurt by this fact, their contact was always spotty, if there at all. They were busy, and she understood that.

'New love for 'Bucky Barnes' actor Sebastian Stan?' The headline screamed at her, one of those stupid click bait posts that she always ignored. Under the headline was a picture of a man, no doubt Sebastian, locked into a passionate kiss with another girl. Laura choked on her spit and dropped her phone in shock. She really had no right to be upset about it, but her heart ached anyway. She wanted to call Chris and beg him to tell her it wasn't true, that they'd somehow doctored the pictures, but she knew she could never do that.

The girl huffed and dragged her hand down her face, suddenly deciding she needed a shower and jumping out of her bed. The quick movement made her head spin and she had to stop, leaning heavily against the wall at her shoulder. After her vision cleared, she padded into the bathroom and switched the shower on. As the water warmed up, she shed her clothes and stared at herself in the mirror. Laura's body had always been something she disliked. She wasn't bean-pole thin like the kinds of girls that the media was saturated with. She wasn't necessarily over weight either. A healthy weight, generous curves. She had stretch marks on her stomach, on her thighs, hell, even on her breasts. Freckles dominated her pale face, almond shaped brown eyes roaming her body, curly auburn hair. Plain. Sebastian Stan would never fall for someone like her.

Scars from a dark past marred her thighs. She'd done her best to get rid of them, everything short of skin graft surgery, but some of them remained, a testament to her downfall and subsequent rise. Ugly. Sebastian Stan would never look at her the way she wanted him to.

"Get out of your own head, Laura." The girl reminded herself, spinning away from the mirror, which was starting to fog, and climbing into the shower. It felt good to wash days of sweat and sickness off of her. When she climbed out, she felt better, like she was breathing fresh air. She threw on a pair of shorts and a loose shirt that was her brother Hunter's shirt, and made her way out into the kitchen with still dripping hair. Her phone lay forgotten on her bed, with five missed calls and seven texts.

She didn't realize that she'd been missing her phone for another fifteen minutes, watching the coffee brew and trying not to think about that damn Sebastian Stan that she'd accidentally given her heart to. Damn her. But all thoughts of Sebastian flew out of her head, her heart stopped, when she saw the texts on her phone.

5 Missed calls

[From: Mom, 11:26am]
Laura please call me. Your father has taken a turn for the worse.

[From: Mom, 11:30am]
Laura, I need you to call me please.

[From: Hunter, 11:27am]
Hey can you shoot mom a call?

[From : Hunter, 11:29am]
Sis...

[From: Annie, 11:26am]
Oh my goodness, Laura. I'm so sorry...Hunter told me.

[From: Annie, 11:29am]
Please call me or Hunter.

[From: Sebastian, 11:32am]
Those pics aren't what they look like. Call me please.

She ignored the last one, dialing her mom's number. The woman picked up on the second ring, completely uncharacteristic for her mother.

"Laura...honey...your father..." She was crying, but trying to hold it together. Laura sank to the floor next to her bed, tears rolling down her cheeks. "He went in his sleep. It was very peaceful. I found him this morning..." A sob tore from Laura's chest and she wound her free arm around her stomach. She couldn't believe it. Her father, her rock, had been taken from her. Too fucking soon.

The two women sat on the phone and cried. Laura couldn't stand the aching pain in her chest, like somebody was driving a machete through her heart until it wasn't there anymore. A void, a chasm, had opened in her chest. Her dad was dead. He'd died. She hadn't gotten to say goodbye. She hadn't gotten to say thank you. She was only twenty seven.

"I have to go honey. Hunter wants you to call him. Please." Her mom begged. Laura understood what she was trying to do. Her mother had never handled emotions well, especially not other people's emotions. Hunter had always been the one Laura had gone to when she was in emotional strife. He was always there with a big hug, a joke, something of that nature.

"I'm going to book a plane ticket. Um. I'll call you later mom." Laura gasped, choking on her tears. Her mom hummed and the call ended abruptly. Laura curled on the floor, wrapping her arms around her chest, and smashed her face into her knees. There was so much she still wanted to do with him. He would never get to walk her down the aisle (were that to ever happen). He wouldn't call her to tell her about some stupid thing he'd seen on the internet, or threaten to beat her coworkers that pulled a prank on her. He'd never laugh in her ear, wrap her into a hug, assure her that everything was okay. They'd never be able to wake up god awful early in the morning and get breakfast, when nobody was awake and the only company they had was each other and the rising sun. She squeezed herself tighter and let out a bone cracking sob, trying to press her broken pieces
back together, but they didn't quite fit right anymore.

The person she called after her mother wasn't Hunter. It wasn't Annie, Hunter's long time girlfriend. It wasn't any of her old high school friends. It was Chris.

"Hey Laura, it's kind of a bad time-" Chris' sentence was cut off by a scream, a sob, the tearing of his heart. "Fuck. What's wrong? Are you okay? Where are you, Laura? Can you talk to me?" Panic spiked in him, his hands started shaking, his face went numb, and he felt tears rise to his eyes. Anxiety was already at an all time high, as it always was when they were about to go on stage, but Laura's apparent desperation, sadness, horrified sobs pushed him into the churning seas of panic.

"Dude?" Sebastian asked, hands tightening around his glass of water. Chris turned away from the noise of the crowd just on the other side of the curtain.

"Twenty minutes." An intern came over to inform them. Sebastian waved him away.

"Laura, I need you to breathe." Chris tried not to let his panic show, knowing it would only aggravate her more.

"My daddy died!" The wail pierced through his heart, the aching pain of someone who'd just lost their closest family hitting him like a fucking brick wall. He dropped to his knees, so affected by the absolute destruction and despair he could feel just through the phone that he was unable to keep himself up. "Chris! He just died! He died last night! I didn't get to say goodbye! I want my daddy! I can't..." She broke off into a gasping, heaving gag and Chris' pulse skyrocketed.

"Hey hey, you gotta breathe for me, okay? Can you do that? Can you breathe? Breathe with me, Laura." He exaggerated his breaths to be longer, deeper, louder, and Sebastian crouched next to him with a tight grip on his upper arm and wide eyes, mouth open as if he wanted to say something. "That's it, sweetie. You're okay. I'm here. You're okay." Chris assured, swallowing harshly. "Sebastian is here. I'm going to put it on speaker." Chris clicked the speaker button and held it between he and his best friend.

"Hi sweetie. Everything is going to be okay." Sebastian assured in a quiet voice.

Laura didn't know why. She didn't understand how it was so easy for them to calm her down. Sebastian's smooth voice curled around her, soothing her frayed nerves, and she could practically feel Chris' protective compassion over the phone.

"That's it, baby." The pet name slipped out of Sebastian's mouth before he could register what he was saying. Laura didn't say anything about it, but Chris shot Sebastian a look Sebastian only shrugged and bit his lip.

"I gotta...I gotta plan the funeral. I have to go home. Fuck." Laura grunted, heaving herself off of the floor and kept the warm phone pressed to her ear.


