Blackmail is not a favor

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Blackmail is not a favor

by monarose

Summary

Olivia has been a Dauntless member for the past eight years and seven of those years she's managed to avoid Eric for the most part, even though he's her next door neighbor. But when his friend threatens to assault her in the worst way possible, he offers her protection but at what cost? Olivia isn't sure she wants to know but she can't afford to not accept his offer either.

Reverse AU of Time Does Not Heal All Wounds.

Notes

Hey, so I've had quite a few people ask me if I would consider doing a reverse AU of Time Does Not Heal All Wounds where Olivia went to Dauntless instead of staying in Amity and I've decided to do it. For those who have not read it, you could probably read this as a stand alone anyway, but for those of you who have, there of course will be differences.

Since Olivia has chosen to be Dauntless, she of course will be a bit different in personality as she's embraced her wilder side but I hope not too much and I've decided that her father never fell ill and therefore she was never on the train the night Eric raped her. And of course that means no Connor.

Olivia will be 24 years old in this story and Eric 23, compared to TDNHAW where they were 28 and 27.

This will not be a story of a rape victim facing her assailant like last time but more of a threat
of rape that forces her to use Eric as protection.

Anyway, I hope you guys like it! Please R&R!
“Hey, mom. How’s Amity life treating you and dad?” Olivia asked her mother conversationally as she walked around her apartment, straightening up, with the cordless phone tucked between shoulder and chin.

“Oh, I’m fine, dear. Your father got a mild cough a few days ago but the doctor said it was a cold, nothing to worry over. How has work on the fence been?” Linda asked.

“Good. I noticed that your roses are coming in nicely this year.”

“I’ve been trying a new fertilizer Erudite came out with and they’ve been growing twice as fast.” She replied, enthused by the success of her garden. “It’s a comfort to know that you’re watching over us, Olivia, but speaking of the fence... Have you had any more problems with those boys?”

“Mom,” Olivia said, annoyed she was bringing it up again, “I already told you not to worry about it.”

“How can I not worry? You’re my only child in another faction where your father and I can’t protect you and they’ve been bothering you for years. If ignoring them isn’t working, then maybe you should tell someone.”

“You and dad practically dragged me to the Dauntless bowl and now you’re complaining that I’m not around for you to protect?!” She rolled her eyes and flopped down onto her bed. “Besides, it won’t work. They’re friends with Eric and he’s a leader. He won’t let them get into trouble.”

Not to mention he was usually with them when it happened, so he definitely knew, but she wasn’t about to tell her mother that. He visited Amity often enough, she didn’t need her mother marching up to him and demanding he help Olivia get his friends into trouble.

“We only wanted you to be happy, Olivia. It was obvious you belonged in Dauntless but you needed a push in the right direction and we gave it to you. But if we had known you wouldn’t have been safe there... Well, you’re a beautiful girl, and sometimes that can be a dangerous thing. Perhaps it’s time to make a conscious effort in making your appearance... less appealing.” Linda suggested.

“Mom.” She growled. “I’m not going to make myself ugly just so two idiots back off. I’m Dauntless, I can handle it.”

Linda sighed heavily on the other side of the line. “If you insist on not listening to me, at least find yourself a boyfriend. Dauntless or not, one woman against two men doesn’t sound like good odds and I’ll feel better knowing there’s someone there to keep you safe.”

Olivia threw her arm over her eyes in defeat. Her mother was right, of course, but it was easier said than done. Her looks got her a lot of dates but that was the only thing those guys cared about and it wasn’t something she was interested in. She wanted a guy who cared about her because of who she was and liked hanging out instead of just taking satisfaction from her, like so many did, without a care about her own needs.

The problem with being limited to your Faction when it came to romance was that the options eventually ran out and instead of choosing to settle, she decided to not bother until the playboys finally got bored with screwing around and wanted to settle down. Except, it was taking a lot longer than she thought it would.

“I’ll see what I can do, mom. Okay?” She said with a sigh.
“That’s all I can expect, I suppose.” Linda trailed off. “But you sound tired, so I’ll let you go. I love you, Olivia.”

“I love you too, mom, and tell dad the same. Bye.” She said and hung up. She tossed the hand held phone beside her on the bed and closed her eyes.

It was ten o’clock at night and it had been a long day but she called her parents anyway because she had promised she would and now a massive headache was brewing behind her eyes. Olivia curled up and threw the covers over her still clothed body and began drifting off, that is until music started blaring from the other side of her bedroom wall.

With a groan, she rolled over and stuffed her pillow over her head but it couldn’t stifle the pounding base of the music and she flipped the blankets off. It only took seven angry strides to reach her front door, which she whipped open, and another two to bang on the door that shared the wall with her bedroom.

The door swung open and the view of a shirtless Eric took up her whole view into the apartment. His hair was disheveled and there were scratch marks across his broad shoulders but he didn’t seem surprised to see her in the least. Probably because he did this almost every other night and she complained every other night too.

He leaned against his door frame casually and smirked. “To what do I owe the pleasure to, tonight?”

Olivia insecurely crossed her arms over her chest and glared. He may not be into harassing her like his friends did, but he was still her leader and that was intimidating enough. “You know why. Turn it down or turn it off. Some of us have to sleep like a normal person.”

“And I intend to do that, just after I finish entertaining my friend. You’re welcome to join us.” He teased, like he did every other night and like every other night, she turned him down.

“I’d rather not be a statistic on the STI board in the infirmary, if you don’t mind, and flirting with me isn’t going to help win you points.”

“It never does, but it’s fun to piss you off.” He said with that smirk faltering just a fraction. He pushed himself off the doorframe and said, “Sweet dreams, Amity,” just before closing his door on her face.

Olivia’s fingers curled into fists, the urge to bang his door down thrumming through her veins, but she turned on her heel instead and slammed her door behind her.

Thankfully, he did turn the music down, not by much, but she’d take it and went to her bathroom cabinet for a Tylenol. The argument distracted her from the pain momentarily but the throb was beginning to return and she turned off all the lights off and crawled back into bed before it got worse. Her thoughts were slowly muddling together five minutes later and as she lay there between lucidity and dreams, a voice drew her back to reality.

“Hmm… Yes… Ugh, yes… Eric… Yes… Keep going… Yes…”

OMG… He has to be kidding. She screamed in her head. She rolled out of bed a second time and pounded on the wall. “Eric! You know this is the wall beside my bedroom! Have the decency to at least screw her in your bed instead of on your living room couch!”

Her attempts to sway him clearly went ignored because then the banging started. The painting on her wall rattled every time he rammed the couch against it and the girl would repeat the word ‘yes’, and over and over it went. Olivia gave the wall a disgusted look and went to sleep on her couch where
the sound was muffled by the second wall between it and them.

In the morning she woke up stiff and sore. Her alarm clock, which was normally blasting in her ear, was quietly beeping away behind her bedroom door and she bolted up. A quick peak in her room told her that it had been going off for the last forty minutes and she was late.

It was a good thing she went to bed dressed, because all she had time for was a quick ponytail instead of her usual braid to keep her long, naturally curled auburn hair in check and a good teeth brushing before dashing out her door and running for the train.

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“You’re late.” Maxi frowned at her arrival and paused. “Did you sleep in your clothes?”

“You know, I’m sorry. I ended up sleeping on my couch and missed my alarm.” She panted in apology and took the gun Maxi handed her.

“Why?”

Maxi wasn’t exactly her friend. She had the night shift at their shared station, so they only saw each other for a few minutes before Olivia began the morning shift but because Olivia was late, Maxi had to stay late and so she owed her an explanation.

“Eric.” Olivia sighed. “He can’t keep it in his pants, can he? They were doing it right up against my bedroom wall last night; I wasn’t going to stick around to listen to it.”

“Why not?” Maxi said, her purple pixie cut glinting in the early sunlight. “If I know no one’s dusting your cobwebs then he knows it too. Maybe he’s trying to help you out.” She winked at her.

“You’re just as disgusting as he is.” Olivia said, stunned. “I don’t want him dusting anything for real or imaginary, okay. So, mind your own business.”

“Ah, don’t pretend like you haven’t wanted to, if you haven’t already. He’s hot as hell and every girl wants him.”

“Good looks diminish when the personality isn’t as appealing.” She retorted.

Maxi laughed. “Whatever you say,” She called as she began climbing down the ladder to the ground level.

Olivia frowned. So what if he knew she wasn’t getting laid? It wasn’t his business anyhow and besides, he didn’t seem the type to help anyone out unless it directly helped him too. Annoyed that he was on her mind at all, she turned to face the Amity fields and tried to ignore her thoughts and the crick in her neck.

The sky was clear that day and from her height, just beyond the main building, she could see her father trudging through the dirt with horse and plow. He was digging up rows of earth to plant the seasons’ corn crop and off to the right of that was their cottage. Her mother’s rose bushes were indeed flourishing, the bright pink flowers stood out against the dark green foliage, and in the back the washing was already hung out to dry.

The scene was always a comfort to her soul, to see that they were doing alright, and it allowed her to acknowledge that she made the right choice. Dauntless was her home and it made her feel alive.

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Olivia was dying. The headache she had last night was back and it was monstrous but she couldn’t get her hands on any medication until her shift was over and she got home.

The train wasn’t quite full but there were a few people in the same car as her and that included Ralph. Doing her best to ignore his staring from across the car, she watched the scenery wiz past as the train made its’ way through the city to the Dauntless compound.

“Have a rough night?” Someone beside her said. She was staring out the window so intently that she never noticed Ralph approach and jumped at his voice in her ear.

“My night was fine. I just have a massive headache and I would appreciate being left alone right now.” Her tone was clipped and she hoped he’d get the hint and leave but he didn’t.

He took a step closer even and said, “I know the best activity for curing headaches. We can go back to my place and I can help you out with it.”

Her lip involuntarily curled in revulsion at the idea. “No, thanks, Tylenol should do just fine.”

Thumps of more people hopping onto the train came as they passed the Factionless sector and a large hand clapped down on Ralph’s shoulder.

“Hey, man.” Eric said to his friend with a brief glance at Olivia and she watched, to her relief, as he steered Ralph to the other side and they began talking amiably.

He must’ve just come back with the recent patrol squad because he had a rifle slung across his back and the black vest he wore allowed his tattooed arms to get a light tan. Next to his tall and bulky height, Ralph was maybe a few inches shorter and much leaner, and his hair was a longer thick wavy brown compared to Eric’s meticulously gelled blond hair but they both had blue eyes.

Eric’s were a steely blue that seemed to penetrate your soul and make you freeze but Ralph’s deep ocean blues pulled you in to a never ending wave of malicious thoughts and at the moment she could feel both on her but she refused to look at them. When the Dauntless compound finally came into view she jumped off with practiced ease and made her way home without a backward glance.

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An hour later, Olivia was woken up by a knock on her door. Still tired and in pain, she grumpily climbed out of bed in her t-shirt and opened her front door but the hallway was empty. She was about to close her door when she noticed the pill bottle sitting on the ground.

With a great deal of confusion and caution, she picked the bottle up and read the label. It was Advil. The blood in her veins froze the second she registered that it was medication for her headache and a chill went down her spine. He hadn’t gone from comments to gifts, had he? Maybe she was in more trouble than she’d thought. Filled with fear, she put the bottle back and closed her door and locked it.
“Olivia?” A female voice called through her door the next morning. “Are you in there?”

Her racing heart slowed substantially at the sound of her friend’s sultry voice and she went to answer the door. “Lace, thank God it’s you. Come in.” She said and yanked the tiny brunette inside by the arm.

“What’s going on? Maxi said you called in sick this morning.” Lace said, worried.

On top of sharing a station on the fence, she and Maxi also shared Lace. Being a transfer from Candor, Lace trained with Olivia as an initiate and they became the best of friends. Maxi, a born-Dauntless, was two years older and met Lace at the club where they shared a mutual attraction. They had an on again – off again relationship for the past four years, mostly because Maxi also liked to be on men too, and it obviously must have been on again if they were talking to each other.

“I had to. I just couldn’t go to work knowing he’d be there.” Olivia said, rattled. “Especially when he knows I’ve rejected his gift.”

“Gift? What and who are you talking about?” Lace said, grabbing Olivia by the shoulders.

“Ralph. Yesterday I had a terrible headache and he was hitting on me again so I told him about it so he’d back off, then an hour later there was Advil sitting outside my door! It freaked me out so I left it there but this morning when I went to leave for work, I noticed it was gone! He obviously came back to see if I got it.”

“Ok, calm down.” Lace soothed and gently pushed her down onto the couch. “How do you know it was him for sure? Was there a note?”

“No note but he was the only person I told about my headache, which means it had to be him.” Olivia replied.

“Where were you when you told him that?”

“On the train home.”

“Well, anyone could have overheard you, Olivia. Maybe someone else has a crush on you and wanted to be anonymous.” Lace reasoned with her. “Besides, when was the last time Ralph or John hit on you anonymously? Your reaction gets their dicks up just as much as the prospect of getting you naked does and if you won’t do that, then your reaction is all they have. They wouldn’t waste that on an anonymous gift.”

Olivia sighed and thought about it. It did make sense, but who else could it have been? “Do you really think it wasn’t him?” She asked her friend.

“100%.”

“Thank God.” Olivia said in relief and fell back against the couch cushions. “I totally thought he was getting worse. I was even contemplating paying some guy to be my boyfriend.”

“Why don’t you just get a real one?” Lace said but Olivia grew serious and waved her off.

“You know why.”

Chapter 2
“You know…” Lace hesitated to judge Olivia’s possible reaction, “Not every guy will be like Zayne.”

“I know.” Olivia grumbled at the mention of her ex. She hated talking about him and wished she had never allowed him into her life or her bed. He was the main reason why she called it quits on dating.

“Then, maybe it’s time to get back up on the horse. There are tons of newly eligible guys now; one of them is bound to be a good one.” Lace said.

‘Find yourself a boyfriend… I’ll feel better knowing there’s someone there to keep you safe.’ Her mother’s words ran through her head like a chant. She and Lace were right; four years had to be long enough. It was time.

“Fine.” She exhaled deeply and sat up. “But I’m not sure I remember how to pick up a guy.”

Lace’s face lit up with excitement. “Are you serious? I have the perfect guy if you are!”


“Yeah, his name is Brent and he’s a sweetheart.” Lace said, repositioning so one leg was tucked underneath her bottom and she faced Olivia better. “Recently divorced, he’s looking to get back out there and he’s got the hots for you.”

“Oh… How recently is recently?”

Lace lightly shrugged. “About a year, maybe less.”

“Oh, okay. But I really wasn’t expecting to go out with anyone so soon…”

“Nonsense. There’s no point in waiting now that you’ve decided to do it; might as well go with it before you change your mind. I’ll tell him to pick you up tomorrow night at 8, okay?” Lace said, quickly getting up from the couch. “Oh, and stop worrying about Ralph. He’ll back off once he realizes you’re off the market.” She said before making a quick exit and leaving Olivia feeling dazed.

“What just happened?” She asked herself.

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The next night, Olivia was pacing the floor by her front door. She was so nervous that she couldn’t stop fidgeting with the sleeve of her dress or constantly looking at the time either. It had been so long since she’d been on a date that she had no clue how to act and the sound of footsteps out in the hall made her squeal. But they passed without hesitation and a door down the hall closed.