"He's right." Chris chimed in, ignoring the fact that his legs were numb.

"Fifteen minutes." The intern prodded again. Sebastian shot him a dark scowl.
"Did I call at a bad time? Oh my god, you guys are busy. You're at a convention! I'm a fucking idiot!" Her breathing started to speed up again and Sebastian balked.

"No no no!" He cried, ignoring the looks his fellow co-stars were giving he and Chris as they all started to arrive. What a sight it must be, two of the main actors crouched on the ground with Chris' small phone between them, heads close together so that they could both hear. He didn't care. "It's okay. Laura, honey, it's okay. It's not a bad time. We're here. You're okay. Just breathe. Slow down. Everything is going to be okay." Sebastian calmed her, hands clenched together in stressful tension.

"Lil' sis, everything okay?" Chris and Sebastian hadn't even realized that Mackie had approached and was now crouched in front of them, creating a circle with the phone in the middle.

"Mackie." Laura gasped, sinking miserably to her couch. "M-my dad..." She trailed off, her voice catching in her throat.

"I'm so sorry." Mackie seemed to understand what she was saying without making her finish her sentence. "Jesus Laura, I'm so fucking sorry." He didn't know what else he could say, didn't think there WAS anything else he could say.

"I just...yesterday he was okay. The doctors said he was improving." She muttered miserably, seemingly calmed from her impressive panic attack just moments before. "We weren't...fuck, guys, I wasn't fucking ready." Chris, Sebastian, and Mackie all shared a look, having the same thought. *Nobody is ever ready for their father to die.* "I mean, like, I knew it was going to happen soon. And I thought I'd be prepared, because he's been basically a vegetable for a couple weeks now, but shit...shit..." Her breath trailed off, a sniffle, Sebastian's heart clenched.

"Ten minutes." The intern interrupted once more in a clipped tone. Sebastian'd had enough. He spun, still on the floor, with narrowed eyes.

"We fucking get it okay, can't you see we're busy." He seethed, not waiting for the young man's reaction as he spun back around.

"I'm so sorry. I knew it was stupid to call you." Laura muttered.

"No, it wasn't." Sebastian replied in a solemn, forceful tone. "It's never a stupid idea to call any of us, Laura. You know we're here for you. You know that, right?" His tone took on a desperate tinge, teetering on the edge of panic. His hands clenched his jeans tightly.

"I know. But-" Chris cut her off.

"Shut up. There are no 'but's'." His tone left no room for argument. Laura took a deep, shuddered breath.

"Sweetie, I'm so fucking sorry, I really hate to leave you like this, but..." Sebastian trailed off, closing his eyes as she whimpered softly.

"No, it's okay. Thank you guys, for picking up and stuff. I'm really lucky to have friends like you. Fuck. I'm gonna read a book. I'm gonna...shit, I'm gonna slow down, okay?" She sounded like she was coming apart, the pieces breaking off in Sebastian's hands as he struggled to hold her together. He blinked tears, which he hadn't been aware of, out of his eyes.

"You do that, hon. Please. Take care of yourself, okay. Don't push it. And if you need anything, *anything* at all, please text one of us." Chris stressed. She sniffled again, voice trembling as she spoke up again.
"I will. Jesus, thank you guys so fucking much. I'll uh...can you maybe call me when you have some time later?" She asked softly, like she was scared they'd refuse her.

"Absolutely. Abso-fucking-lutely." Sebastian nodded, glancing at his two co-stars. Laura let out a relieved breath.

"That's...awesome, great, thank you so much. I'll talk to you guys later then. Thank you so much." She said again before there was a click and they were left with silence.

"We're supposed to go out on stage after that?" Mackie broke the silence, glancing between his two best friends with a somber look in his eyes. "Fuck."

"But we'll do it, because that's what we do. We act." Chris stated forcefully, standing up with a groan. "My legs went numb." He muttered, stretching his arms over his head.

"Same." Sebastian snorted, cracking his neck to either side. "Fuck dude." He groaned, closing his eyes softly. "Poor Laura."

"Understatement of the fucking year, man." Mackie deadpanned. Chris chuckled dryly and nodded in agreement.

"Alright, you're on." The intern clipped, eyes narrowed angrily at Sebastian. The dark haired actor nodded, working a smile onto his face.

"Let's do it."
Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

This is more of a filler chapter than anything else, haha.

Laura didn't know how much time passed. She stared at the same page of the book for what felt like hours, reading the same sentence, losing herself in thoughts of her father. Fuck, it hurt so bad. Nothing could have ever prepared her for the pain of losing a parent, especially not so young. Her parents were young, too young for her to lose one at only twenty seven. Her dad was only fifty, for fuck's sake.

Her vibrating phone startled her from her thoughts. She grunted and dropped her book carelessly on the coffee table. Hunter's name lit up her screen.

"Hello?"

"Jesus fucking Christ, Laura, I fucking told you to call me like four hours ago. I was worried fucking sick." Hunter was on the other end of the line, sounding just on the edge of panic.

"Sorry." She mumbled, sighing through her nose. "I got distracted."

"Yeah...I know, sis." Hunter replied empathetically. "Listen, Annie and I are springing for your plane ticket, okay? I already have a couple flights bookmarked that I wanted you to look at."

"No, Hunt, you don't have to do that." Laura shook her head quickly back and forth, though she knew her brother couldn't see her. She was slightly glad for that, she probably looked like an utter fool.

"Laura, let me do this, okay? I need you to be able to pay rent next month, and I know that you don't make that much. Let me help you." Laura closed her eyes and only hummed in response. Hunter was always doing things like this for her. Helping her pay her rent, sending her money for groceries. She figured it had something to do with him owning his own law firm, but she always felt bad when he and Annie bought things for her. Kind of like they were wasting their money.

"Annie is really worried about you. So am I. How are you?" He asked worriedly. Laura was closer to her dad than Hunter had been, so he pushed aside his own despair to care for his sister. He had been conceived when their mom was only seventeen, and though he was technically only Laura's half brother, they'd never seen it that way. He had always cared for her like they were full siblings, and today was no different.

"I'm okay." Laura replied meekly. "As okay as I can be, I suppose." She amended softly.

"I know this is all cliché bullshit, but you know that he's always with you, right? He's always in your heart, and always watching over you." Hunter assured her. "So don't do anything stupid, because now he'll know." He succeeded in pulling a soft giggle out of Laura.

"Is that Laura?" Annie demanded in the background. Laura smiled at the worried voice. She was really the luckiest girl in the world to have such caring friends and family. "Hi sweetie, how are you?" Annie asked, seemingly pulling the phone away from Hunter's grip. He whined
"I'm...rough." Laura answered honestly. Annie made a noise of sympathy. "But, wounds always heal. I know it'll get better with time." The sentiment was just that at first, a sentiment, but as she spoke the words she realized how true they were.