“Relax. You’re Dauntless, you can do this. Just pretend he’s an old friend and there’s nothing riding on tonight; except my entire romantic future… Ah, who am I kidding?” She ranted quietly. “Okay, play the Amity angle. A friendly compliment and smile goes a long way to win someone over. Be sweet and lovely, until he slips a hand up your skirt, then slap him in the face and walk away.”

Olivia shook her head and mumbled, “This is the worst pep talk ever.”

There was a rap at the door and her head snapped toward it. Shit, he was early.

“One minute.” She called and tugged at the hem of her skirt to make sure it was presentable.

She chose this dress because it was classy in a world of risqué, with its jewel neckline and long sleeves covering her completely on top while the knee-length skirt showed off her toned calves. It
had a layer of black lace over top the black satin underneath and she wore a pair of Dauntless red pumps with it. She did nothing with her hair except let it down so her soft natural curls could reach her mid-back.

Olivia grabbed her keys and clutch off the coffee table and opened the door. Outside stood Brent in his normal Dauntless attire and his eyes widened at the sight of her.

“Wow, you look great.” He gaped at her. “Was I supposed to dress up?”

“Um… I suppose not. I wasn’t sure where we were going and I’m actually quite nervous so I must’ve over done it.” She rambled.

“I was just going to take you to the bar so we could talk, but if you want to do something else, we can do that.” He replied, still staring.

“No, that sounds fine.” She quickly said, because past Brent’s curly black hair, she spotted Eric rounding the corner and she wanted to avoid him in general. Locking her door, she said, “Let’s go.”

“Going out on a date?” Eric’s low voice sounded surprised when he saw them.

Olivia groaned inside, but then decided that perhaps this was a good thing. He could spread the word to Ralph and John that she was dating again for her.

“Yes, we are.” She answered, hooking her arm around Brent’s elbow for emotional support. Eric’s friends’ reaction to the news was important.

Eric eyed her from head to toe. “With a dress like that, I suppose I won’t be the only one kept awake tonight.”

“No… There will be none of that tonight.” She said to the both of them with a strong need to be clear. “This dress does not say ‘I want sex’, it says ‘hey, I want to look nice’.”

“To you maybe but to a guy, looking hotter than you usually do always means you’re looking for a good time.”

She automatically let Brent’s arm go and stepped closer to Eric. The top of her head only reached his collar bone, so she had to tilt her head up to stare him in the eyes.

“Stop putting it in his head that he’s gonna get laid tonight, because I’m not a sex toy. I just want him to like the packaging enough that he’ll want to get to know me as a person, but you wouldn’t know anything about that would you?” She said, her tone full of challenge.

Eric’s eyes narrowed a fraction. “No, I wouldn’t.” He replied, his voice sounding somewhere between husky and threatening and she backed off.

Taking Brent’s arm again, she dragged him away from the corridor, her heart beating fast in her chest. What was she thinking, provoking a leader like that? She had to get a grip.

“Am I really not getting laid tonight?” Brent asked as they made their way to the Pit.

Olivia stopped and stared at him. “Seriously?”

He gave her a sheepish grin and scratched the back of his head. “I mean, he’s right. You look really hot…”

“No, Brent. You and I are going to go out, have a nice conversation, a few drinks and then we’re
“going home separately. Got it?”

“Loud and clear.” He replied.

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The bar was fairly crowded when they arrived but they managed to find two stools at the counter that were free, though, not necessarily next to each other. With some maneuvering, Brent had the two in the middle vacated so they could sit down.

“What can I get you?” The girl behind the bar shouted at them over the boisterous chatter of the other patrons.

“I’ll have a beer and the lady will have…” Brent looked to her to finish the order.

“The same.”

The girl nodded her blonde head and placed two bottles on the counter before bouncing off to the next customer. Olivia clasped the bottle between both hands and asked, “So, what do you do Brent?”

He swallowed his swig of beer. “I’m actually a gym teacher at the school. The Dauntless kids usually have a lot of pent up energy they need to let loose, so they send them to me every afternoon.”

Olivia was impressed. “You like kids then?”

“Oh, yeah, I love them. Marnie couldn’t have them though… What about you? Lace said you worked on the fence.”

“Yeah, I do and I really like it. I came from Amity so the sunshine is always nice to have…” She said as someone squeezed in next to her and ordered a beer. Out of natural curiosity, she turned to see who it was and there was Eric, again.

He gave her annoyed look a wink and left with his drink. Curious as to what he was up to, her eyes followed him as he weaved through the crowd to a table at the back where Ralph and John already sat. Both of them were staring at her and not in a pleasant way. They didn’t even look away when Eric sat down with them.

“Hey, are you okay?” Brent asked her. His hand was warm on her chilled one and she dragged her gaze back to her date.

“Yeah.” She said with a soft smile.

Brent looked at her in concern. “Does Eric bother you a lot?”

Olivia shook her head. “No, it’s not him. I mean, he’s a dick, but it’s his friends that creep me out.”

“Do you want to leave?”

“No, it’s okay. They need to know they can’t intimidate me.” She replied and took a large gulp of her beer.

***

“Hey, how’d last night go?” Lace asked as she sat down at the cafeteria table with her tray the next morning.

“It wasn’t bad.” Olivia replied and took another bite of her scrambled eggs.
“What do you mean ‘it wasn’t bad’? He works with kids and he wants them, which means he looking to settle down. I thought that’s what you wanted.” Lace frowned at her.

“It is and he seems very nice, but I don’t know… I didn’t feel anything between us.” She explained but added before Lace could express her frustration, “Don’t worry, I still set up another date with him for this weekend.”

“Good.” Her friend said before ripping her toast in half and taking a bite. “Are we still going for our run after breakfast?”

“Absolutely. Is Maxi going to come?”

Lace shook her head. “No, she just got off work. Said she was going to head to bed.”

“Okay. When did you guys start dating again, anyway? Neither of you said anything to me about it.”

“That’s because we’re not back together. We’ve decided to keep things… physical for now.”

“Oh…” Olivia trailed off in surprise. Lace was usually always about the relationship but Maxi must have managed to change her mind. Not wanting to pry, she changed the subject, “I heard there’s going to be a fight between Jose and Casey tonight. Want to go?”

"Sure. There's nothing better than watching two grown men fight for points." Lace said lightly but it didn't hold any of her usual excitement at the prospect of a fight.

Olivia could tell there was something off with her since she mentioned Maxi. "You're not happy just keeping it physical, are you?"

Lace looked at her for a second and sighed. "No." She stabbed the pancake on her plate. "Why is it so hard for her to commit?"

"That's just the way she is and I don't think she's going to change anytime soon. So you can either wait it out or move on, like me." Olivia sarcastically grinned.

Lace snorted and nudged her. "Whatever… Hypocrite."

Olivia felt better seeing the small smile tug at her friend's lips and finished eating. As soon as they cleaned up their trays, they headed outside for their jog.

It was still cool out in their tank tops and shorts but that was okay because they quickly worked up a sweat running along the train tracks until they reached the hub and broke away to go down the streets. A patrol of Dauntless members were making their way over to the Factionless sector as they ran by and someone whistled.

Already uneasy because of Ralph’s behavior, Olivia pushed her legs faster when one of the men broke away from the group and began jogging behind them. She knew it was John without needing to look back because, although burlier than Ralph, he wasn't as fit as Eric and she could hear his labored breathing as he tried to keep up.

"Hey, those are a nice set of legs. What time do they open?" He called out.

"That is the lamest pick up line I've ever heard." Lace sneered over her shoulder at him.

"I ain't talking to you.” He sneered right back at her. “So, what do you say, Liv? Wanna go back to my place and get sweaty there?"
"My name isn't Liv and that is the worst pick up line I've ever heard. When are you and Ralph going to take a hint? I'm not interested." She replied firmly and picked up her speed. Lace followed suit and they saw him slow down in defeat.

Apparently he still wanted the last word because he called after them, "Oh, but the pussy gym teacher is?"

The girls ignored him and kept going until he was out of sight, then made their way back to the compound without backtracking. It was the farthest they had ever gone and Olivia was pretty winded by the time she got back to her apartment. Lace had left her back at the Pit because her apartment was on the other side but promised to meet her there for the fight later.

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The large cavernous room was packed with people cheering and hollering at each other as they waited for the competitors to come out and wanting the best view, the girls ducked and pushed their way to the front.

Across from them, Eric of course was already there waiting with the other leaders who had the best spot in the house, which was a ledge overlooking the ring. Olivia made the mistake of making eye contact with him because the way he looked at her drew her attention, and she couldn’t seem to stop herself from glancing back at him once in a while, even after the match had started.

She was pretty sure he wasn’t even paying attention to the fight since his eyes were on her every time she looked up and his expression never changed as the others cheered. It wasn’t a contemptuous look, but it was unsettling all the same. When it was over, she said goodnight to Lace and took the long way home.
Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

Ugh, this chapter should have been up a week ago but it kept going in directions that I wasn't quite satisfied with and I rewrote it over 4 times. Thanks to the guttersnipe for helping me out with it! Anyway, I've also been extremely tired this week so please forgive me if it sucks but this is definitely more along the path that I originally wanted it to go in. Please R&R! Thanks to everyone who has kudo'd and reviewed already!

The hallways were full of laughter as the crowd slowly left the Pit and Olivia grinned at her peers’ excitement. The thrill of the fight had everyone’s adrenaline coursing through their bodies and no one seemed to want to go to bed, but it was obvious that duty called first thing in the morning for those who were.

Rounding corner after corner and staircase after staircase, she had less company the closer she got home until she was suddenly alone. Most people who lived near her would have gone the fastest route and been home by now, which is why she chose the long way; she wanted to avoid walking home with Eric. They way he’d been staring at her was odd and it left her feeling uneasy.

Somewhere behind her, though, two pairs of feet began following her down the empty corridor. It was normal for people to be walking around Dauntless at night but the fact that Dauntless were never quiet when they were together made her gut say something was wrong.

Her previous adrenaline rush quickly came back in a spike of fear and she tried to appear nonchalant as she walked faster without looking back. If it was Ralph and John, she didn’t want them to know she was frightened at the prospect of being alone with them and if it wasn’t… Well, she didn’t need people to think she was paranoid either.

Maybe taking the long way home wasn’t such a good idea, she reflected. With one hallway done, she still had a staircase and the last corridor that led to her apartment to go, if only she could make it there before they reached her.

The footsteps were gaining and with a spurt of speed, she skipped the steps two at a time and they faded away when she ran around the last corner and saw Eric leaning against his door. Olivia skidded to a halt at the sight of him.

“What are you doing?” She nervously asked when she was within reach.

“Waiting for you.” He confirmed her suspicions and she frowned.

“Why?”

“Thought I’d let you know that when I got home your new boyfriend was standing outside your door with an entire chocolate cake. He said something about not being able to wait to see you again on Saturday.”

Olivia perked up. “And what did you say? He obviously left.”

“Yeah, he left after I told him we had such a great time tonight that you needed some fresh air before
coming back and I was just about to get ready for dessert. Then I took his cake and left him in the
hallway.” He told her with a smirk.

“You what?!” She burst out. “Eric, please tell me you seriously didn’t imply that we were on a date
together on purpose.”

“I didn’t imply anything.” He replied still grinning.

“If you didn’t imply it, then you downright lied.”

“I didn’t lie to him. We were both at the fight and we both had a good time; you did take the long
way home, and now I am getting ready to have some dessert that he so thoughtfully supplied.”

Olivia glowered at him and said, “You’re such a dick.”

“Hey, I did you a favor.”

“Oh, really? In what way?”

“You didn’t even like him.”

“How would you even know what I’m feeling? You’re so self-absorbed; I would be surprised if you
paid enough attention to your own dates to find out their names.” She criticized.

His features remained impassive as he replied, “I pay a lot closer attention than you seem to think. I
know flirting when I see it and you didn’t, not even once, during your date.”

Olivia rolled her eyes. “That doesn’t mean anything. I barely even know him, so how would I know
if I like him enough to flirt on the first date?”

“It’s called physical attraction. You either want to fuck him or you don’t and obviously you don’t.”

“And obviously, you’re also a pig.” She declared and went to leave but he twisted his head around to
follow her.

“Just calling it as I see it.” He said just before she unlocked her door and went inside.

Fuming, she paced her living room and cursed him under her breath. How was she going to explain
to Brent what really happened? Was their date even still on for Saturday? With all these thoughts
running through her mind, she wished she had that chocolate cake.

Well, if he’s going to screw with my date the least he could do is give me back my cake. She thought
and impulsively went back to pound on his door. He opened it with a knowing smirk and she held
her hand out.

“I believe that chocolate cake was meant for me, so hand it over.” She said.

“I’m willing to share if you are.” He replied with the irritating smirk still on his face.

“Just give it to me. I’m not in the mood to play your games tonight and you owe me.”

“You need to loosen up.”

“And you need to start minding your own business, so I’d say we’re even.” She said and gave him a
sarcastic smile.
Eric thoughtfully stared at her for a moment before he finally ducked back inside, leaving his door wide open. Olivia could see into his living room and it was immaculate. Her style wasn’t messy but it was a lot more casual and colourful than the stark white walls and black furniture thing he had going on. Nothing was out of its place either. She wondered if he even lived there or if it was just a place to bring all his dates back to.

He came back with the cake in his hands but before he handed it over, he ran a finger through the icing and sucked it off. Olivia rolled her eyes at him but took it and went home.

***

Saturday night, Olivia was stretching out in the hallway outside her door when Eric came home, for once, alone.

“I thought you had a hot date tonight.” Eric said as he came striding up to his door.

Still annoyed with him, she stared at the wall ahead of her and rotated her right shoulder to loosen it up. “Nope.” Was all she said.

“Oh, well, I hope it wasn’t anything I said…” He said, playing dumb and she snapped at him.

“Just stop it, Eric. He called me the next morning and cancelled because he realized we, apparently, want different things. Now he thinks I’m playing the field, like you.” She told him with her voice full of derision.

“I don’t see what the trouble is.” He shrugged it off like it wasn’t his problem and jiggled his keys in his lock.

“You wouldn’t.” She sneered as she went to jog past him but he gently grabbed her elbow to stop her.

“Where are you going, then?”

“For a run or is that suddenly against the rules?” She retorted, glaring him in those cold blue eyes of his.

“It isn’t safe to go out alone at night.” He said and if she wasn’t mistaken she’d say he almost sounded concerned.

“I’m not stupid, Eric. I’m staying in Dauntless.” She said, pulling her arm from his grip and left him behind as she ran around the corner and down the hallway before he could stop her again.

Running was the only exercise she truly enjoyed because it allowed her mind to wander and she had a lot to think about now. Her hopes for a new boyfriend to keep the local creeps at bay were now scattered in the wind, thanks to Eric, and that only left the option of making herself unattractive. The thought of letting her beautiful hair go unwashed and limp made her cringe. She’d never get a real boyfriend like that; there had to be another way.

The reminder of her unwanted suitors brought back the memory of a couple of nights ago when she felt like they were following her and Olivia consciously pick routes that were teeming with nightlife. The Pit was always a popular place but it was especially busy on the weekends and people came and went through the nearby hallways at all times of the night.

Making her way up the levels, she jogged through the crowded halls overlooking the pit and did laps. She went upstairs and back down, over and over again. She was nearly done her fifth lap when
a wiry arm reached out of a dark doorway and yanked her to the side. Her back slamming against the
door knocked the scream out of her mouth before a hand covered it.

Half of Ralph’s face was hidden in the doorway’s shadow but the blue eye she could see twinkled
with malice as it inched closer. His hand beneath her nose smelled of dirt and his breath reeked of
alcohol when he leaned in and sniffed her skin from neck to ear, making her skin crawled with
revulsion.

His mouth grazed her ear as he spoke, “You smell nice.” He purred and Olivia tried to buck him
away with her hips but it did nothing more than make him shift his weight so his knee went in
between her legs and he growled. “You think you can just tease me for years with this ass and those
pretty green eyes of yours without any compensation and then go and flaunt a new boyfriend in my
face, do you?”

Olivia’s gut clenched when he grabbed her butt and squeezed it. Her mind raced with options. She
couldn’t knee him in the groin since its hardened state was already shoved up against her thigh, nor
could she butt him in the head, but her arms were free.

“If you won’t give me what I’m owed for waiting, then I’ll just have to take it.” He threatened in her
er.

Angry and frightened out of her mind, she used her right hand to yank his hair and bash his head into
the wall beside him. His grip on her mouth loosened and when he went to clutch his throbbing head,
she punched him in the face and he fell backwards. She kicked him hard in the ribs for good measure
and ran.

Her heart pounded in her chest faster than her legs moved until she reached Max’s private residence
and she banged on his door. A woman with a major case of bedhead answered the door while still
tying the belt of her housecoat. It was Max’s wife, Cindi, and her sleepy brown eyes sharpened at the
sight of Olivia.

“What can I do for you?” She asked.

“I’m sorry to wake you up, but I really need to speak with Max. It’s urgent.” She begged.

Cindi took in her sweaty and shaking appearance and nodded her head. “Come on in. You can wait
in here while he makes himself presentable.” She said, showing Olivia to a room that was obviously
used as a private office.

The older woman left the room to get her husband and Olivia took the time to try and calm herself
down. She breathed in deeply, held, and then released it slowly. She had time to do it twice more
before Max finally arrived and closed the door behind him.

“What’s so urgent that you had to come here now?” He asked, sitting down behind his desk.

“Ralph Cannon just threatened to sexually assault me if I don’t sleep with him.” She answered clearly.

Max’s irritated demeanour softened and he cleared his throat. “I see. What exactly happened?”

“I was running and taken by surprise when he pulled me into a dark corner. He pinned me to the
wall and grabbed my ass while he threatened me. I managed to free myself and I escaped.”

“Is that all?”

“What do you mean is that all? He threatened to rape me and he would have if I hadn’t smashed his
head in before he could.” She replied, taken aback.

“It sounds to me you’ve done more damage to him than he has to you and I have no evidence, except your word, that he even threatened you.” Max replied, leaning back in his chair.

“More damage to him?! His wounds will heal but what about my mental state? If you let him go, then I will be looking behind my back for who knows how long, just waiting for him to attack me again, and I can assure you he won’t be so unprepared next time. John will be there to help and I can’t live my life like that!” She cried.

“I’m sorry, but if no crime has been committed then there’s nothing I can do. At best, we can keep an eye on him and catch him when he slips up...”

“I’ll be a rape victim by then!” She shouted and leaned over the tabletop to glare at him.

“Sometimes sacrifices need to be made.” He said without apology. “If you want some advice, stick close to friends and brush up on self-defence techniques. Dauntless take care of themselves.”

Olivia couldn’t believe what she was hearing. How could he be okay with letting Ralph walk the halls and possibly put every female member in jeopardy? Filled with disbelief and disgust, she couldn’t look at him anymore and turned on her heel and walked out.

***

Not knowing what to do now that she knew Max wouldn’t do anything, and not wanting to scare Lace, Olivia stayed home all morning and painted to keep herself calm.

She was sitting at her easel with the window at her back to take advantage of the daylight and she was just starting to add fine detail to the skyline when there were three firm raps at her door.

Her heart jumped into her throat at the sound but she managed to convince herself that Ralph wouldn’t announce himself before attacking and went to see who it was.

It was Eric.

Olivia narrowed her eyes at him in suspicion and said, “What do you want?”

“Max told me what happened last night.” He replied.

She snorted. “I’m surprised he even bothered to do that. Did he tell you to babysit me or something?”

“No. He told me to keep my friends in check.” He said. “Look, if the only reason you were dating Brent was to get John and Ralph off your tail, then you went about it the wrong way. A pretty boy like him wouldn’t scare them at all.”

“Oh? You have a better idea then?” She raised both her eyebrows in mock interest.

“I didn’t say your fake boyfriend idea was a bad one, just who you picked.”

“And who would be your suggestion, then?”

“Me.” He said bluntly.

Olivia stared at him in disbelief before she said, “Go screw yourself,” and tried slamming her door in his face but his foot blocked the way and he casually pushed his way inside.
“I’ve always wondered what your place looked like.” He said as he looked around. He pointed to one of the many paintings hanging on her wall and said, “You were Amity, right?”

Olivia let her door close and crossed her arms over her chest. “Yeah, so? Painting isn’t a crime.”

“But it’s also not a normal Dauntless hobby.” He replied as he leaned closer to one and peered at it intently. “You’re good though.”

“You do know that I didn’t actually invite you in, right?”

He glanced at her with his usual cool look and strode over to her couch to sit down. “I’m the best chance you’ve got to keep them off your back and you know it. I’m their friend and a leader; they wouldn’t dare touch my girlfriend. So, why do you seem so against it?”

“You’re probably in it with them.” She argued, throwing her hands up in the air, “For all I know, you could’ve drove Brent away just so I would stay vulnerable.”

Eric, who was casually lounging, sat up. “Contrary to popular belief, I’m not heartless nor am I into forcing women into sexual relations. Where would the fun be in that?” He said, giving her an unamused smirk.

“Then why the hell did you let them harass me day in and day out? Why didn’t you stop it before it got to this point?” Olivia demanded, her anger quickly escalating.

“I didn’t think it was anything more than some harmless fun. They hit on you, you tell them to fuck off and they’d move on when they got bored.” He shrugged.

“Except, they never did get bored, did they?” She snapped. “This is as much your fault as it is theirs, Eric, and I’m so mad at you for it!”

His jaw clenched at her words. “I know.” He admitted. “And if they hurt you, then it’s on me too. I owe you and I’m trying to make it right.”

Olivia stared at him for a moment. He looked deadly serious and she just wanted to punch him in the face.

“No.” She finally uttered. “I’d rather be raped then sell myself to be your whore.”

Eric stood up immediately and hissed, “This isn’t me trying to get you into my bed; I’m actually trying to help you.”

“I don’t want your help.” She hissed back.

“Fine, if you won’t take it, then I’ll be forced to arrest you for your own good.”

Olivia gaped at him. “Arrest me for what?!”

“Faction traitor.”

“That’s a lie.” She said, shocked he would stoop that low.

“Even if it is, there’s plenty of evidence that I could spin around.” He replied with confidence and that made Olivia nervous.

“Like what?”
Eric waved his hand around the room. “Your paintings; you’re calls home to mom and dad, etc… Sure seems like you miss home.”

“How do you know about the calls?” Suspicion filled her voice.

“You’re not the only one with thin walls, Olivia.”

Her lips pursed at the realization that he could probably hear everything that she did in her bedroom and was grateful she never brought Brent home. “You can’t seriously do that, can you?”

“Like I said, I’m a leader; I can do whatever I want.”

She frowned at him and said, “This is blackmail.”

“I prefer to think of it as an unappreciated favor.” He replied with a slight smirk.

Her mind was at odds with her heart. She believed him when he said he’d arrest her and pretending to be his girlfriend did make sense, but the mere thought of hanging out with his friends and being with him longer than a few minutes made her skin crawl. Eventually her self-preservation won.

With hands on both hips, she asked, “Won’t Ralph be pissed you moved in on the girl he wanted?”

“I’ll deal with that.” He replied offhand but his smirk turned into a grin now that he knew she was coming round to his idea.

She narrowed her eyes at his response. “What’s your plan to make this believable? Because, no offense, other than the fact that you’re a really shitty neighbor, we don’t talk to each other and I’ve avoided guys like you.”

“No one would question my motives. Everyone knows I like a good challenge and if they’ve eyes and ears, then they’d know I’ve been hitting on you for years.”

“I’m sure if they had, they’d realize it was just to piss me off.” She said, remembering all the times they’d argued over his loud music and late night guests.

“Was it?” He said, making a contemplative face and leaving Olivia to wonder what that meant. “No matter if they do. It’s you that needs to be believable. Like you said, you haven’t dated anyone in a long time but thankfully I’ve already planted the seed in Brent’s mind that it’s true. The question really is: can you handle putting on a good show?” He said looking at her lips and took a step closer. Olivia involuntarily stepped back; he noticed and stopped. “I guess we’ll need to work on that.” He said.

The blush that crept up her cheeks was embarrassing and she avoided eye contact with him. To distract herself from it, she said, “This can’t be a permanent fix. What happens after this ‘ends’?” She used air quotations at the end. “He’ll still be there, waiting.”

Eric silently watched her before he answered, “We’ll cross that bridge when we get there.”

Olivia took a deep breath. “I’m going to need a day or two to think this over.”

“Fine, but don’t tell anyone about our deal. If the tiniest rumor that it’s fake gets out, then I can’t promise Ralph will behave.”

“But Lace already knows I only agreed to see Brent because of Ralph. She was hoping I’d actually fall for the guy, but she’ll never believe I’d fall for you.” She reasoned.
“Then I guess you’ll just have to make her believe it.” He said as he left.
Chapter 4

What was she going to tell Lace about Eric? Olivia wondered, pushing her mashed potatoes around her plate so they mixed in with her peas. She’d never believe it, not in a million years, not when she knew what she already did. Short of marrying him, Olivia was sure Lace would see right through the whole masquerade. She groaned to herself and lowered her head in defeat. She was screwed. *Maybe I just won’t ever have to tell her...* She hoped.

“What’s this I hear about you ditching Brent for Eric?” Lace asked as she sat down next to her.

The cafeteria was nowhere near full for dinner but a few people sat at the table with them and they glanced up at Lace’s question. With eyes now on her, Olivia lowered her voice so only Lace could hear, “Where did you hear that?”

“From Brent.” She said, copying her friend. “He told me he went to your place after the fight to see you and Eric told him you were on a date with him. He didn’t believe me when I said you went to the fight with me. What’s going on?”

Shit, shit, shit. What should she say? Even for an ex-Amity, lying to an ex-Candor wasn’t easy. They always knew your tell signs. She decided to take a page out of Eric’s book and lied by omission.

“I saw Eric after the fight. He invited me in for chocolate cake as an apology for not keeping his friends in line and I accepted. Stuff was said and… he essentially asked me out.” She said, praying it would be enough.

Lace looked dumbstruck. “You went into his place at night, alone? And you said yes to a date? Are you sick?” She touched Olivia’s forehead with the back of her hand but Olivia pulled away.

“He seemed very sincere with his apology, okay?”

“Uh-hmmm...” Lace hummed in speculation. “You’re using him aren’t you?”

“Dammit, Lace. Can’t I have any secrets?” Olivia grumbled.

Lace chuckled. “Not when I’m around. Spill.”

“Fine.” Olivia huffed and her posture deflated into a hunch over her food. “I ran into him after the fight and he told me that Brent stopped by with a cake. For some reason he thought it would be a good idea to insinuate that he and I were together and the next day Brent cancelled our date. Then this morning, Eric invited himself over because he found out that Ralph had tried to…” She paused to evaluate whether or not to tell Lace what happened and deciding it was it essential to the story, said, “Assault me last night…”

“Hold up. He what?!” Lace said, instantly angry. “I’m going to kick Ralph’s ass.” She declared and was already getting up but Olivia pulled her back down.

“Don’t make a scene. I said he tried.”

“Did you at least tell Max?”

Olivia rolled her eyes. “Of course I did, who do you think told Eric?”

“And what did Max say? Please tell me he arrested that perv’s ass.”
“No.” Olivia grumbled. “There’s nothing he can do without proof, so I’m stuck watching my back.”

“That’s fucking ridiculous.” Lace growled. “Eric didn’t threaten you, did he? Because if he’s more interested in protecting those ass wipes he calls friends then he’s got another thing coming.”

“Actually, he didn’t. He really did apologize, amazing as it sounds. It was even his idea to pretend to be dating so Ralph would be too scared to touch me again.” Olivia explained, leaving out the bit about his threat to arrest her if she didn’t agree to it.

“What?” Lace said, surprised. “Are you really going to go through with it? I mean, it’s Eric.”

“Well, I can either go around with eyes at the back of my head or I can feel somewhat safe and make googly eyes with the hottest guy around.” She replied.

“But you hate him.” Lace reminded her.

“Yeah, I know.” Olivia sighed. “But what other choice do I have? He is by far the best option and he offered.”

“Yes, but what’s in it for him?”

“He said he owed me.” She shrugged. She honestly had no idea why he wanted to do it but she wasn’t exactly in a position to demand answers either.

“I don’t know…” Lace hesitated. “When’s the last time he did something for anyone out of the goodness of his heart?”

“How should I know? I’m not his keeper.” Olivia snapped; her frustration with the whole idea rising to the surface.

“Sorry.” Her friend apologized. “I just find it really odd that he wants to help you over his friends. By the way, won’t it get super weird to be ‘dating’ their friend? You might have to hang out with them.”

“We haven’t discussed the logistics of it all yet. I asked for a day or two to think about it first.” She replied while looking down at her plate and realizing she wasn’t hungry. She shoved it to the side.

“Good idea. You should write down a list of rules to follow. I’m assuming you don’t plan on sleeping with him?” Lace asked with an eyebrow arched in inquiry.

“Hell, no.” Olivia bluntly denied the possibility.

“Make sure he knows that.” Lace said, waving her fork at Olivia before stabbing a piece of lettuce and eating it.

“Trust me, I will.” She agreed. “But you have to promise not to tell anyone, even Eric, that you know.”

“I promise and hope to die, stick a needle in my eye.” Lace said, playfully crossing her chest. Olivia smiled at her best friend and shook her head.

***

The Pit was busy as usual as they browsed the racks in one of the stores. Olivia found a really cute dress she desperately wanted to try on but she was saving her points to buy more paints now that she was running low and decided not to tempt herself and put it back with a sigh.
She joined Lace by the lingerie where she was holding up a black see through baby doll and matching thong to her body. She looked at Olivia’s reflection in the mirror and asked, “What do you think? Would Maxi like it?”

“You’ll be naked underneath it, what’s not to like?” Olivia replied nonchalant. Lingerie wasn’t really her thing and she never saw the draw. The end goal was to get naked, wasn’t it?

Lace rolled her eyes at her in the mirror. “You’re no help.”

“Why are you bothering to waste your points on this stuff for someone who would willingly dump you to the side as soon as someone else comes along?”

“As much as it’s for Maxi, it’s for me too. It makes me feel sexy and it boosts my confidence, if you know what I mean.” She winked suggestively and playfully nudged Olivia with a chuckle.

Even not having an affinity for other women, Olivia still couldn’t fathom why her friend would need a confidence boost in the sexy department. Her beautiful dark tan skin was smooth, her naturally black hair was streaked with medium blue highlights and it hung down her back in a silky curtain; her almond shaped brown eyes always shone with laughter and her petite body was toned and firm. Maxi would have to be crazy not to find her attractive.