"You're very wise, Laura." Annie replied softly. "I'm so sorry. There's nothing I can say that will make the pain go away. But I'm so sorry for your loss. Anything you need, anything at all, just ask." Annie promised.

"Thanks, Annie. That really means a lot." Laura replied genuinely.

"Here's Hunter again." Annie said softly.

"Hey sis. Listen, I gotta go, but I'll email you the couple flights I have bookmarked and you tell me which one will work best for you, okay? I love you." Hunter stated.

"I love you too, Hunter. Thank you." Laura replied softly, waiting for him to hang up. The line clicked and she threw her phone on the coffee table, glancing at the clock. She had no idea when Sebastian, Chris, and Anthony would be done. They were several hours ahead of her, and it was three pm.

Almost like they were reading her mind, her phone lit up, Chris' name appearing on the screen. She lunged forward, sliding the green circle to the side and pressing her phone to her ear.

"Hello." She breathed, swallowing harshly.

"How are you?" Chris demanded immediately. "Are you okay? What do you need?" He pressed.

"I'm doing better." She replied softly. "I'm like...kind of in shock I think? I'm not really sure. I talked to my brother and his girlfriend, so that's cool I guess." She rambled, picking at the threads poking out of her old couch.

"That's good, sweetie." Sebastian's voice came through, soft like warm honey. Laura subconsciously let the tension melt out of her shoulders.

"He's buying my plane ticket." She murmured, scratching at an old scab on her leg. "I don't want to do it, you guys. I don't want to go home and stay in that house, be in that town, not without him." At once, she felt her heart seize and tears rise to her eyes.

"Honey, stop. It'll be okay. Stop thinking about it as best as you can, okay?" Chris replied.

"Can you guys tell me about your days?" Laura asked, sounding almost nervous.

"Of course." Chris replied earnestly. "The convention was a lot of fun today. The fans are always awesome to talk to." He stated. Sebastian hummed in agreement. "And we had photo ops today. Those are always great." Chris sounded tired, exhausted in fact. Laura's breath caught.

"Am I keeping you guys up? You sound tired. Go to sleep. I'm okay, I'll be okay." She assured, hating the way her voice trembled.

"You're not keeping us up." Sebastian replied in a tone that left no room for argument. "We're just worried, Laura." He stated.
"Did you guys know that the Wiccans believe that someone is reincarnated after they die? Succession of lives, it was called." Laura's voice sounded far away to the boys, lost in thought. Chris shot a look at Sebastian.

"Sweetheart, stop looking up things about death. Where did you even come up with that idea?" Chris asked rhetorically.

"I want to believe that he's not actually gone. I want it to be a joke, you know? But I know it's real. I know he's gone. I just don't want to accept it." Chris swallowed and closed his eyes at her heartbroken tone. "I think it's going to be awful. Going home. Feeling that reminder. Walking into my parents' house and knowing that he's gone." She sighed softly. "I wish you guys could come with me."

"Honey..." Sebastian trailed off, clenching his hands. How much he wished he could be with her too. Hold her, make sure she would never feel this way again.

"I know it isn't possible, it's okay. Just wishful thinking, anyway. Any crazy fan stories today?" She changed the subject, tried to put on a cheery front. Chris and Sebastian could see right through it. Laura was nothing if not easy to read.

"Not really." Chris replied, chewing on his lower lip and trying to think back to the day. "The fans are mostly okay. We only get crazy ones occasionally, you know? Like last year when that one fan followed Robert to his hotel room?" Chris reminded Sebastian, chuckling softly. "She kept saying she wanted his babies." Laura snorted half-assed on the other end of the phone. Chris counted his blessings that she was even laughing at all, even if it was partly fake.

"Can I meet the rest of your co-stars sometime?" Laura asked in a half miserable tone.

"Of course you can." Sebastian replied, knowing that he was digging himself deeper and deeper. If she met the rest of his co-stars, there was no way he'd be able to keep himself from falling completely and totally for her. But there was no way he could say no to her, not in the state that she was in

"Have you eaten today, Laura?" Chris suddenly asked, breaking Sebastian from his thoughts. She hummed indecisively.

"I don't think so." She finally responded. "I haven't been very hungry. I actually feel nauseous." She stated miserably.

"I know that you're just now getting over the flu, and with what's happened today, I'm not surprised that you feel nauseous, but I really need you to eat something, okay, sweetie?" Chris asked. "I need you to take care of yourself, please."

"I will. I'll order Chinese or something." She replied, not caring to cook or go out.

"Good." Sebastian cut in. "Why don't you do that now?" He suggested.

"Okay, and you guys go get dinner too." She stated.

"We will. Take care, honey." Chris stated.

"I will. Thanks for being so awesome right now, you guys. It really helps knowing that I have people I can talk to during all of this. Bye." She waited until they said their goodbyes to click the end button, effectively leaving her in the suffocating silence of her apartment. She sighed and dialed the number for the Chinese Delivery place down the road, lost in thought as she
mechanically placed her order.

Later that night, Laura ate her food without tasting it before she fell asleep directly on the couch. As she drifted to sleep, she wondered if she would ever be able to give a real, genuine smile again.
Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

I AM SO SORRY!!!!!!! My brother is getting MARRIED tomorrow!!! I haven't been able to update because we've just been going nonstop with the wedding stuff!!!! Here is a chapter and I'm so sorry it's taken this long!!!! I love you all!!!!

Home. Laura didn't think she'd ever return to that house, the house that had caused her so much anger as a child and teenager, so much frustration. She'd spent most of her adolescent years trying to find a way to escape the place that she associated with such high expectations, expectations that she was sure she'd never reach.

"And this is my daughter, Laura." The woman looked up at her name, a painfully fake smile plastered across her face, and smoothed her hands over her black dress. "Laura, this is Jacob. He was the home care nurse that was with your father for the past couple years. Laura is a doctor in LA." Her mom introduced with a smile stretching her red lips thin. Laura accepted Jacob's hand shake silently, inclining her head in a silent greeting.

"I'm sorry for your loss, Laura." She couldn't count how many times she'd already heard that, and the funeral service hadn't even started yet.

"Thank you." She replied as genuinely as she could, swallowing past the lump in her throat and retracting her hand. She didn't know anybody at the service, though all of the seats were filled, and she'd shaken more hands today than she had in her entire life. Hunter stood next to her, a towering presence next to her short 5'4" frame, conversing easily with anyone who passed by. He'd always been better at this kind of stuff than Laura had. She tried to hide next to his lanky frame, staring at the floor and only lifting her head when someone spoke to her directly.

They were having the ceremony at the house. Because of her father's status as a NASA engineer, the large mansion that they lived in had more than enough room in the backyard for the viewing and service, and her father had always joked that if he had to have a funeral, he wanted to do it in the comfort of his own home. So Laura's mom had fulfilled his wish, and his elegant coffin was set up at the end of the backyard.

A sudden murmur went up over the crowd and Laura hunched her shoulders, trying to get away from the gazes on her and the stifling heat of Arizona.