It must be a man/lesbian thing, because all Olivia knew was that she had no desire to see a man in lingerie. Give her a hot guy just out of the shower in nothing but a towel and she was good.

“Maybe we should get you one; it might help your objection to having sex with Eric. God knows you could use a good lay and I hear he’s pretty good.” Lace teased and handed her a black corset with a leather front that laced up between the breasts. The sides and back were nothing but lace that ran down to make a skirt that ran around the hips beneath the leather top. Olivia stared at the material that was shoved into her hands and was startled when a deep voice beside her spoke up.

“Hey.”

Olivia internally groaned as she recognized Zayne’s voice.

“So, I guess the rumor is true, you’re dating again?” He said, eyeing up the lingerie she held. “Must be a lucky guy, you never wore anything like that for me.”

“Um, yeah I am.” She replied, not wanting to have this conversation with him. In fact, she didn’t even want to look at his asshole face but she liked the way he seemed jealous over the thought she might be into someone more than him and she flaunted it. “We’re going on a special date soon and I thought I’d spice it up.”

“I guess leadership gets you the best of everything, even when it comes to women.” He said.

“Leadership?” She asked.

“I heard you were seeing Eric; everyone’s talking about it. Were you keeping it a secret?” Zayne asked when he saw the confusion on her face.

“Um…” She stammered. How did he find out so soon?

“Not anymore.” Someone else said as he slipped an arm around her waist and jolted her out of her stupor. Eric’s strong arm pressed her firmly into his side as he addressed her ex. “She wanted to wait until we decided to make it official.”
“I see.” Zayne said, noticing the possessive way Eric held her. “I guess congrats are in order, then. You’re a lucky guy, she’s a great girl.”

“I’m not sure you know just how great she really is, seeing as you broke her heart, what, four years ago?” Eric said, glaring Zayne down. “So, if I see you talking to her again, you can guess what will happen.” He threatened.

Olivia was stunned. Not only did he know that information but he’d defended her as Zayne nodded and walked away with a single glance back at her.

Eric loosened his grip on her tense body and peered down at her. “Are you okay?”

She swallowed and replied, “I’m fine.” When she noticed he was staring at the corset, she quickly hid it behind her back and waved it so Lace would get the hint and put it back. “What are you doing here?” She asked to distract them both from what just happened.

“I was on my way back from seeing Max and I spotted him walking over.”

“Oh… How did you even know he was my ex?”

He glanced at Lace, who pretended to peruse the dresses a couple of feet behind them, and said, “It’s hard to not notice when your neighbor goes from having hot rabbit sex to crying every night for months.”

“We did not have hot rabbit sex.” She objected.

“Believe me, you did.” He smirked and looked back at the lingerie on the rack. “And it looks like I’ve got a lot to look forward to as well.”

“That…” She stopped and cleared her throat. “We were looking for Lace. But speaking of that, I need to talk to you in private.”

“Sure, my place is free.”

“Fine.” She agreed and turned to her friend. “I’ll see you tomorrow, Lace. I’m just going to…” She trailed off, unsure what to say.

“No problem.” Lace replied, eyeing Eric up with concern as they left.

Walking down the halls, it was the first time they had been alone since the whole situation began and she was acutely aware of his body keeping pace beside hers. Olivia wasn’t sure how she should be acting with him now that it was clear they were going through with it and she was caught off guard when he took her hand.

The skin on his knuckles was rough from years of fighting and they scratched the pads of her finger tips, sending a tingling sensation up her arm. She brushed it off as nerves and tried to endure the awkward silence between them on the way to his apartment but it seemed that he couldn’t.

“Your hand is sweating.” He said.

“Oh, sorry.” She mumbled and let go so she could wipe it on the leg of her pants. She didn’t offer it back, though, and his hand eventually fell to his side.

“I know you told Lace the truth.” He said a few minutes later.

Olivia looked up at his stoic profile but she remained quiet.
“It’s alright. I wasn’t really expecting you to pull it off, that’s why I spread it around that we were together before you could ruin it.”

“It was you?” She said, surprised. “You couldn’t wait another day or two like I asked?”

“This way you had less reason to back out.” He replied with a slight shrug.

Unamused at the fact that he basically made the choice for her, she entered his place when he unlocked the door and held it open for her.

“So, what did you want to talk to me about?” He said as he tossed his keys onto the coffee table.

“If we’re going to do this, then I want to set some rules.” She declared putting aside her nerves.

“What?”

“Like what?”

“Like, we’re not sleeping together… ever.”

His lips lifted in a half smile. “I sort of already figured that one out but that lingerie did throw me for a second.”

“I already told you that I wasn’t buying that.” Olivia huffed. “And I want your famous revolving door to stop too. I don’t need people thinking I allow my boyfriend to cheat on me.”

He eyed her for a second before he flopped onto his couch and answered, “Done.”

“Really? You’re not going to argue about it or try to convince me that I owe it to you?” She said, full of scepticism that it would be that easy.

“Like I said earlier, this isn’t me trying to force you to sleep with me, but you will owe me big time for the amount of blue balls I’ll be getting from our dates.”

“Dates? What dates? I thought we were just going to pretend in public.” She said, taken aback by this new bit of information.

“Won’t it look a bit odd to people when they never see us together privately? You see most couples on their dates at the bar or out for a run together.” He pointed out. “If we want to sell this as the real deal then we’re going to have to look intimate with each other and that means PDA because there will always be someone watching.”

“I was expecting some hand holding in the hallways or a kiss on the cheek in front of our friends, not a real relationship.” She argued.

Eric got up and slowly approached her. “Well, think of it this way. If you were still with Brent, you’d be forcing yourself to do all these things with him anyway, including sleeping with him, just to keep him from finding out you’re using him. I on the other hand already know and am willing to keep sex out of the equation since you’re so against it. I think that’s a fair deal, don’t you? But if you ever change your mind on that lingerie, I’m more than willing to help you out with your Tuesday night ritual.” He said suggestively.

He was now so close that his chest was an inch from her nose and she had to take a step back to look up at his face, which was hovering above hers as he asked, “What’s with Tuesdays anyway? Is it your treat day or something?”

Her cheeks heated as blood quickly rushed to her face. “My Tuesdays are none of your business and
you’re a pig for listening in.”

He smirked at her answer. “Well, I can’t be too chivalrous or you’ll fall in love with me and we can’t have that, can we?”

Olivia scoffed. “I don’t think that will be a problem.”

“Good.” Eric replied and reached behind her.

She jerked back at his sudden nearness and bumped into something hard. He had backed her up to the door without her noticing and she took the hint that it was time to leave when he opened the door.

“I’ll pick you up at 8pm tomorrow for our date.” He said as he leaned on the open door. She replied with a curt nod and slipped out of his apartment, filled with dread at what tomorrow might bring.
Yey another chapter! I had difficulty with getting this one right too, so please, let me know if it doesn't quite fit well together. Anyway, R&R and thanks to everyone who has previously!

Her hair was a mess by the time work was over the next day. For hours the wind whipped at it and pulled it loose from the hasty ponytail she threw it in before rushing for the train, and now, as she waited for the shift change to arrive, she stifled a yawn and wished she had gotten more sleep.

All night she had the most irritating Eric dreams where they just argued, over something she couldn’t remember, and she would wake up with a head ache. But those weren’t the problem. It was when they turned into nightmares that really did it. She could still recall one vividly because she couldn’t go back to sleep after.

Eric took her to a dark, crowded room, probably the club, where they ran into his friends and he just stepped back and watched as they ripped her clothes off; her screams going unheard by the crowd because the music was too loud. It was so intense that she woke up screaming and needed to do something to calm her nerves.

She ended up sitting down at her easel but at some point fell back asleep because she woke up in the morning still in her chair with paint smeared all over her hand when it fell slack onto her palette. She had just enough time to have a quick shower but her skin remained stained and now she lifted her pink, purple, and green hand up to sweep her hair out of her eyes.

The clank of feet on the ladder told her that Tommy was finally there to take over for the afternoon shift and she sighed in relief. Olivia knew that if she was going to be ready for whatever Eric had planned for her then she’d need to fit a nap in before their date and rushed home to do just that.

The phone rang in the dim room and jarred Olivia awake. She reached across the bed and felt along the bedside table for the phone without opening her eyes and upon finding it, answered, "Hello?"

"There you are." Her mother's voice came from the other side in relief. "We haven't heard from you in a while and we were starting to get worried."

"Sorry." She replied, rubbing her forehead. Her head was still groggy from her short nap. “I've just been busy."

“Did something happen?”

“Nothing bad.” She lied, hearing the concern in her mother’s voice. “I’ve started dating again and… I got a boyfriend.”


“Eric Coulter? Didn’t you say he was friends with those boys?” Linda said, utterly confused.

“He is, but he’s not my…” She paused, wondering how best to phrase it, “real boyfriend. He, uh, agreed to pretend so they would back off since he’s a leader and their friend. He thinks they won’t bother me if I’m with him.”

“Maybe so, but what’s to stop him from hurting you? He already let his friends get away with harassing you.”

Olivia knew she couldn’t tell her parents that she was being blackmailed into the situation. That would only result in them flipping out and demanding his resignation from leadership and she didn’t need any more drama. Opening her mouth to tell a lie, there was a bang against the wall that distracted her for a moment.

“Wear your dress tonight.” Eric called through the wall.

“Who was that?” Her mother asked, clearly hearing him.

“Oh, just my neighbor.” Olivia tried to down play it, in hopes of withholding the fact that Eric lived next door.

“Why does he want you to wear a dress?”

Bowing her head in defeat, she sighed and said, “Because it’s Eric and he probably wants to show me off on our date.”

There was a pause on the other end and then, “You mean the boy who keeps you awake with his philandering is Eric? Olivia, don’t you remember what happened the last time you dated a boy like that?” Her mother scolded.

“Yes, I do, mom and I’m not sleeping with him. It’s part of our agreement.” She replied and looked at the clock. Holy crap, how did it get so late? She thought. “Anyway, I gotta go. It’s our first fake date tonight and he’ll be picking me up soon.”

“All right, sweetheart, but please be careful.”

“I always am. Love you.” She said her good-byes and made a dash for the shower.

* * *

At 8 pm on the dot, a knock sounded at her door. She opened it with a sardonic smile and said, “My, aren’t you an eager beaver.”

He ignored her comment and assessed her black jeans, tank and boots quickly with a frown. “Where’s your dress?”

“In my closet.” She replied with her hands on her hips. “I don’t need you getting the wrong idea.”

“But we need everyone else to get the wrong idea.”

“They’ll deal with it.” She shrugged, not budging on her outfit.

“Fine.” He said, clearly annoyed and gently tugged her hair out of its ponytail to fluff it out.
“What are you doing?” She swatted at him.

“Trying to make you look less miserable and more like you actually give a shit. Do you have any make-up on?”

“No.” She grumbled at his nit-picking.

“Can you come across any more loath to be out with me?” He growled. “I thought you wanted my help.”

“Correction, you’re forcing me to take your help. I never asked you to do anything for me.”

“I didn’t hear you correct me in front of Zayne.” He retorted.

He had her there. She huffed and went back into her apartment with him right behind her. Olivia’s make-up kit was in her bathroom cupboard and as she pulled it out, Eric made himself comfortable on the doorjamb with his arms and ankles crossed as he watched her.

She ignored his presence the best she could and applied the black eyeliner along her lashes but instead of making her prettier, it only accentuated how bloodshot her eyes were. She let out a low growl and furiously washed it off.

For some reason she felt on the verge of tears and when Eric gently tugged her hands from her face and asked her what the matter was, the dam broke loose. He gathered her in his arms and allowed her to cry into his chest.

*What am I doing?* She thought after a moment and pushed away. “Sorry.” She mumbled and turned back to the sink, highly embarrassed by her sudden show of emotion in front of him.

“I know you’re not feeling up to it tonight but we can’t put it off.” He said, not having moved from her side. “The guys have already heard about us but they won’t believe unless they see it and the longer we wait the more likely they’ll get angry about it.”

It took her a moment to process what he had just said and then blurted, “Are you crazy?! Our first date and you’re going to make me hang out with them?!”

Eric merely gazed down at her and said, “Face your fear, Olivia, otherwise they’ll control you. You don’t want to be looking behind your back forever, do you?”

She white-knuckled the porcelain sink and scowled. Of course she didn’t want that but she didn’t want this either. She worked hard to earn her place within Dauntless, to learn how to protect herself, and now her safety was threatened and she was reduced to relying on a man she hated for protection.

*Beauty.* She angrily thought and glared at her reflection. It was her curse and possibly her only salvation.

With a heavy sigh, Olivia splashed cold water on her face and retried applying the makeup. It still didn’t help hide her eyes but, at the very least, it was an improvement on the dark circles and her splotchy cheeks.

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The darkness of the bar allowed for shady corners where couples commonly snuggled up and made out in, and as she followed Eric by one of those spots, Olivia half-expected Ralph to suddenly drag her into one and molest her. She hadn’t realized her fists were clenched until Eric slipped his hand
over hers and very calmly told her to relax.

Relax? Who the hell was he kidding? She was instantly filled with rage and fear and Olivia wasn’t sure whether she wanted to flee or bash Ralph’s head in some more as they approached their table. She reluctantly took the chair that Eric had pulled out for her and sat down while she eyed up the darkening bruise on the side of Ralph’s face. She also enjoyed the look of angry confusion slowly creeping across it.

“What the hell is this?” John asked as Eric scooted his own seat closer to the table.

“I’ve asked Olivia to be my girlfriend and I thought I’d let you know in person since we know you guys have a thing for her…”

“You’ve brought her here to flaunt her in our faces, you mean.” Ralph glared.

“I’m not flaunting her, I’m warning you.” Eric glared back. “I know she gave you that shiner, Ralph and I know why. She’s mine and if either of you touch her again, there’ll be hell to pay.”

“Did she put you up to this?” Ralph asked, unfazed by Eric’s threat. “’Cause last I heard she was dating the gym teacher, not you. So where did this come from?”

“Brent and I weren’t exclusive and when he found out I was seeing Eric too, he broke it off. You can ask around if you want.” Olivia said, silently daring him to because she knew that was what Brent told Lace.

“Well, if you wanted a big bad dick between your legs, then all you had to do was give me a call, darlin’.” John gave her a lewd grin.

Acting out of utter disgust and need, she smirked at John and made it obvious as she slid her hand over Eric’s crotch. He grunted in surprise at the unexpected touch but didn’t flinch away and she said, “This is the only big bad dick I want, because he at least had the decency to treat me like a human being.”

The two men silently watched with envy at the intimate caress and for a second, Olivia was beginning to think maybe they were hoping to get the whole show when John piped up, “Since when do you do girlfriends, Eric?”

“Since now.” He replied, shifting uncomfortably in his seat as his bulge slowly stiffened beneath Olivia’s palm. She felt it and moved her hand to rest on his thigh. “I’ve wanted Olivia from the first day I saw her but I’ve been waiting for her to get over her lousy ex and unlike you two idiots, I have the patience to wait to get what I want.” Eric said, glaring his friends down despite his growing need.

“Now that I have her, I’m not letting her go. Have I made myself clear?” John picked up on the dangerous undertones and immediately nodded. “Alright, man.”

They both looked to Ralph. At first he appeared sceptical whether or not he believed it but in the end he nodded as well and Olivia let out the breath she didn’t know she was holding in. But Eric suddenly pulling her up as he stood with his increasing hard on displayed for everyone to see startled her before she could fully enjoy her relief.