"Hey guys, thanks so much for coming." Hunter spoke next to her, genuinely, with a thick voice. He was holding back tears.

"Of course." A familiar voice made Laura look up with wide, startled eyes.

"Oh my god." She gasped, her eyes widening.

"Hey sweetie. Your brother called us last week. How are you doing?" Laura stared into those blue eyes, eyes that she dreamed about almost every night, that deep, sweet voice that she frequently fell asleep listening to.
"Guys..." She gasped, tears rising to her eyes, lips trembling.

"Come here." Sebastian wrapped his arms tightly around her shaking frame, one hand coming to the small of her back and the other resting on the back of her head. She threw her arms around his torso and buried herself as close to him as she could get, sobbing quietly into his shoulder. Sebastian softly swayed them side to side, humming quietly into her hair. She didn't know how long they stayed wrapped up like that, the sounds of the world melting away into nothing as she melted into Sebastian's arms, inhaled his scent deeply, and cried.

"I'm getting your suit all wet." She sniffled, stepping away from him. His arms fell to his side. "Hey." She stepped to the side and threw her arms around Chris' neck as well.

"Hey honey." He squeezed her softly and she closed her eyes, allowing herself to revel in his comforting hold. "Mackie said he wanted to be here, but was meeting up with his wife and daughter. He sends his condolences." Chris assured her as she stepped back from him and stared at the two actors in front of her.

"I can't believe you guys are actually here..." she breathed in awe.

"It was all Hunter. He called us one night after you fell asleep and planned the whole thing. You've really got an amazing brother." Chris clapped his hand onto Hunter's shoulder and gave her older brother the brightest smile he could muster. Hunter chuckled humbly.

"I just know how much they mean to you. I hear you talking to them on the phone every night. They make you smile, and I wanted you to have some form of comfort today." Hunter shrugged, wrapping his arm around his sister's shoulders.

"Thank you all so much. Thank you. This means more to me than anything." She breathed as Hunter stepped away from her.

"The ceremony is about to start. Come on." He gestured towards the rows of chairs in the large yard, which were filled up. She led Sebastian and Chris to the front row and sat in between them, each of them holding one of her hands tightly. She laced her fingers with theirs and squeezed, so tightly she thought she might actually break their fingers. Neither of them said anything about it.

"Hello everyone, and thank you for coming." Her mother started the ceremony. "Today, we celebrate the life of Marcus White. NASA engineer, husband, brother, son, and father." Laura didn't pay much attention as her mother continued to talk, only focused on Sebastian rubbing soft circles on the back of her hand with his thumb. "Now, I'd like to invite my daughter, Laura, up to speak." At the announcement, Laura swallowed harshly and stood up, meeting her mother halfway between the podium and the seats. The two women embraced quickly before Laura took her mother's place at the podium. Her eyes traveled over the sea of faces before coming to rest on Chris and Sebastian's faces in the front, each giving her encouraging smiles.

"Hello. My name is Laura, like my mother said." She swallowed and closed her eyes briefly. "I thought for a long time about what to say. But nothing I could come up with would ever do my father justice." She heard a murmur of agreement rustle through the crowd. "He was amazing, so dedicated to everything he did. He was the best father I could have asked for, a compassionate man that would give the shirt on his back to someone if they needed help. Dad was talented, an amazing engineer, really just an amazing man." Her voice hitched and the girl took a deep breath, eyes flickering sideways to the open coffin. Her father lay peacefully inside the elaborate casket, eyes closed, and a smile drawn up on his mouth. "I wrote and rewrote this speech, had so many different versions, and ended up using none of them." She cleared her throat and stood
up straighter, casting her eyes out among the sea of unfamiliar faces. "My dad wasn't a rehearsed man. He said what was on his mind, no matter what. So I eventually decided that, in honor of him, that's what I was going to do. Dad, I'm sorry. I'm sorry for moving out of the state, for leaving you. It's too little, too late, and I know that. But you have taught me and raised me to be strong and independent, to walk on my own two feet. That's what I've been doing, dad. I know that these last few months were hard for you, and for mom as well. I tried to be strong, dad. I held my head high, and when push came to shove, I shoved right back. You taught me that, daddy. I love you so much. I love you. And you'll always be with me, I know that. You'll see, dad. I'm going to conquer the world, just like you always told me to. And you're going to be right there by my side the whole way." She took a step back, holding her head high as she started to make her way back to her seat. Sniffles echoed around the crowd as everyone gave a weak round of applause. As soon as Laura had thrown herself back into her seat, she pushed her face into Chris' shoulder. His arms came around her, holding her shaking frame as she sobbed.

"That was so good, sweetie." Sebastian whispered, his warm breath billowing over her ear as his hand rested on her back. "You did so good. I'm so proud of you." He cooed. She shuffled closer to Chris, one of her hands clutching Sebastian's pant leg and the other holding the lapel of Chris' suit jacket.

"Thank you for those amazing words, Laura." Hunter's voice floated over the crowd. "Hello everybody, my name is Hunter, and I'm Laura's half brother. Marcus wasn't my biological father, but there was never a time that I considered him anything other than my dad. When he and my mother got married, he took me in like I was his own, and raised Laura right alongside me as his children." He started, his voice trembling softly. Laura huffed and squeezed her eyes shut, inhaling Chris' comforting scent and allowing her thoughts to drift away from her dad's funeral, away from the moping sadness of death, losing herself in his brotherly embrace.

"At this time, we would like to invite everyone inside for food and good company." Laura's mother suddenly chirped, pulling Laura from her syrupy daydreams. She sat up, rubbing her red face uselessly and watching her mother flourish down the yard and open up the large back doors into the dining room.

"You did so good on your speech, Laura." Annie was suddenly in front of her, crouching down so that she was eye level with the younger woman. "I'm really proud of you." She squeezed Laura's knees and nodded in greeting at Chris and Sebastian before standing up and walking away.

"You guys don't have to stay if you don't want to. This part isn't too hard. Mom does most of the talking, so I can usually hide out in the corner and just eat without anyone bothering me." Laura explained as she stood up. "It's just like one of their business get-togethers." She shrugged, going for nonchalance. Sebastian could easily read the obvious tension in her shoulders.

"Absolutely not." Chris replied flatly. Sebastian nodded in agreement. Laura turned to them suddenly, throwing her arms around both of their necks and pulling them towards her.

"I got so lucky with you guys!"
Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

My brother is finally married, so that's a whole lot of stress off of my plate!!!!!!! Enjoy this chapter :)

"Fuckin' snobs, man." Laura groaned, throwing herself onto her bed as Chris and Sebastian followed her into her room. The door closed softly behind them, trapping the three of them in the spacious room.

"You're a champ, Laura." Chris replied, taking a seat much gentler on her king sized bed. Sebastian stayed by the door, leaning against the wall and shedding his suit jacket with a relieved sigh.

"Even at a goddamn funeral they never stop kissing ass. My mom fuckin' loves it, too. I'm like 85% certain she's not even that upset about my dad dying." Laura admitted, drunk eyes gleaming up at Chris from her fluffy pillow.