“Sorry we’re not sticking around guys, but we’ve got plans.” He said and dragged her with him as he nonchalantly exited the bar.

“I hope our plans don’t involve me taking care of that because you can go to Hell.” Olivia said when they left the reek of sweat and alcohol behind.
“Just give me a second.” He muttered.

“I was only playing the part, Eric, like you told me to. I wasn’t trying to turn you on.” She tried to explain but when he looked at her, his pupils were dilated with lust and the thought that maybe he couldn’t control himself popped into her head. How could they pretend to be intimate while avoiding this if he couldn’t?

Needing to know if that was the case, Olivia approached him. Putting aside her dislike for him, she raised her hands up to his torso and slid her palms underneath his black t-shirt. The muscles of his abs tightened at his quick intake of air and she was slightly impressed with how toned he felt but she didn’t let it show. She ran her hands around his waist and down to grab his ass as she pressed herself closer so his hardened appendage rubbed against her lower belly.

“What are you doing?” He growled as he stood stiffly against her.

She gave him a seductive smirk in reply and trailed her fingertips up his back. “Maybe I was wrong about the no sex rule. It’s been so long and you’re already up for me…” She said and ran her nails along the back of his neck and into his hair. He gripped her hips and allowed her to gently pull his head down to her level.

Olivia wasn’t planning on kissing him, she just wanted to see if he would close the distance himself, but never being this close to him before, it was the first time that she noticed he was wearing cologne of some sort and the smell reminded her of Amity.

It triggered a warmth that spread through her body and she closed her eyes to savour it. The combination of his gorgeous body against hers and the sweet smell coming from him made her forget who he was and she closed the gap between their lips.

It was as if she broke an invisible barrier between them because Eric suddenly came alive and he wrapped his arms around her. His soft lips crushed hers in a hungry kiss, like he had been waiting years for this, and his hips began to rock into her.

It had been so long since she’d been this intimate with anyone that Olivia forgot how good it felt to feel wanted and she played with his hair as she kissed him back. She was so absorbed in the moment that she was jolted back to reality when Eric pushed her away suddenly.

“I know what you’re doing.” He said, his chest heaving with every breath he took.

Oh yeah, she thought as she was reminded of what the purpose of that was. How did she get so carried away?

“You think I can’t control myself, don’t you?”

“Can you blame me?” She said, glancing down at his lower region.

“I can’t hide the fact that I want you, badly, but I already told you that I wouldn’t pressure you into anything.” He hissed.

Something low in her belly tingled at his confession, but she shoved it away and reminded herself that he wasn’t the type of guy she wanted to end up with.

“Then we need to come up with a way to avoid this.” She gestured to his manhood again.

“Will you stop reminding me of it? I’m painfully aware that it’s there.” He snapped, running a hand through his hair.
“Maybe we should call it a night so you can do something about that in private.” She suggested.

“No.” He shook his head. “It will seem odd if we consider five minutes in a bar a date. I just need a
minute… and a cold shower.” He mumbled the last part. “Why the hell did you kiss me back,
anyway?”

Her cheeks heated at the memory of what she had done but refusing to let him know that it turned
her on, she scowled at his remark. “I didn’t kiss you back; I had a mental lapse because you smell
like Amity.”

“I smell like Amity?” He seemed confused but then a light went off. “Oh, you mean my cologne. I
got it as a gift from Johanna when I did her a favor. Women seem to enjoy it but I have no idea what
it smells like. There aren’t many women here that are from Amity to tell me.”

“It’s apple pie.” Olivia said quietly, slightly homesick for the delicious dessert Amity was known for.

“Apple pie, huh? Does it taste as good as it smells?”

“Oh, god, yes. Especially when it’s served warm with ice cream.” She salivated at the memory.

Eric’s gaze was still lustful but also warm as he watched her recall her childhood memories and it
made her uncomfortable. “So, is there a plan for the rest of the night once you’re, uh, ready?” She
asked with a raised brow to change the subject.

Eric smirked. “How are you with heights?”

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An hour (and a cold shower) later, Olivia found herself at the top of the Hancock building
surrounded by a crowd of fellow Dauntless, all eagerly awaiting their turn down the zip line. But as
soon as word spread that Eric was there, it split into two as people moved out of the way so he could
easily usher her to the front of the line.

Slightly uncomfortable by her earlier behavior and unwilling to hear any more of his ‘face your fears’
speeches, Olivia remained quiet throughout their trip and neglected to mention she was slightly afraid
of heights. Instead, she feverishly prayed for him to change his mind before they got there but she
had no such luck.

Now that she was there, she curiously peered over the edge and instantly knew that was a mistake
because the ground was 100 floors below and so pitch black that she couldn’t see a damn thing. It
vaguely reminded her of her first day of initiation, except that jump was during the day and they
ultimately knew it was safe.

This was theoretically safe too, as Dauntless had been doing it every night for years, but the fact that
your life depended on a string to keep you from falling to your death unnerved her. Years of wear
and tear, and the good chance of human mistakes were all it took for something to go wrong; she just
hoped it wouldn’t be today that it did.

Eric was right behind her, so when she took a quick step back from the frightening sight, she
bumped into his chest and his warm hands steadied her shoulders. “Don’t tell me you’re afraid of
heights like the Stiff is.” He gently mocked so the others around them couldn’t hear.

“What Stiff are you referring to?” She asked to distract herself from the fear that was building in her
chest.
“Four.”

“Oh.” She knew of Four and had seen him around. The dislike he and Eric had for each other was pretty common knowledge as well, but she’d never actually met him since he kept mostly to himself and his close group of friends, including his equally famous girlfriend, Tris. “Then, I guess I am. I didn’t know he hated heights.” She admitted.

“Not many do unless they pay attention. Come on, we’ll go tandem.” He said, gently turning her around.

His large hands brushed parts that were sensitive as he buckled her in but she couldn’t tell if it was accidentally or on purpose as his face merely looked focused on what he was doing, tightening every strap so she was secure, and then he slipped his own on.

Her heart pounded loudly as they stepped up onto the ledge and were attached to the line. Olivia found the view dizzying and closed her eyes tightly but she was grateful when Eric wrapped his arms around her torso and whispered in her ear, “Breath,” before they were pushed over the edge.

Olivia let out a piercing scream and clung to the arms hugging her. “I’m going to die, I’m going to die.” She chanted under her breath like a mantra.

“You’re not going to die.” Eric shouted from behind to be heard over the roaring wind. “Open your eyes.” He then ordered but Olivia shook her head no. “Come on, you’re missing the best part. Do it, or I’ll let you go.”

“No!” She clung to him in fright. He tried prying one arm from her death grip and she shouted, “Okay! Okay!” and cracked one eye open and then another.

The view was unbelievable and she looked around in awe at the far off buildings as everything seemed to be moving in slow motion. It was oddly peaceful to be sailing through the air with the stars above them and the world below that she forgot why she was afraid, until they hit a change in the line and they accelerated at a steep decline.

Another scream escaped her lips as they plummeted but this time she couldn’t tear her eyes away from the wall that was rapidly approaching. Eric released one arm from her body and reached behind to grab the brake. It screeched as it slowed their velocity and stopped them from becoming pancakes a foot above a crowd of cheering Dauntless.

A couple of guys from the crowd helped them down from the harness and Olivia weakly leaned against the wall; her body felt like it was buzzing all over. Eric came over and gently placed a comforting hand on her chilled, bare shoulder and grinned.

“That wasn’t so bad, now was it?”

She glared at him from the side. “As far as near death experiences go; no it wasn’t so bad. What ever happened to quiet first dates to get to know each other?”

“Over rated.” He replied. “I just learned four things about you from that ‘date’. Things you’d never tell me.”

“Like what?” She frowned.

“Like… you’re brave, as a Dauntless should be; you’re scared of heights, you’re honest about your flaws and… you trust me.” He said with all sincerity.
Olivia’s mouth fell open. “I wouldn’t say trust, Eric…”

“There’s no way you’d let me take you up there if you didn’t, so don’t even pretend like it’s not true.” He cut her off.

Her eyes narrowed. “Fine. I suppose I trust that you won’t let me get killed… on purpose, but that’s about as far as it goes.”

“Good enough for now but I better get you home before you pass out, though. You don’t look so good.”

“Yeah, I’d say that’s a good idea.” She said, too nauseated to bother with sarcasm.
Tucked into the curve of Eric’s side, he held her upright as they walked back to Dauntless headquarters. Initially she tried to convince him they were alone enough that they didn’t have to play ‘friendly’, but he merely pointed at one of the many security cameras and told her that there was always someone watching in Dauntless and she gave in. Her legs were still a bit shaky and she preferred his furnace like quality over the chilly night air anyway.

“So, do all your dates end up sick at the end or just the fake ones?” She asked, feeling irritable from the roiling in her stomach.

“This is my first date to ever make it past the bar before ending up at my place.” He replied, straight faced.

_of course_. Olivia lightly chuckled to herself. "You know, if you wanted to get back at me for earlier, you didn’t need to scare the shit out of me.”

Eric looked down at her from the side. "Is that what you think tonight was about?"

"Uh, yeah.” She replied.

Eric sighed. “Look, I had no idea you were afraid of heights when I suggested it.”

“Yeah, right!” Olivia scoffed. “You have access to everyone’s records. You’re telling me you didn’t watch my fear sims just so you could have more leverage over me?”

“No, I didn’t.” He replied, growing angry with her insinuations. “You think I’m blackmailing you, but I’m trying to keep you safe from yourself. Your plan would have gotten your unconscious body dumped in the factionless sector and your ‘boyfriend’ thrown into the chasm.”

Olivia stopped abruptly and pulled out of his embrace. “If you’re so certain that they’re that dangerous, than why haven’t you done something to stop them!!” She shouted, angry that no one seemed to be doing anything about the psycho’s he called friends.

Eric took a step closer. “Because there is nothing I can do. They haven’t committed any crimes that I can arrest them for, but I can prevent a crime and you should be grateful that I’m doing that.” He snarled at her angrily but his face quickly changed to concern. “Olivia?”

Her anger burned so hot that the contents of her stomach made a sudden appearance and she dashed to puke in a bush by the wall. Olivia could feel Eric’s body heat directly behind her, waiting for her to finish, as she embarrassingly hurled chunks of beef and potato along with some sort of milky liquid. Her throat burned when she was done and wiped her mouth off with the back of her hand.

Standing back up and feeling particularly bothersome, she gave Eric a grin and said, “Want a kiss now?”

His look of indifference didn’t change but he did reach out for her. “Let’s get you home.” He said as he scooped her up.

She wanted to protest but her stomach was still churning and instead, closed her eyes and rested her
head against his shoulder as she distracted herself by counting each step he took.

***

Olivia woke up at the sound of her alarm clock. She smacked it off and flipped her covers off to find herself still clothed and last night’s events replayed in her mind. She must’ve fallen asleep because she had no memory of Eric bringing her home or putting her to bed. At least he had the decency not to crawl in with her.

Making her way to the bathroom, she pushed the door open and an awful smell hit her. She quickly covered her nose and flipped the switch on. There, in her tub, was a pile of black clothing that appeared to be covered in puke.

“Oh no.” She whispered when she realized they didn’t belong to her.

Turning around, the sun was coming up and it cast a golden glow on the contents of her living room, including a nearly naked Eric who was asleep on her couch.

He was on his back with one arm behind his head like a pillow as the other hand splayed over his curly blond chest hair and his right leg hung off the edge. Thankfully he kept his dark gray boxer-briefs on to hide the only thing that would be more appealing to look at than his impressive abs because she could barely tear her gaze away from the defined muscles as it was.

Why did he have to be so beautiful? The peaceful look on his face almost made her believe that this God-like creature might actually be a nice guy and her frosty feelings towards him melted a little at the sight of him, but the memory of their argument brought her back to reality and she nudged him with her foot.

“What?” He mumbled, still half-asleep.

“Why are you sleeping on my couch?”

He popped one eye open and looked up at her. “Because you vomited all over me last night and I didn’t feel like stinking my place up with it. Besides, I have a rep to maintain.”

She rolled her eyes and said, “Well, you can leave now; I have to get ready for work.”

He slowly got up and her eyes travelled over the expanse of his broad shoulders and down to his narrow hips without realizing it.

“I already called your supervisor and told him you were sick today.” He said as he opened her door still in his underwear. “You’re welcome.” He added just before he left her there dumb struck.

A second later she went after him. “What about your clothes?” She asked just as two women walk by, eyeing the two of them up with all-knowing smirks.

Great, now everyone was going to think they slept together.

Eric saw them too and shrugged after they went into their apartment. “Looks like they did their part. Throw them out for all I care.”

He opened his door and went in without another glance at her but the light that peeked through the gap at the bottom of his door had a shadow and told her that he was still there. Was he watching her through the peep hole or was he waiting for something? Like for her to call him back and demand he take his clothes?
Olivia didn’t know what to say. Of course, she didn’t want to deal with his gross clothes but it was her puke and he had been kind enough to call into work for her…

His shadow moved away from the door and she sighed. Going back to her bathroom prepped with a scarf over her nose and a pair of rubber gloves she used for washing her paint brushes with, she stared down at the clothes in contemplation. Did he really expect her to just throw them away? The guy always seemed to wear the same stuff that she would be surprised if he had a closet full of clothes, and a whole new outfit could be expensive. But she supposed a leader probably earned more points than the average Dauntless did.

Unable to waste perfectly good clothing, she gingerly picked up each article and threw them into her washing machine. She was rinsing her tub out of any remaining vomit when there was a knock at the door and she stood up, wondering who it was.

“Zayne.” She was surprised to see him when she opened the door, expecting that maybe Eric just forgot something.

“Hey... I heard you were sick.” He replied, giving her appearance a confused look.

Remembering what she was wearing, she pulled the scarf down and said, “I was last night; now I’m just cleaning up the puke. How did you hear I was sick so fast? My shift hasn’t even started yet.”

“I’m friends with Randy, your supervisor.” He reminded her. “He thinks you might be playing hooky with Eric since you’re dating him now and he’s the one who called in for you.” Zayne’s eyes darted behind her like he was trying to spot Eric in the background.

“Well, I’m not.” She replied, annoyed that everyone was poking their noses into her business and making assumptions. “Eric took me down the zip line last night and I got sick.”

“You went down the zip line?” His eyebrows shot up in genuine surprise. “I tried for years to get you on it.”

“Yeah, well, he won’t be doing it again any time soon because I ended up puking all over him. In fact, I was just washing his clothes.”

“So he spent the night?” His dark eyebrows creased in a frown.

“Possibly.” She vaguely replied.

“Geez,” He ran a hand through his black hair, “I heard he would sleep with anything but…”

“Excuse me?” She said, crossing her arms. “Why are you here, Zayne?”

“I wanted to make sure you were alright.”

“Why? You haven’t spoken to me in four years and now that I’m seeing Eric, you’ve popped up twice. You’re acting like you’re jealous.”

“Of course I am. You deserve better than him and I want you back, Olivia.”

“Are you out of your mind, Zayne?” She exclaimed. “I loved you and you left me heartbroken after I told you about…” She paused, unable to talk about it, “and now you think I’ll just take you back?”

“I loved you too, I just wasn’t ready for that but I am now. Please, Olivia, give me another chance.” Zayne pleaded.
“No.” She shook her head. “I deserve better than you, not him and it might be a good idea to leave before he finds out you’re here.”