"How much did you have to drink?" Sebastian asked, carefully hanging his jacket over the back of Laura's desk chair. She shrugged carelessly, kicking her heels off and using her feet to fling them to the floor.

"Enough?" She replied in a questioning tone. "I wouldn't drink so much if those business execs wouldn't shove their heads so far up my mom's ass. Sometimes I can't even tell where she ends and they begin, you know? Like everyone just wants his money. I didn't see one fuckin' genuine face in that crowd. My dad's fuckin' dead and nobody even gives a damn. When did it all go to hell like that? Seriously, fuck the one percenters." Laura crowed, words slurring together.

"Relax, hon." Chris placed a calming hand on her wriggling shoulder as she whined softly. "Sorry." She stated miserably, staring up at him with tears still in her eyes. "This is probably the worst way you could ever spend a weekend. I can't even begin to tell you how much it means to me that you came, though." She struggled to sit up and clumsily threw her arms around Chris' broad shoulders. He softly embraced her back.

"I'm really sorry about your dad, Laura." His murmured into her blonde hair. She took a deep breath and shrugged a little.

"We all saw it coming, you know. Like, I knew it was gonna happen. It's still shocking though. To just wake up one day and one of your parents be gone." She looked up at him, still draped over his shoulders drunkenly. Chris only pulled her in closer, unable to formulate a response. There wasn't much of anything that he could say to her. Nothing would ever bring her dad back, so he pressed his face into her hair instead. "Sorry, this is fuckin' depressing. Do you guys wanna do something?" Laura pulled away from Chris, standing up and stretching her arms over her head.

"Nah." Sebastian shook his head, stepping forward and placing his hand softly on the top of her head. She seemed to relax as he softly raked his fingers through her blonde hair. "How about a
movie?" He gestured to the TV at the foot of her bed. "It's pretty late anyway." He shrugged.

"Sure thing. Do you guys have like...extra clothes or anything?" She eyed their suits, both had shed their jackets, with a sympathetically uncomfortable look.

"At our hotel. Not a big deal." Chris replied, waving away her concerned gaze. "Go change." She nodded her head at him and dug through the suitcase on the floor, producing a pair of sleep shorts and a large shirt with a triumphant smile before retreating into the en suite bathroom.

"You guys will stay until I fall asleep, right?" Laura called through the closed door as she changed.

"Of course, sweetie." Sebastian replied, toeing off his dress shoes and untucking his shirt. The door swung open again, revealing a frazzled looking Laura in her pajamas, hair tangled around her head.

"Thanks guys. I'm sorry. This is the worst thing you could have done with your off time." She apologized again. Chris shook his head as she crawled onto her bed, patting the space on her left side for Sebastian. "There's plenty of room on this bed for all three of us. What do you want to watch?" She booted up Netflix and handed the remote over to Chris.

"Stop apologizing." Sebastian replied as he crawled onto the bed, settling himself so that his right shoulder was pressed against her left shoulder. "Anything that isn't Marvel, preferably." He replied to her second question.

"How about this?" Chris decided on some crime movie, turning questioning eyes towards his two companions. "I hear it's supposed to be awesome." He assured them.

"I'm cool with it. Oh, let me grab the lights." Laura added as an afterthought.

"I got it." Chris replied, pressing play before standing up and turning off the lights. The room became dark, the TV light the only thing illuminating it. Laura crawled under the blankets and snuggled into them, one of her hands resting right next to Sebastian's hip where he sat and the other hand held firmly in Chris' when he returned. She only watched the movie for a couple minutes before she started to doze off tiredly.

"Thanks for everything." She yawned, not catching what Chris or Sebastian responded before the girl fell into a deep, dreamless sleep.

***

Sebastian was so incredibly fucked. He realized this sentiment as he and Chris snuck out of Laura's room and down the stairs of her mansion after making sure she was tucked into bed comfortably. Hunter and his girlfriend Annie were sitting in the kitchen drinking coffee when they passed by.

"How is she?" Hunter's question caused them to halt and backtrack into the large kitchen. *Fuckin' amazing. Beautiful. Goddamn gorgeous.*


"Laura doesn't deal with trauma well. Alcoholism runs in the family." Hunter explained with a tired frown. "It was much better with you guys here. You make her happy." He gave them an understandably hard look. "I'd feel better about it if you weren't A-list actors. I know you've got
busy lives and shit, but my sister has really become attached to you.” The words came out as more of a threat than anything else.

"Hunter." Annie stated in what seemed to be a warning tone. Hunter shot a look her way.

"You leave her now, during all of this..." Hunter trailed off with a menacing glare. "Don't hurt my little sister. I run one of the most successful law firms in this country. I'll eat you for breakfast. Clear?" He snapped.

"We'd never even consider it." Chris replied in a genuine tone. "We care about Laura too." Way more than I probably should. Sebastian thought to himself. "We'd never do anything to hurt her." Chris finished.

"That true?" Hunter asked, staring at Sebastian with hard eyes.

"Absolutely." Sebastian answered with no hesitation, matching Hunter's glare with an even gaze. "I'd never intentionally harm Laura." Hunter leaned back in his seat, seemingly satisfied.

"I appreciate you guys taking the time to make the trip out here. Laura was really close to dad, way closer to him than I ever was. Today was really hard on her. It was kind of a buffer to have you guys here. She seemed a little more put together than if you hadn't been here." Hunter seemed truly appreciative.


"Yeah well, break my sister's heart and I break your fuckin' bones." Hunter replied in a mutter.

"Oh shut up, you dork. He's all bark and no bite. We're all glad you were here. Thank you. Laura's dad would be so thrilled to know she's made such good friends, and we are too. Thank you." Annie spoke up, a smile gracing her face. "You guys look pretty tired, though. Can you text me and let me know you make it back to your hotel okay?" She pressed a piece of paper into Chris' hands with her number printed in neat handwriting. "I'm a mother hen. I won't be able to sleep until I know your safe." She shrugged unapologetically.

"I'm the same way." Chris replied with a knowing smile. "I'll shoot you a message when we get back. Thanks for everything! We'll probably see you tomorrow. Our flight doesn't leave until eight pm." He lifted his hand in a wave before stepping out of the kitchen with Sebastian following him. Annie walked them to the door and bid them both a goodnight, not closing the front door until they were both safely in the rental vehicle. "You good, man? You've been uncharacteristically quiet tonight." Chris asked Sebastian worriedly as he started up the car and flicked on the lights, pulling away from the large mansion-like home.

"I'm pretty fucked, dude." Sebastian replied honestly. Chris smiled coyly and allowed Sebastian to collect his thoughts. "She's fuckin...I dunno, man. I just...I don't want to see her like that anymore." He tripped over his words.

"Yeah man, me either." Chris muttered in agreement.

"But it's different, dude. Like, I'd do anything to never see her look that sad ever again. I'd run to the ends of the fuckin' world to make sure she never cries like that again." Sebastian explained. Chris smiled slyly, glancing at his best friend out of the corner of his eye.

"You're refusing to accept it, but I know you know what's happening here." Chris stated wisely.
"Fuck off with your Gandhi shit." Sebastian snapped sourly. Chris chuckled. "This can't happen."

"Why not?" Chris asked rhetorically. "You're just being a pussy." He deadpanned. Sebastian's jaw dropped open.

"What the fuck, dude?" He demanded, astonished by the sudden attitude change from his friend.

"You know I'm right. This is about you being scared to put yourself out there after Caitlyn. You can't hide from it forever, dude. You gotta accept it and move on. It's been over a year. It's time to get over it." Chris stated. Sebastian's jaw ground angrily at the true statement and he turned his head to stare out the window childishly.

"Fuck you, Chris." Sebastian snapped.

"You're mad because you know I'm right." Chris pointed out. Sebastian didn't respond, only furthering Chris' point. "Whatever, dude. Laura won't wait forever. It's time for you to get off your ass and do something about it."

"Shut the fuck up."
"Thank you guys for flying out for this. I'm sorry that you had to spend your weekend doing something so completely depressing." Laura apologized again as the three of them stood near Laura's gate at the airport.

"Honestly, stop apologizing." Chris chuckled, wrapping his arm around the girl's petite shoulders, squeezing her softly. Sebastian nodded in agreement, a soft smile stretched across his face. Laura could see the tension pulling tight at his eyes, but decided not to say anything about it.

"Okay...thank you guys." She thanked again, smiling softly. Chris only drew her in for a tight embrace before releasing her into Sebastian's arms as the woman near the jet way called for boarding.

"That's you. Fly safe. Shoot me a text when you land, okay?" Sebastian asked softly, holding the girl's shoulders and staring down at her meaningfully. She nodded her head solemnly before backing out of his grip, deliberately slowly, and turning around. Laura took a deep breath, not looking back, and stepped onto the bridge. Just before she turned out of sight, the girl turned once more to see the boys waving at her with sad expressions pulling both of their faces down. She mustered the brightest smile that she could and gave them an enthusiastic wave back before turning the corner and entering the plane.

Sleep was the game on her flight home, head angled awkwardly against the window and knees pressed uncomfortably against the wall of the plane as the tall guy next to her spread his knees with an unapologetic glance shot her way. She wanted to sneer, but exhaustion sunk deep into her bones and she only pressed herself as close to the wall as she could get and drifted into a spotty sleep.

Coming home to her unassuming LA apartment was like magic, and picking her dog up from the kennel even more so, despite the several hundred-dollars bill that came with it. Collapsing onto her couch with her face smashed into the cushion felt like heaven.

It felt like she hadn't been home for seconds before her cell buzzed in her pocket. The girl pulled it out, glaring angrily at the text on the screen before huffing a sigh.

[From: Janet, 8:08 pm]

I'm so sorry. I know you just landed, but we're incredibly short staffed in the ER tonight and we need you to pull a night shift for us.

Laura groaned and made a face at her phone before quickly typing an affirmative back and going to her room to change into some scrubs.

The night air was cool as she climbed aboard the bus, hand clenched tightly around the railing. Jake made pleasant small-talk as he drove towards the city.

“How was going home?” The kindly bus driver asked, an apparent smile on his face,
though Laura couldn’t see him.

“You know, it was rough actually.” Laura replied honestly as the man pulled up to the stop outside of the hospital.

“Sorry to hear that!” Jake chirped, not sounding sorry at all as the girl stepped off of the bus and slung her work backpack over her shoulders.

Working the night shift in the ER was probably the worst. Laura hated it more than working the ER in the day. This was the time that all of the homeless people and crazed drug addicts came out searching for help, or just someplace indoors. Laura leaned against the counter at the nurse’s station and tried to rub the sleep angrily from her eyes, but it stayed.

“Laura, there’s a patient in room 3A for you.” Janine, one of the older nurses, informed her quietly.

“Thanks Janine.” Laura sighed, pushing herself off of the counter and meandering slowly down the hallway to the room. Pushing open the door revealed a young man with a blood soaked t-shirt, surrounded by several other men.

“Hey doc!” One of the men, clearly of college age, called. Laura smiled and tried not to shy away from the obvious stench of alcohol on his breath.

“James Carson?” Laura asked, examining his chart. The man on the bed nodded with a delirious smile. “I’m Dr. White. Looks like you did a good number to your shoulder, what were you doing?” Laura asked, glancing up at the man on the bed. He flushed red and looked away, clearing his throat.

“We were sword fighting.” He mumbled.

“Well, really it was more like kitchen knife fighting, but these knives were seriously huge!” One of the other boys explained. Laura nodded, glancing at the boy and trying to suppress a snort.

“Ah.” She murmured, scribbling that down on his chart. “Lemme take a look. I’m gonna have to ask all of you to back away please.” She motioned towards the crowd of four or five boys that were crowded around the head of their friend’s bed. The woman stood and moved forward as they parted to stand closer to the door, peering over her shoulder as she peeled the bloodied shirt from his chest and cut away at it until she could see the wound. “Doesn’t look too deep.” She murmured, peering at the wound that was still weeping blood. “This will definitely need stitches.” She concluded.

“Dammit.” The boy on the bed murmured, glancing away. “Listen, I can’t really afford to be here, but they made me come. Can you just discharge me? I’ll bandage it when I get home.” The boy begged.

“Unfortunately, I can’t discharge you until I’ve treated you. I’m sorry, but you can talk to our financial administration about payment plans for this visit.” Laura replied with a short smile. The boy sighed heavily and threw his head back, wincing as it pulled at his wound. “Would you like anesthetic for this?” She asked.

“Sure.” The boy shrugged, wincing again. Laura nodded, turning around to prepare the needle.

“So what’s a pretty girl like you doing here at a time like this?” One of the other boys asked from the doorway.
“I’m a doctor here.” Laura tried not to snap as she started to come to the end of her patience, peering carefully at the wound she was about to stitch.

“Right…” The boy trailed off, clearing his throat awkwardly as his friends muffled laughter into their palms. “Maybe we could grab coffee when your shift is over?” He asked hopefully. Laura sighed silently as she flicked the syringe of anesthetic and poked it into James Carson’s shoulder.

“Sorry, I don’t think I can do that.” She replied as James relaxed, finally free from pain.

“Oh…are you seeing someone?” The boy pressed on.

“Dude, she obviously is, leave it alone.” One of his friends replied, rolling his eyes.

“It’s complicated.” Laura replied absentmindedly as she started to stitch the large gash in James Carson’s shoulder.

“In what way?” One of the boys asked.

“His job has him move a lot. And there are other situations barring us from seeing each other.” Laura replied cryptically.

“But you like him?” One of the boys asked.

“I love him.” Laura replied without thinking, before she tensed suddenly, realizing that she was giving away parts of her private life to one of her patient’s friends.