Too late, as she heard Eric’s lock turn and he stepped out. He didn’t seem to be angry or surprised to see Zayne outside her door and she couldn’t help but wonder if he was listening the whole time.

“I see you didn’t take my warning to heart.” He said as he stood next to Zayne’s 5’10” frame and met his deep brown eyes with a cool stare.

Zayne always had a thing about challenging others when it came to who was in charge and Eric was the epitome of the Alpha male but he also knew when to stop, except this time it was over her.

Olivia hoped he was using the head between his shoulders and kept his mouth shut because Eric could seriously make his life hell if he really wanted to, but that was wishful thinking.

“You can’t stop me from talking to an ex-girlfriend.” Zayne retorted, seemingly unafraid that Eric would touch him.

She mentally smacked her head because Eric gave him one of his trademark smirks where he was pretending to find something funny.

“Oh, yeah?” He chuckled. “Well, it’s a good thing I only came for my boots, then.”

He leaned past Zayne and reached inside to grab the boots that sat by the door. When he straightened out, he kissed her quickly.

“Mmm, tastes like puke. Good thing I’ll fuck anything, right?” He said to Zayne before he left for work with boots in hand and his unspoken threat lingering in the air.

Zayne was in big trouble and the look on his face said he knew it too.

“You should probably go before you make it worse.” She suggested and closed her door in his face.

***

Having the day off and nothing better to do, Olivia decided to take her latest painting to the Distribution center so it could go to a loving home. She wrapped it up in a clean sheet and tucked it under her arm to make the long walk from Dauntless to the city center.

It was the perfect day for it. It was sunny but not hot as a cool breeze blew the scent of something sweet past her and she closed her eyes to relish it. Days like this one used to remind her of when she would work with her mother in the orchard on the weekends and the smell of apples and other fruit surrounded her all summer long, but this time she thought of apple pie and how Eric felt pressed up against her as his lips crushed hers in a heated kiss.

Heat crept up her cheeks at the memory and she had to mentally shake herself. It didn’t matter how good it was because it felt good to be with Zayne too and look how that turned out. Eric was dangerous, in more ways than one, and that worried her. The way he seemed to care about her was out of character for him and she wondered what it was that he really wanted all the way to the Hub.

“Olivia?” Someone called out. She looked around for the source and saw an older man in a red outfit waving at her.

“Dad?” She squinted at him and then grinned. “Dad!”
In a hurry to reach him, she dodged her way through the sea of grey, blue, black and white, and red and yellow, all making their way to work or school, and flung her free arm around him. His strong arms circled her in a bear hug and picked her up as he swung her around.

He then patted down the auburn strands of hair that escaped her braid when he let her go and peered down at her lovingly. “My dear Olivia. I haven’t seen your beautiful face in so long.”

She gazed up into the green eyes they shared and smiled. “I know. I’m sorry I’ve been too busy to visit.”

“Ah, your mother told me about the new boyfriend situation.” He said as he gently tugged her over to a nearby bench. He sat down and patted the seat next to him. “You know how your mother worries about you.”

She did.

“But I’m glad I ran into you. She never lets the phone go when you call, so I never got a chance to tell you that I understand what Dauntless is like and I approve of you using Eric as a bodyguard. He is a smart man and he’s right to believe this is the best solution to your problem.”

“Really?” She said as she joined him on the bench. She was not expecting him to say that.

“Yes, but that doesn’t mean you should let your guard down. Even he can’t be around all the time and men who hurt women find all sorts of ways to hurt their victims, even if it’s not physical.” Her father warned.

“How come you don’t seem concerned that Eric might hurt me? Mom got her panties in a knot when I told her about him.”

He smiled. “If he took it upon himself to offer you his protection then I believe he will do right by you, but sometimes matters of the heart can be difficult.”

“Matters of the heart? What are you talking about, Dad?”

“I did the same thing for your mother when we met a long time ago, you know.”

“You did?” She said, entirely intrigued by this new bit of information on her parents’ past.

“She was being bullied by a Dauntless girl at lunch and I stepped in to stop it. I sat with her for the rest of the year to make sure no one bothered her again. Do you want to know why I did that?” He asked and Olivia nodded. “Because I had the biggest crush on her and being from different Factions, it was my only opportunity to be with her until I transferred from Dauntless to Amity.”

“That’s so sweet, dad,” She cooed, “but I hope you’re not implying that Eric has feelings for me… are you?”

“I have no notion what his intentions are, but I did it for love and I would not be surprised if he did the same for you.” He replied.

Oh, you have no idea what he did for me, Dad. She thought dryly.

“Thanks, I’ll keep it in mind.” She smiled sweetly at him.

“Is that another painting you have there?” He asked, pointing to the wrapped parcel next to her.

“May I?”
“Sure.” She handed it to him and watched as he unwrapped the sheet.

His face lit up when he saw the view of Amity from the top of the fence at sunrise and said, “Is this what you see from the fence?”

“Every morning.” She replied with a nod.

“It’s beautiful.” He sighed. “Perhaps it will bring happiness to a former Amity or inspire a dependant to join us.”

“Or maybe it will make more Dauntless want to work the fence.” She joked, causing her father chuckle.

“I better get going, dear. Your mother has been badgering me to dig a new plot for more of her precious roses and I promised to do it when I got home.” He said as he got up and kissed the top of her head.

“Okay. Say hi to mom for me and I promise to come for a visit soon.”

He nodded his auburn head and they hugged one last time before she watched his broad back, slightly bent with age, walk away. With a grateful sigh, she rewrapped her painting, finished her errand and headed back home with a bounce in her step.

***

Work the next day was largely boring and she was on her way home when Lace came running up behind her.

“Did you hear what happened to Zayne?”

Olivia narrowed her eyes, suspicious that Eric had taken his anger out on him, and shook her head.

“A gun he was testing out blew up in his face. He’s in the infirmary.”

Olivia froze.

Well, she wasn’t expecting that. What the fuck was Eric trying to prove? She thought he’d throw him in the ring and fight it out or something, not try and have him killed. And for what? For her? They were only pretending to like each other for fuck sakes.

“Olivia? Are you okay?” Lace gently touched her arm.

“Uh, yeah.” She cleared her throat. “Is he okay?”

“Sounds like he’s alive but I’m not sure how bad he is.” She said. “You don’t think…”

“I don’t know.” Olivia numbly replied, knowing who she was talking about. “But I need to find him.”

“Last I heard all the leaders were investigating the security footage from the weaponry room.”

Without another word, Olivia spun on her heel and went to the security room in a daze. Behind her, she vaguely heard Lace say she would go with her, but she didn’t care. She just needed to know if it was her fault Zayne was hurt. Slowly her walking pace increased until she was running and Lace had to jog to keep up.
The hallway leading up to the room was buzzing with people. Max could be heard barking out orders inside the room but the crowd packed in front of the doorway made it hard to see anything inside and Olivia stood on tiptoes to see over their heads. When she spotted Eric’s gelled, blond one, she called out his name. He turned and saw her but when he made a move to go to her, there was no space.

“MOVE!” He shouted at the crowd and they quickly moved aside so he could exit. He took her elbow and escorted her around the corner so they could talk in private.

She didn’t even have to ask the question that was forth most on her mind because he immediately said, “I swear I had nothing to do with this.”

“Is that the truth? Because I could’ve sworn you planned to punish him for challenging you yesterday.” She said.

“Of course I planned to punish him, but I was thinking more of a suspension not blowing up a fucking gun in his fucking face! He’s a good weapons maker and we need more like him.” He hissed at her.

His reaction seemed sincere and she calmed a little. “Was it an accident, then?”

“No.” He sighed and rubbed a hand over his face. “There’s footage of someone sneaking in last night but we can’t see his or her face. They purposely tampered with his specific equipment so we know he was the targeted victim, we just don’t know why. Do you know if he had any enemies?”

“You.” She replied.

He glared at her. “Other than me.”

“The only other person who I can think of would be me, but I wouldn’t do that to him! And if I were inclined to, I would have done it years ago.” She said. “They’re not going to think it was me, are they?”

“No.” He was quick to reassure her. “I’ll tell them you were with me last night.”

“But that’s a lie!” She protested.

“Will you stop arguing with me when I’m trying to protect you? If you didn’t do it, then there’s no reason why you should care that it’s a lie.” He said, placing his hands on her shoulders.

“If I didn’t do it, which I didn’t, then I shouldn’t have to lie in the first place.” She glared back at him and brushed his hands off, but he caught her hand in his quickly.

“How long have you had paint stained on your hand for?”

“Since the morning of our date. You didn’t notice?” She was confused as to why he suddenly cared.

He smirked. “You might not have to lie after all. The person in the video wasn’t wearing gloves until they got to Zayne’s table and put them on. There’s no sign of paint on them. Your Amity hobby just saved me a lot of trouble trying to explain why my girlfriend wasn’t the one who screwed with her ex-boyfriend.”

She yanked her hand back. “I’m glad I could make your life easier. What about Zayne? Will he be okay?”
“You’re not worried about him because you might still have feelings for him, are you?”

“No, but just because he hurt me doesn’t mean I want to hurt him, Eric.” She snapped.

Eric’s face went grim. “He’ll live but he’ll have scarring on his face and his hands are in bad shape. The doctors are looking into some treatments to recover the use of his fingers.”

Olivia held back the surge of tears that wanted to spill. If the doctor’s couldn’t fix his hands then it would be expected of him to leave Dauntless by either joining the Factionless or death. No one stuck around when they were no longer physically able to protect and she felt terrible.

“Hey, this isn’t your fault.” He said, cupping her cheek so she’d look at him.

He was always touching her, she realized, and it got on her nerves. She stepped away from him and said, “Even if it wasn’t me who tampered with his weapon, there’s a good chance it happened because of me. What if Ralph did it to get revenge?”

“I thought of that but he and John were getting drunk at the bar at the time of the incident. I saw the footage myself; it had nothing to do with you, I promise.” He said.

Relief flooded her body and quickly replaced her guilt with curiosity. Who else would want to hurt Zayne? Maybe he broke another girl’s heart by trying to run back to her? If that was the case, then he deserved it.

“Go home, Olivia. There isn't anything more you can do for him.” He said and she nodded in agreement.

Lace was waiting for her by the security room and together they went back to her place.

Chapter End Notes

So, when I came to physically describe Olivia's dad I realized that I never mentioned what he or Linda looked like in TDNHAW, except for the fact that Linda is short. That's my bad and hopefully you can get to know them better in this story! Also, I am still writing my original story and I've decided to post it on fictionpress to help me keep at it and if you want to check it out, go to: https://www.fictionpress.com/s/3291812/1/The-Star-Sapphire, or look up monarose. Any feedback would be helpful! And a big thank you to everyone who has been reading and reviewing! Reviews really help me to keep going, which is why I posted the original online.
The sun was just beginning to rise above the buildings, casting long shadows that seemed to creep up behind her as she jogged down one of the many empty streets. Once in a while, Olivia had to squint to avoid the glare of light reflecting off the windows and turned down an alley to escape the bright light.

“You!”

She jumped at the sudden noise, her heart thumping rapidly against her ribcage until the man gradually crept out from the shadowy doorway and she recognized him.

“Zayne?” Her eyes widened at the sight of him. Long jagged scars ran across his face at an angle like an animal clawed it and the skin over his left eye was permanently shut.

A crippled and scarred hand swung up to cover his face. “Don’t look at me. This is all your fault, Olivia.” He hissed.

“My fault?” She asked, taking a step back.

Her heel caught the edge of the curb and she stumbled into the wall beside her; skinning the pads of her fingers against the rough bricks. The crunching of gravel behind her said he was approaching and, ignoring the stinging scrapes, she faced him again.

He sneered down at her. “You thought you needed to be saved but people really needed to be saved from you.” He banged on his chest with a closed fist. “You’re the reason why I was turned into this monster and forced to become Factionless.”

"No, it's not my fault. Eric said it wasn't them." She reached out; pleading for him to understand, but he took a step back and scoffed.

"You believe that piece of shit? Of course he would tell you that. He wants you for himself."

Olivia shook her head. He wouldn't lie to her about that.

"Don't believe me?" He stared at her, his fists clenching at his sides, but she stayed quiet. "Who else would do this to me then, Olivia? Who?!" He shouted.

His words echoed through the dark alley and each time they repeated, the volume grew until she had to cover her ears from the noise. It became so unbearable that Olivia thought her head might explode and she clenched her eyes shut. When she could no longer hear his voice above her own
humming, she opened them again.

She was still in her bed with the sheets tangled around her legs. Wrestling them off, Olivia swung her legs over the side and lifted the damp hair off the back of her neck. The cool air did little to quell the urge to hit something as this was the second night in a row she had the same dream and it was obvious the twisting in her gut wouldn't go away until she saw him. Digging her elbows into the flesh of her thighs, she rested her head in her palms and sighed.

Eric wasn't going to like it when he found out but her sanity was more important than their image as a couple. Besides, Eric had been so busy the last couple of days, trying to find Zayne's attacker that she hadn't seen much of him outside of the awkward dinner dates he managed to squeeze in. He'd sidle up next to her with barely a word, scarf down his food and be off again with a quick kiss. It was hardly relationship material.

Olivia fell back against the plush comforter and stared up at the ceiling until the morning light inched its way in through her window and chased away the shadows.

***

Zayne looked like shit when she found his bed. Gauze covered the majority of his face; the shrapnel from the exploded gun having cut it, and the damage to his hands were hidden by their wrappings. Thankfully both of his eyes appeared to be fine as his gaze saw her and lit up.

"I didn't think you'd come." He said.

"Neither did I." She admitted, rounding the corner she was hiding behind and came to stand beside his cot. "Are you in much pain?"

"Some." He shrugged. "The worst of it is knowing I will never be the same again." He said, giving her a weak smile but his gaze never wavered from her face.

She had to admire his courage and placed her hand on his knee. "I brought you a get well gift."

"You did?" His brows rose slightly, making his deep brown eyes seem bigger.

Olivia's shoulder twitched upward. "It's just some balm I made from one of my mom's old recipes. I thought maybe it will help with the pain." She handed him the small jar.

His hand lingered over hers when he took it. "Why are you being so nice to me, after everything I did to you?"

"It wasn't Eric, Zayne. He's not as bad as everyone thinks." She replied, not sure why she was defending Eric but realizing that it...
was true nonetheless.

Zayne flinched when he gripped the jar she gave him too tightly and angrily stared at the wall, his jaw clenching. “I never did deserve you, did I?” He whispered.

“A long time ago I thought you did, but you proved me wrong.” She replied, her throat tightening at the change of topic.

“I’m sorry. Running out on you when… you needed me the most was the worst thing I ever did…” His voice wavered. He still wouldn’t look at her, “and then staying away when you lost the baby was even worse. I couldn’t face you after that, especially when it seemed like you were still grieving years later.” A tear escaped from the corner of his eye and ran down the cheek that faced her.

Olivia turned away and swiped at her eyes. She really didn’t need this right now. When had her life become so complicated? After her miscarriage, she thought that would be the hardest her life would ever get but now, with two potential rapists at her door, a fake boyfriend who held her life in his hands and her ex trying to squeeze his way back into it, she felt overwhelmed as it was. Add on the renewed grief of losing her baby and the sob she tried to hold back broke through her clenched jaw.

The tears were hot and salty on her face, and Zayne reached over. She let him guide her onto the bed when he made room and rested her head on his chest. It was firm beneath her cheek and the sound of his quick heart beat thudded against her ear but she could only focus on her pain as she soaked his hospital gown.

***

“Hey, Olivia.” An arm wrapped itself around her shoulders and she smiled when her friend Jamie gave her a side hug.

“Hey, haven’t seen you in a while.”

“Yeah.” Jamie sighed. “We’ve been swamped in the kitchens ever since the milk shortage started. Had to re-plan meals and come up with suitable substitutions for the lack of calcium in everyone’s diets. A total nightmare.” She shoved a lock of blonde hair behind her ear. “So… Are we still a go for the annual scavenger hunt this weekend?”

“Of course.” Olivia smiled. “Lace and I are already making the list.” In fact, they had started it last night after her visit with Zayne. The emotions he had brought out were so strong that she needed something to distract herself with and it was the perfect solution.

“Are you going to bring Mr. Hot Stuff?” Jamie nudged her with a wink.

“Uh…”

Olivia hadn’t even thought of asking him and to be honest, she wasn’t sure she even wanted him there. Their annual scavenger hunt was a tradition she and her friends began after passing initiation to celebrate their newfound freedom. Taking Eric felt like a violation, because he wasn’t really one of them, even though including significant others was common practice. Initially Zayne went with her but after the break-up they narrowed the groups down to two and she just tagged alone with Lace and Maxi. Now that she had a ‘boyfriend’ it was only logical that she would bring him.

“He’s been pretty busy lately but I’ll see if he can make it.” She covered up the oversight.

“Great. Nate and I will see you Friday, then.” Jamie said good-bye and bounced down an adjacent hall on her way to meet up with her fiancé.
“Oh, that’s gotta sting.” Someone said behind her and Olivia jumped at the sound of John’s voice. “Not inviting your boyfriend to your scavenger hunt, tsk tsk, and here we thought you two were in love.” He batted his eyelashes in mockery.

A lump quickly formed in her throat at his tone. It had been less than two weeks and already they were suspicious? She really had to work on her acting.

She gave him her best condescending look and said, “If you’re going to eavesdrop, then you might as well pay attention. Zayne’s attack has taken up a lot of Eric’s time lately and I said I would ask if he wasn’t too busy.”

“Hmm, if we had known keeping Eric busy would have kept him away from you, then maybe we would have done something about your friends earlier. Shame we didn’t think of it first.” His eyes glinted maliciously as he looked her up and down.

“Threatening me or my friends won’t do you any good, John.” She growled, pissed that he would stoop so low.

One side of his mouth tilted upward. “Don’t worry Darlin’. We’d never hurt you or your friends while you two are together. That is, if you can make time for each other.” He said, looking satisfied. He gave her another once-over and left, leaving her there to curse.

Forgetting about where she was originally going, she turned and quickly made her way to the Leader’s offices to see Eric. Her footsteps echoed down the cold stone floor as she read each name on the doors until she found Eric’s and knocked hurriedly. From inside she could hear his muffled reply telling her to come in.

Turning the knob, she stepped into the cluttered office. The contrast between it and his apartment was vast and she looked around, wide eyed. Piles of papers littered the top of his desk and his shelves were so crammed with books that they spilled onto the floor as well. Eric was behind his desk, furiously writing something down.

“What do you want?” He asked without sparing her a glance.

“They’re already questioning our relationship.” She blurted, unable to contain the worry in the pit of her stomach but he remained impassive.

“You’ll need to be more specific.”

“Who the hell do you think, Eric?!” She hissed. “I just ran into John and he basically said he didn’t think we were that serious about each other.”

Eric’s hand stilled just before he dropped the pen. The little metal tube rolled until it wedged itself against a stack of paperwork and he finally looked up at her with a heated gaze. “Then maybe you shouldn’t be visiting your ex when I’m not around.”

Olivia paused. Word traveled fast in Dauntless but she was sure there was no one else in the infirmary when she went to see Zayne.

She scowled. “I only went because I feel guilty about what happened.”

“And I told you that image is everything.” He growled, pushing his chair back violently and stood. “Snuggling with Zayne only told people that you still have feelings for him.”

Was he spying on her?
“If you want the cripple’s help instead of mine, then by all means, take him back and see how he does against Ralph and John. But if you do, you might as well just join the Factionless. It’ll be safer.”

“Don’t act like this is all for my safety!” She finally lost it. “You’re jealous that I might want someone other than you and it makes you look bad. Everything is about your ego, isn’t it?” She seethed, slapping her palms against the cold steel of his desk.

Eric copied her movement, his face inches away from hers as he glared at her in silence. The air in the ventilation shaft that ran through the ceiling of his office rumbled past.

“You know nothing about me, my motivations included.” His voice was low and intimidating but she was too angry to care.

“I think I know enough to say you’re an egotistical prick.”

Eric’s lips curled into a sneer. “And you’re an ungrateful bitch.”

That was it! She didn’t need him and neither did her friends.

Olivia’s fingers curled into her palms. “We’re through.” She spat. “I’ll find a way to handle your friends on my own.”

She spun on her heel and stormed out of his office before he could say another word, the door slamming so hard behind her that the unnoticed painting beside it rattled.

***

Bappity, bappity, bappity…

The unrelenting noise was driving Olivia insane.

Shoving her pillow over her head, she once again tried to drown out the sound of Eric’s loud pastimes. By the sound of it, she swore he brought home a speed bag and set it up right against their sharing wall just to piss her off.

Refusing to acknowledge him or the annoying noise, she grabbed some of her stuff and headed to Lace’s place for the night. She really shouldn’t have been surprised that Maxi was there but the sight of her opening the door in a see through nightie sure was.

“Whoa.” Olivia covered her eyes. “Sorry, I didn’t think you’d be here.”

“It’s my night off.” The other woman replied. “Why are you here so late?”

“Max, who is it?” Lace’s sleepy voice carried through the apartment.

“It’s Olivia.” Maxi called back, giving Olivia a curious look.

There was a heavy thud as a body hit the hard floor and Lace limped to the door in the lingerie she’d bought.

“Are you okay?” Olivia asked.

“Yeah,” She replied unconcerned, “just got caught up in the blankets. So, what’s the matter?” She asked, clearly worried that her friend had shown up at her door in the middle of the night.

“Nothing really, I just need a place to sleep tonight.” She explained, feeling a bit stupid for bothering
them over something so trivial.

“Can’t you stay with your boyfriend?” Maxi’s eyebrow arched in question.

“Not when he’s the problem, no.” She blankly answered, leaving out the fact that their relationship was over.

Maxi’s brow arched even higher. “Trouble in paradise already?”

Olivia sighed. “Look, I didn't mean to interrupt…” She briefly eyed them up, “whatever it was you were doing but it’s been a long night and I can’t sleep at my place.”

Lace, sensing her unease with talking about Eric in front of Maxi said, “It’s not a problem, right Max?” Maxi glared back but kept her mouth shut. “Why don’t I meet up with you in the morning for breakfast?” She offered as an apology for kicking her out in order to accommodate her friend.

Maxi rolled her eyes and huffed. “Fine. I was planning on ravishing you all night but if you’d rather complain about men instead, I’ll take my leave. Night babe.”

Olivia stood there as Maxi leaned in and kissed her best friend goodbye. It wasn’t the chaste kind either; it was slow and sensual and Olivia grew uncomfortable when one of them moaned as the tips of their hardened nipples rub against each other’s.

“Ahem.” She coughed in hopes of breaking them up.

Lace reluctantly pulled away, a dreamy look on her face, and watched as her girlfriend confidently sashayed down the hall in only her nightie.

“I’m really sorry I ruined your night, Lace. I wouldn’t have come by if I knew she would be here tonight.” Olivia apologized.

“It’s alright. You wouldn’t have made the trip down here if it wasn’t important.” Lace replied, waving her inside. “So, what happened with Eric?”

“I called it off.” Olivia declared and flopped down on the couch while Lace pulled on a pair of sweatpants. “We got into a fight over Zayne and I just couldn’t take any more of his bullshit.”

Lace stopped tying them up midway and frowned at her. “Why were you fighting over Zayne?”

“I didn’t.” Olivia sighed and let her head fall back onto the cushions. “I seemed to think I was going to take Zayne back instead of using his guaranteed protection plan and I called him out on his ego.”

“His ego?”

“Yeah. He seemed to care a lot more about how bad he’d look if I were to choose a cripple – his words, not mine - over him instead of caring what would be best for me.” She grumbled, feeling extremely tired all of a sudden.

Lace’s forehead creased pensively. “Are you sure he wasn’t hurt because he might actually feel more for you than he’s letting on?”

“Are you on drugs or something? Of course he doesn’t.” She scowled up at the ceiling.

The day Eric had feelings was the day that pigs could fly, in her opinion.

“Alright then…” Lace sat down next to her. “So, why can’t you sleep at your place?”
Olivia’s eyelids felt so heavy now that it was quiet, she was having a hard time keeping them open at this point. In a sleepy haze she mumbled, “Zayne said Eric liked to get revenge and he’s doing it by keeping me awake. And now you’re in danger too.”

She dozed off but Lace poked her in the ribs. “What are you talking about?”

“They won’t stop… use you to get back at me… John told me so.” She rambled half-asleep.

Lace frowned and brushed a stray hair off of Olivia’s forehead. “What have you gotten yourself into?” She whispered to her sleeping friend.
Chapter 8

The air was windless and muggy; the skies, dark just like her mood as the rain pelted down on her hooded head. They said it would be like that all day and possibly the next, and it seemed fitting after what happened the day before.

Maybe turning Eric down was a mistake and, even though it was a quick decision made out of frustration and anger, she didn’t regret it. She’d had enough of his bullying and with Zayne already hurt and facing an unknown future, he wasn’t likely a target. Jamie and Nate had each other, so they were probably pretty safe, which meant Lace was all that was left. She was a tough girl and Olivia was sure if the two of them stuck together, they’d be okay.

As Olivia contemplated her next move without Eric, a low rumble grew louder as something in the distance grew closer behind her. Turning to see, she shielded her eyes from the water pelting her in the face and saw a Dauntless truck approaching. Only leaders took the truck to the fence and she squinted, trying to make out who it was.

It stopped below her station and Chuck approached the driver to receive instructions; on the passenger side, Eric stared up at her. She briefly returned the hard stare before turning back to look out over the fields.

The truck’s engine purred to life when the gate creaked open and it lurched forward through the puddles that dotted the dirt road as it made its way through Amity. Olivia assumed Eric had a meeting with Joanna or something but when the vehicle went straight instead of turning right toward the main building, she gripped her gun as she watched it drive to her parents’ house through the unrelenting rain.

Her sight being so impaired by the weather, she could only make out dark shapes as the vehicle stopped and someone got out and ran to the little cottage with the pink roses. She waited anxiously for them to come back, hoping they realized they made a wrong turn, but nothing else happened. Fifteen minutes passed before three forms finally came out.

What is he doing? He can’t be arresting them, can he? Fear gripped her throat at the thought. It wouldn’t surprise her at all if he was. After all, he did threaten to arrest her not that long ago.

The three figures boarded the truck and it turned back. In panic mode, Olivia spun on her heel, swinging her weapon over her shoulder and began climbing down the ladder in a hurry. She had to get back to dauntless before Eric had a chance to charge them with anything.

The rungs were wet under her bare hands but throwing caution to the wind in her haste, she scrambled down until her foot suddenly slipped off mid-climb and sent her flailing one handed. It happened so fast that she barely knew she was falling until she landed on top of someone and they dropped to the sodden ground together. Shaken, Olivia lay in his arms and stared up at the grey sky.

"Olivia!" Her mother shouted behind them. "Are you alright?"

She titled her head back to see her parents rushing over to them and frowned, confused. She swore they had driven off, so what were they doing there? She peered over at the person who caught her and found Eric, soaked to the bone and panting.
"Eric?"

His grip around her waist tightened and he said, "I told you you needed me."

Before she could utter a retort, her parents reached them and Olivia’s father hauled her off Eric and into his arms. "What were you thinking, rushing down like that?" He asked.

"I... Thought Eric was arresting you..." She stumbled in her reply, more confused than ever. They weren’t handcuffed nor was anyone trying to stop them from leaving the vehicle.

"Why would he do that, darling?" Linda inspected her for injuries. "He invited us to Dauntless to see you, and it’s a good thing he went to call you down when you fell otherwise you might have broken something."

"He asked you to come to Dauntless? Why?" Her forehead wrinkled.

Eric, who had picked himself up, said, “There’s something we need to discuss and I’d rather do it back at headquarters than standing out here in the rain. So, if you’d kindly…” He gestured toward the truck before marching over to it and getting in.

Her parents, not as reluctant as she was to get in the vehicle, gently dragged her along as they went. After being nudged to get into the backseat, her wet clothes squelched against the cracked leather as she scooted over to make room and found herself right behind Eric. His gaze was set firmly out the front window and she glared at the back of his wet head.

What did he have up his sleeve this time?

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Friendly as Amity were, the ride had been oddly quiet, probably because she had crossed her arms over chest and burned a hole into Eric’s cranium the entire time. Not even her parents could mistake the animosity there and now she led the way to her apartment so they could dry off with Eric bringing up the rear. She itched to call him out on whatever he was doing but the Dauntless hallways weren’t the best place to do it and neither was in front of her parents. She was glad to reach her door first and quickly unlocked it.

"Towels are in the bathroom on the left. I’ll just be a minute, okay?" She said ushering them in as Eric jiggled his keys in his lock.

Her parents frowned at her as they went in but she ignored it and ducked into Eric’s apartment before his door could close. He was already pulling his muddy shirt over his head.

"What the hell do you think you’re doing?" She growled at his back. “It’s one thing to blackmail me but to threaten my parents too?"

Eric’s broad shoulders rose and fell with a deep breath and he slowly turned. “No one’s being threatened. You can’t do this on your own and I simply need their help in convincing you of that.”

“Oh, so you think I can’t take care of myself, now?” She huffed and gripped her hips.

“It’s not just about you any more, is it?” He snapped; his knuckles turning white from clenching his black shirt. “When were you going to tell me they threatened your friends?”

Olivia’s body stilled and she closed her eyes momentarily. Lace.
"I was going to tell you yesterday but then you started dictating to me about Zayne. What right do you have to do that and how did you find out anyway?"

"First of all, I have every right because I am your leader." He angrily held up a finger. "And I found you two cuddling up when I went to ask him more questions. How do you expect me to react at seeing that when I… when I know I could have been anyone else walking in on you and jeopardizing what we were trying to do?"

"There was nothing to see!" Olivia cried, wildly gesturing.

"Well, it looked like something to me and if John or Ralph saw it they would have thought so too and you know it." He jabbed his finger in her direction.

She narrowed her eyes at him. "All I know, Eric, is that you’re a bully. You use people to get what you want and how they feel doesn’t matter."

Both his jaw and fist clenched. Olivia could tell he wanted to hit something and she was pretty sure it was her.

"Fine, hate me all you want but we’re doing this." He growled. "Your safety isn’t my only concern now and your friend asked me to see this through, so that’s what I’m going to do."

"No way. I’m not playing your whore…"

"Olivia, that’s enough!" Her father shouted behind them.

Taken by surprise, Olivia froze. Her father had never raised his voice before and it scared her to hear it now. Neither she nor Eric was facing the door, so she had no indication at how long they had been there or what they had heard. She cringed at the thought that they might have caught it all.