“Well, if you love him, then nothing should stand in the way of that. I don’t get why girls make everything so complicated.” The boy replied, shrugging his shoulders. “Even if he has to be away for his work, if you guys really love each other then you should support each other in that, and make it work between you two. If you can’t do that, then do you really love him?” The boy asked nonchalantly, as if he hadn’t just given Laura the deepest realization she’d ever had.

“I suppose you’re right.” Laura murmured.

Sebastian’s phone rang at 10 AM, just as he was waking up from a restful night’s sleep. He peered at the name on his phone before picking up with a grunt.

“Hello?” He answered, unable to keep the smile from his face.

“Sebastian, I’m in love with you.”
“W-what?” Sebastian stammered, face heating up. Laura’s breath shuddered on the other end of the phone. “Laura, I…”

“No, please. You don’t have to say anything.” The girl replied in a trembling voice. “Please don’t say anything.” She reiterated. “I just needed you to know that.” She finished lamely. Sebastian sat up in his bed, running a hand down his face.

“Laura, I just…I don’t think it will work.” He murmured. Laura’s breath shuddered through the phone again and he heard her muffle a small whimper. His heart shattered.

“You’re probably right.” She whispered softly. Sebastian almost groaned, pressing the heel of his hand into his eyes.

“I’m sorry, Laura. I’m so sorry.” He murmured. “I wish I could give you the answer that you were hoping for. I just…my life is so hectic right now, with the press tours and the conventions and the fact that we live across the country from each other.” He blinked the tears from his eyes as she let out a sobbing laugh.

“No, yeah. You’re right. This was stupid.” She muttered in reply. “I guess I’ll just…I’m gonna go now.” Her voice cracked.

“No, yeah. You’re right. This was stupid.” She muttered in reply. “I guess I’ll just…I’m gonna go now.” Her voice cracked.

Okay.” Sebastian whispered, waiting until he heard the telltale click of the phone hanging up to allow his own phone to fall to the bed. “FUCK!” He bellowed, pressing his face into his hands, and sniffing softly. “Fuck.”

Laura had been through a lot of rejection in her life. Rejection from her mother when she didn’t make it into Cambridge’s Medical program, which she’d originally applied for. Rejection from several different schools before UCLA had finally accepted her. Countless rejections from men. But none of the hurt the way Sebastian’s had. She felt like finally, Laura White had been defeated. The girl rolled over in her own bed and allowed tears to drip down her face, doing nothing to stop them. What was the point, anyway? Without Sebastian, her life seemed meaningless. Why did she get up every morning, why did she go to work, if not for the only man in her entire life she’d ever allowed herself to fall in love with?

With the realization came the feeling of desolation. Her life started to crumble around her as she curled into the fetal position on the bed and clutched knees to chest. Eventually, the tears stopped. She didn’t care anymore. She didn’t want to care anymore. She didn’t want to feel anything anymore. She’d lost so much in the last few weeks. Her father, the man she’d come to love with her whole being, her motivation to live. Everything gone, just like that. She had no more tears to cry.

Her phone vibrated next to her. The girl uncurled slightly to pick it up, watching Chris’s name light up her screen. She denied the call and threw the phone back to the bed. It vibrated again. And again. And again. Until she had ten missed calls from the man. When it reached fourteen and didn’t seem like it was going to stop, she finally picked up.

“Hello?” She muttered monotonously.

“God, Laura. Seb called.” She did feel something then. A pull at her chest, a wince, at his name. “He told me. Jesus, I’m so sorry. I wish I could do something for you, but I don’t know
what will make it better.” He admitted. Laura shook her head slowly even though he couldn’t see her.

“I’m not sure there is anything.” She replied softly. “I just feel…empty, Chris.” She muttered.

“I know, sweetie.” Chris replied softly. “Are you going to be okay?” He asked. Laura laughed sharply.

“I don’t know, Chris? Am I?” She snapped rhetorically before immediately feeling guilty. “Sorry, I shouldn’t take this out on you.” She muttered. Chris only hummed.

“Do you want to come to New York? Take some time off of work. Bring Cherry. You can stay with me as long as you need to.” He offered. Laura was about to deny the man, but something stopped her.

“Actually…that does sound pretty nice.” She murmured. She could practically feel Chris’ relief through the phone. “I have a lot of hours of paid time off saved up. I haven’t taken a vacation since I started working there.” She admitted.

“I think it will be good for you. Have you ever been to New York?” He asked.

“No, but I’ve always wanted to see Times Square during New Years. It would be so cool to watch the ball drop.” She replied, feeling a slight flutter of excitement in her chest.

“Come out the first week of November. You can stay until New Year’s.” Chris replied, a small smile coming through the phone.

“That’s almost two months, Chris. That’s a long time for me to be in your hair.” Laura replied, startled.

“I don’t care, Lo.” Chris replied, and she could practically see him shaking his head. “I just need you to be okay. And Buster and I would love to have you and Cherry. We both suffer from the loneliness bug.” He joked. Laura cracked a small smile.

“I think that sounds like a lovely idea, Chris.” She replied.

“Great! I’ll send you a few flights. Don’t worry about the ticket, I can cover that.” He chirped excitedly. Laura smiled, a genuine smile, and worried her bottom lip with her teeth.

“Are you sure?” She asked, eyes drifting to look at her popcorn ceiling. Sunlight dappled her room, casting shadows, and she could hear the cars rushing by on the street outside.

“I’m sure, Laura! It’ll be great. I have a ton of fun things that we can do!” Chris exclaimed excitedly. Laura smiled brightly. “And don’t worry. I’ll buy two seats, so you can put Cherry under one of them. I’d hate for her to have to ride down with the luggage.” He assured her.

“This means a lot, Chris. Honestly.” She said gratefully. “I got really lucky, meeting someone like you.”

“I’d do anything for you, Laura. You know that.” He assured her. Laura couldn’t help the smile that rose on her face at that. “Alright, I’m going to go look at plane tickets. I’ll text you a few. I love you. Keep your head up, okay kiddo?” He said.

“I love you too. I will.” Laura hung up the phone after they’d said their goodbyes, leaving
her in silence that suddenly didn’t seem so intimidating.
New York was cold. Laura tugged her thick coat, a new one that she’d bought just for this trip, tighter around her shoulders as she stepped off of the plane and onto the jetway. JFK was a huge airport, but the girl had no problems finding the signs to lead her the correct way, Cherry’s carrier in tow and her backpack hiked up on her shoulders. She couldn’t help the excitement that buzzed in her chest. It would be great to see Chris again, and she was ecstatic to see what these next few months would bring her. Chris had held off on buying her a return ticket, choosing instead to leave the visit open ended. He’d told her that he wanted her to stay as long as she felt like she needed to, even if it ended up being more than just the two months she’d originally planned. She appreciated it more than she had words to express.

As she stepped through security, she heard a voice bellow her name, and then she was being swept into the familiar and brotherly embrace of one Chris Evans. She carefully set Cherry down at her feet and threw her arms around the man, squeezing him as tightly as she could. After what felt like several minutes of silent embracing, the two finally stepped away from each other. She beamed up at him, and Chris was relieved to see happiness twinkling in her eyes. He’d do anything to keep that look on her face.

“I’m so glad you made it safe! Hi Cherry! It’s been a while!” He crouched down, poking his fingers through the bars of her carrier. The Sheltie whined happily and licked at his fingers, tail wagging as much as it could in the confined space. He beamed before retracting his fingers and standing back up. “Let’s go get your bags! How many did you bring?” He asked, taking her backpack from her shoulders, and slinging it onto his own before draping his arm over her now free shoulders. With his free left hand, he picked Cherry’s carrier off of the floor and led her towards the baggage claim.

“I brought two. I figured you had a washer at your place, so I tried not to pack too very much.” She replied, trying to keep up with his long strides; every one he took she had to take three.

“No, I don’t know what that is.” He replied, nudging her shoulder. She rolled her eyes, giggling sweetly. The two came to a swift stop at the baggage claim, standing behind the large crowd of people milling around and waiting for their bags. “What do they look like?” He asked as the buzzer sounded, indicating movement, and bags started to slide by on the conveyor belt.

“They’re red. One of them has an Alcatraz luggage tag and the other one has a Captain America one.” She blushed slightly as he glanced down at her, winking mirthfully.

“How was your flight?” He questioned conversationally, eyes peeled for the suitcases she had described. She shrugged under his arm.

“Pretty uneventful. It was nice to have two seats to myself.” She admitted. “You spoiled me.” She glanced up at the tall actor, noting that his hair had finally gone back to its natural dark cherry color. She could see the ends of it peeking from under his baseball cap.

“What can I say.” He met her eyes with a small smile. “I make sure my family is taken care of.” The way he said it so easily made happiness balloon in Laura’s chest. She’d been silly to think that just because he had rejected her, her life was over. But Laura had always been a bit overdramatic. “I talked to your brother.” Chris admitted softly, pulling her from her thoughts. Laura looked up at him. “I wanted him to know where you were. And that you were okay. He and Annie were worried.” He stated. Laura sighed miserably and nodded.
“I know. I haven’t been very good about letting them know how I’m doing after…
everything.” She murmured. Chris squeezed her arm.

“That’s okay, Lo. A lot’s happened recently. You’re allowed to withdraw every now and
then.” He assured her. Laura smiled at his relaxed nature and nodded her head.

“Thank you for calling them. I appreciate it. I appreciate everything you’re doing for me.”
She murmured. Chris squeezed her shoulder again.

“Stop thanking me. It isn’t like I’m not getting anything out of this either. I get to hang with
the coolest chick on the block.” He replied, patting her head as he moved forward to grab one of
her bags. “And…I talked to him yesterday.” Laura’s smile dropped quickly, and Chris winced. He
hated to bring it up but felt she should know. “If it makes it any better, he’s struggling too.”

“It doesn’t.” Laura replied, a frown playing at her lips. “I just want him to be happy, Chris.”
She admitted. The man nodded knowingly.

“Me too.” He agreed. “He isn’t. At all.” He informed. “I’m worried about him too.” He
admitted. Laura sighed heavily.

“You should have invited him here instead of me.” She murmured, looking down at her
feet awkwardly.

“No. You need this way more than he does. Seb is a big boy, he can take care of himself.”
Chris replied, snatching her second bag off of the belt.

“Are you saying I can’t?” Laura demanded playfully. Chris grinned and shook his head,
pulling his baseball cap lower on his head.

“That’s not at all what I’m saying.” Chris replied evenly as the two moved in tandem
towards the exit. “Maybe I just like your company better.” He winked. Laura shook her head,
knowing it wasn’t true. Chris enjoyed their company equally, she was sure. “LA gets stuffy
sometimes. Everyone needs a break from it.” He explained as they exited into the snowy weather.
Laura shivered softly and zipped her coat up, pulling a beanie from one of the pockets and pulling
over her ears. Chris grinned at her and led her towards the parking garage. “You’re adorable,
Laura.” He chuckled as she scrunched her nose at him. The two came to his large pickup truck,
something that Laura had almost assumed he would drive, and he put her two bags in the back.
After closing the door, he crouched down to open Cherry’s carrier. The sheltie gave a little whine
as she escaped the confines and stretched before jumping up on Chris. The actor laughed,
scratching the dog behind the ear as she showered him with kisses.

“Come on Cherry, up!” Laura opened the back-passerenger door and the dog leapt in with no
hesitations, immediately pressing her face to the front of the truck as the two humans got in the
front. “She’s glad to be out of that carrier and off the plane.” Laura noted as Chris started the truck
up, warm air blasting from the vents immediately.

“I don’t blame her.” Chris gave the dog another pat on the head before reversing from the
parking spot and starting the treacherous drive home. “Buster hates his crate. It gets all stuffy for
them, you know.” He stated conversationally. Laura turned to look out the window, humming in
agreement as she watched the snow swirl outside the window and land softly on the ground.

“Snow is so pretty.” She sighed dreamily, leaning her forehead against the cold glass, and
watching her breath fog the clear pane. Chris smiled over at her but didn’t answer.
The drive to his place didn’t take long. They pulled up in front of a large house with a big front yard that Cherry would love to run around in. She could hear the dog panting excitedly in the back, taking in all of her surroundings with wide eyes.

“Buster is a little big excitable.” Chris warned as they made their way to the door, Cherry running gleefully in the yard and making a track in the snow.

“That’s okay, you’ve met this furball.” Laura giggled, calling her dog to her as Chris unlocked the front door. She heard the click of the nails on hardwood before a boxer came bowling towards them, tongue hanging lopsidedly out of his mouth. Laura dropped to her knees to receive the dogs greeting as he ran up to her, licking her face excitedly. He suddenly seemed to notice Cherry behind the two humans and moved forward curiously to investigate. The two sniffed at each other for a few seconds before running off together, the sounds of playing in the living room echoing through the house.

“I guess they like each other.” Laura joked, hauling her suitcase into the house so that Chris could close the door behind them. She shed her outer gear at the door, hanging her coat in the closet that Chris showed her.

“Alright so, this will be your room while you’re here. I just bought the bed. I’ve never had any reason to furnish this room, I never have guests. I hope its okay.” He showed her into the quaint room, filled with a California King bed and a desk in the back corner. “There’s an en suite bathroom.” He opened one of the doors to show her the decent sized bathroom, a bathtub in the far-right corner and a double sink vanity right beside it. “And a walk-in closet.” He announced proudly, opening the second door to a large closet. “Feel free to hang your things up.” He assured her. “I’ll give you a few minutes to get settled.” He ruffled her hair as he passed the younger woman and closed the door softly behind her. Laura perched on the edge of the bed with a soft smile on her face. Maybe this was exactly what she needed.

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