"Look at me, Olivia." He commanded in that same tone. She really didn’t want to look him in the eye when he sounded so angry but she slowly turned anyway. "What is this about blackmail and threats?"

Apparently they heard everything. Damn that wall! One day soon she was going to take a sledgehammer to it and have the maintenance crew rebuild it thicker.

"Sir…” Eric began but Grant held his hand up to stop him without taking his gaze off his daughter.

Olivia swallowed the lump in her throat as her mother stepped out from behind her father with tears in her eyes. Her anger quickly deflated at seeing the pain in them and she told them everything. From Brent to Ralph’s attempt, and then Eric blackmailing her into his plan, until finally Zayne’s accident and John’s recent threat.

"Why didn’t you tell us?" Linda asked; her dress bunched at the sides from her fingers twisting the fabric around them.

Her voice was quiet when she replied, "I didn’t want to worry you more than you already were and I thought I could handle it on my own."

"Is that why you ended your partnership with Eric?" Grant’s voice and posture was laced with fury and Olivia found it very unsettling to see her parents so upset.

"Yes and no.” She answered, looking down at her toes.
“Olivia.” Grant sighed. “There is no shame in receiving help when you need it.”

She chanced a brief glance at Eric, who was still standing beside her shirtless, and remembered why she wanted out in the first place.

“It’s not the receiving help part I have a problem with, dad. It’s who I’m receiving it from.”

Grant looked at Eric too and hummed. “While I don’t approve of his methods, he’s still right. You need him, specifically, especially now that your friends are involved, so stop being selfish and trust him.”

“But I don’t…” She wanted to argue.

“Then learn to.” Grant interrupted and gave her a stern look. “For our peace of mind you will follow through with this.”

“Dad…”

“No, Olivia.” He stopped her again. “The next time we see you we want to see him by your side and that’s final. Now, where would these boys be?”

She frowned, “You mean Ralph and John?”

When he nodded, Eric answered, “I believe they’ll be in the cafeteria for lunch.”

Grant looked at his wife. “I think we could do with some lunch before we leave after visiting with our daughter and her new boyfriend, don’t you Linda?” He said and turned back to Eric, “Perhaps it will help convince them of your relationship’s validity to see us.”

Olivia couldn’t believe her ears. Never in a million years did she think her parents would turn on her, but here they were, making plans with Eric to continue the ruse she didn’t want to keep up.

“Don’t you think that might be a bit much this early on? I mean, meeting the parents is a serious step.” She tried to gain control of the situation.

“Exactly. If they see Eric meeting us, the question of it being a lie is gone and they will have no reason to attack anyone.”

Seeing the logic of their plan, Olivia sighed heavily. The fact that everyone was against her grated on her nerves and she snapped at Eric, “Why haven’t you put your shirt back on?”

“Olivia.” Linda scolded her. “Don’t be rude.”

She growled under her breath at the reprimand and crossed her arms over her chest; Eric cleared his throat.

“Why don’t you take your parents to dry off while I get changed and then we can head down to lunch together?” He suggested.

“Fine.” She grumbled. “The sooner this is over with the better.”

The three of them made their way to his door but Eric caught her arm and held her back. “You can hit me later if it makes you feel better, but we need you to look happy out there.”

Olivia’s face lit up with a smile. “Of course baby, meeting my parents is such a big deal. Soon we’ll be getting married!”
Eric rolled his eyes at the sarcasm but dropped her arm and she turned to leave with her parents.

***

The cafeteria was loud as they approached but as soon as people caught sight of her parents in their Amity clothing and the fact that they were with Eric, the volume hushed to the rumble of low whispers. Eyes followed their path to a free table close enough that Ralph and John could see them and Olivia begrudged how they too watched them sit down.

“Chocolate cake.” Grant’s eyes lit up with delight. “I haven’t had this since I left Dauntless. Linda, you have to try some.” He handed her a slice and grabbed one for himself too.

“Dad, you haven’t had lunch yet.” Olivia leaned in to say.

He waved her off. “We can have sandwiches any old time back in Amity. Besides, we’re celebrating and that calls for cake.”

“Celebrating?” She frowned and Eric kicked her underneath the table. “Oh, right. My new boyfriend.” She giggled.

God, she sounded like an idiot.

Eric slid a plate of cake in front of her and wrapped his left arm around her shoulders as he dug into his own dessert. To others it was a casual gesture of affection but to Olivia it felt like a reminder that she was his now and the weight of his arm held her in place next to him. She put a smile on her face and took a bite too, the sweet chocolatey dessert forming a rock in the pit of her stomach.

“So, Eric, how is your investigation into Zayne’s attack going?” Grant asked conversationally.

“Unfortunately we don’t have any leads yet,” His tone was relaxed but the fact that his body stiffened a fraction told Olivia that he wasn’t, “but we have determined that his attacker was female.”

“Female?” She snapped her head around. “How do you know that?”

Eric’s blue steel eyes met her green ones. “The hands were too fine boned to be a man’s; that’s why I needed to ask him some more questions. Do you know if he was dating anyone?”

“No.” She glanced at her parents and then down at her plate. “I haven’t kept up to date on him since we broke up. He could be screwing my best friend if she didn’t tell me, for all I know.”

The table fell into an uncomfortable silence but it only lasted a second before her mother bravely asked Eric what his hobbies were. Olivia had already told her about his ‘hobbies’ but she supposed she must have meant something else because his reply surprised her.

“I like to read.” He said noncommittal.

“What sort of books?” She asked again.

Eric shrugged lightly. “Mostly manuals on battle techniques and weaponry.”

Linda playfully tsk-ed. “That sounds more like work than a hobby. You don’t read anything else?”

Everyone watched as he appeared to contemplate something and then reluctantly said, “I also enjoy old spy novels from before the war.”

A snort escaped from Olivia and the grin she hid behind her fork didn't need to be faked.
"Oh, how nice." Her mother said, giving her daughter a reproving look as she snickered away.

Eric gave Linda a smile and leaned in close to say low in Olivia’s ear, "Don't you dare tell anyone."

"Is the big bad leader afraid of what other people might think?" She whispered back. She had no intention of telling anyone, she only wanted to taunt him and it worked because the tips of his ears turned red.

Instead of telling her off like she thought he would, he caught her lips with his and kissed her. She wasn’t expecting it and only remembered that it was for show a second before she shoved him away. Instead, she nervously chuckled against his lips and placed her hands against his chest. Gently pushing him off just enough that he was no longer kissing her, she forced another smile on her face.

"Maybe we shouldn’t do that in front of my parents." She said sweetly to cover up the fact that she didn’t want to kiss him at all.

"They don't mind; do you Mr. and Mrs. Spence?" Eric grinned mischievously and glanced at her parents.

Olivia swore her mother was picturing wedding bells when she smiled at them but her dad looked rueful as he said, "of course not," and Olivia was thankful when he changed the subject. “How is work on the fence?”

“Same as usual, except days like today make it pretty miserable to be out there.” She replied.

Grant nodded in agreement. “Yes, the rain can make it difficult. It’s important to remember to take more care up there when it gets slippery; your fall could have been serious.”

“I know dad…” She mumbled feeling increasingly more annoyed each time they acted like she didn’t know how to take care of herself.

“Why do you work on the fence when you’re scared of heights?” Eric butted in, his brows furrowed in genuine curiosity.

Olivia sighed. Why did everyone have to ask that every time they found out about her fear?

“It’s not the height I’m afraid of, necessarily. Tall structures are fine; I just don’t like being airborne, like on the zip line. Besides, it’s a fair price to be able to see Amity every day.”

Eric’s eyes roamed over her face intently. “You obviously have a strong relationship with your family, so I can see why you miss Amity so much. You’re very lucky.”

Olivia didn’t know what to say to that. She was grateful he understood but he was also using it against her and so she avoided the topic by asking her parents how long they were going to stay.

“I’d love to stick around for a while but we should be getting back. There are plenty of chores left to do around the house before the rains let up and its back to plowing the fields.” Grant said, wiping his mouth with a napkin.

Eric and Olivia agreed to walk with them to the entrance where the truck would give them a ride back to Amity and the girls were well down the hall by the time they realized that the men weren’t with them. They both looked back to find them talking just outside the cafeteria and stopped to wait.

“What do you think he’s saying?” Olivia asked her mother as they watched Eric attentively listen to whatever her father was saying.
“Probably giving him the speech all father’s do to their daughter’s boyfriends.” Linda smiled. Olivia quirked a brow at her mother’s answer but her gaze never left the men.

Eric briefly glanced at her and nodded.

“I must say that Eric is quite handsome and I think he really likes you.” Linda commented.

“Mom, please.” Olivia begged, rubbing her forehead, but her mother ignored her.

“Maybe you ought to give him a chance.”

Olivia nostrils flared as she took in a deep breath. “Just stop it. I’m already playing along.”

“But you need to forgive him, Olivia.”

“No, I don’t.” She snarled and faced her mother. “I'm not bound by those rules any more, mom. I don't have to lie to make someone happy or forgive anyone. In fact, I can tell the truth or lie, just to piss him off if I want to.”

Her mother huffed. “If that’s how you want to live your life Olivia, then fine.”

She ignored her mother and looked back to see what else the men were saying but they were already meeting up with them. She let her father go ahead with her mother and fell back to walk beside Eric.

“What was that about?” She asked quietly so that her parents didn’t overhear.

“Nothing.” He replied.

“What do you mean nothing? What did he say to you?” She stared at his profile, willing him to answer.

“He gave me advice.” He shrugged.

“Advice?” She repeated, her forehead creasing. “What sort of advice?”

“I’m not at liberty to say.” He replied, a slow smile tugging at the corner of his mouth.

Olivia harrumphed. Fine, if he wasn’t going to tell her then she’ll just have to ask her father. She went to do so but Eric caught her arm.

“Don’t.” He shook his head. “Just leave it be, Olivia. They’re already burdened with worry over you; they don’t need you badgering them about something like advice.”

Her eyes narrowed. “Why do you care about how they feel?”

“I have parents too.”

“Yeah? And when’s the last time you talked to them?” She snapped at him.

Eric stared back but answered, “A long time... Too long.”

“Too bad.” She glowered. “Maybe it would have made you think about how they’d feel before you used mine against me just to get what you want. I hope you’re happy.”

“I’m not happy about it and I’m sorry, but you didn’t give me another choice.” Eric argued.

“There’s always another choice.” She hissed and stormed away to join her parents.
They reached the doors quickly after that and Olivia hugged her parents goodbye as Eric stood back and watched.

“Make sure you come to Amity for the Apple festival coming up and don’t forget to bring Eric, honey.” Linda told her as they parted.

“Of course.” She forced through the plastered smile and then hugged her dad.

He gave her a squeeze just before letting go and sticking his hand out to Eric. “It’s too bad we didn’t meet on better circumstances, Eric, but I wish you luck.”

“Thank you, Sir.” Eric shook his hand and slid his other into Olivia’s; his grip was tight enough that she couldn’t easily pull away. “I promise to take care of her.”

With a final nod of farewell, they hopped into the waiting vehicle and Olivia watched with a heavy heart as her parents drove away. Eric’s hand squeezed hers but she felt numb and let it fall limp at her side when he let go.

Chapter End Notes

I just want to thank murmelnichen so much for helping me out the last couple of chapters, you've been a great inspiration! She writes Eris stuff, but go check out them out anyway if you're on fanfiction.net! She just started a new story called One Year of Significance.

And thanks so much to everyone who sends in reviews, they give me motivation to write faster!

I hope this chapter was up to snuff.
Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

I can't believe how long this took and how long it actually is. Over 7000 words is a very long chapter for me, so please be kind if I rushed it or anything. I'm sorry if I did though, I tried not to.
Anyway, I think I'm going to be putting this story on hiatus for a bit. I really have to start focusing on my original that I've been ignoring for the longest time but I hope to get back at this one soon.
Thank you again to everyone who reviews my stories and for all of those who read it. It means a lot to me.

The rain continued the following day even though the downpour had slowed to a constant drizzle. Still covered with clouds, the night sky was blank as Olivia and Eric jumped off the moving train and made their way to the city centre. Jamie and Nate were already there, cuddling beneath the branches of a large tree as they waited. They waved them over when they spotted their flashlights and introduced themselves to Eric.

"Hey man, name’s Nate,” he said and nudged his fiancé, “and this is Jamie.”

“Hi,” she grinned at Eric and appraised him from head to toe before winking at Olivia.

Eric only nodded in greeting, assuming they already knew who he was and of course they did, there wasn’t a soul in Dauntless who didn’t.

“I’m glad you could make it. Olivia said you were pretty busy,” Jamie said, making conversation.

“I am, but I’m learning that I need to make time for my girlfriend so she doesn’t get pissed off at me,” he half-joked, knowing that word already got out that they had a spat.

"Yeah, it's important to remember to give our ladies the attention they deserve." Nate squeezed Jamie around the shoulders and kissed her temple.

Olivia watched Eric eye them. She wondered if he thought they were completely cheesy but his expression was neutral. Even his tone was expressionless when he said, "Olivia mentioned you two were engaged. How long have you been together?"

"Going on seven years this May," Jamie grinned.

Olivia smiled to herself, happy that her friend was in a good relationship and glanced at Eric. Now that she was forced to be committed to this ridiculous scheme, she was obligated to bring Eric to their scavenger hunt otherwise it would have looked suspicious. Not that he'd have let her leave him behind anyway.

Maxi and Lace finally arrived a few minutes later, arguing like always. In the eight years they played this game, they'd only won once a few years ago when Olivia first joined their team. Most of the time they wasted so much of their time quarrelling over the best places to find the things on their list that Olivia eventually gave up trying to play the mediator and just let them go at it. They never won
again.

She didn't think she and Eric would be much better off and wondered if she should just declare Jamie and Nate the winners and go home. But not wanting to spoil everyone's fun with her sullen attitude she whipped out the lists of items and handed them out.

"Okay, you guys know the drill. Get as many things on the list as you can before time runs out and meet back here in 2 hours. Rules: No stealing but you can take unwanted stuff lying around. Some items require someone to give it to you and that can be done however you can; trading, begging, even seduction," Olivia explained, ignoring Maxi’s wink at Lace when she mentioned the less savoury way of requiring items. “Time starts now."

The others took little time before running for the train but Eric calmly stood beside her and shook his head after them.

"You don’t want to go after them?" she asked.

"No. If you want to win then the first thing you do is get a plan."

"I agree," she said, expecting him to take over and tell her what to do but he just looked at her. One of his blond eyebrows rose when she just stared at him.

"This is your game, so what do you want to do?"

"Oh, uh... Okay," she mumbled, caught off guard. “Why don’t we group items together by the faction where they can be found in first?"

Eric nodded, his gaze looking down at the list in her hands. "Then we can map out the quickest route and save time."

"Yeah..." she trailed off, unsure why he was being so agreeable.

He noticed and smirked. "Were you expecting me to take over?"

"I was, actually."

His smirk waned. "Normally I would, but I'm trying not to ruin your night by taking over your tradition. I know you're pissed at me but how about we call a truce for tonight? I could use some fun and arguing will only make it harder."

Olivia bit her lip in thought and then stuck her hand out. "Okay, truce."

His hand practically engulfed hers when he shook it and then they huddled under the tree to protect their paper from the rain and separated the items by faction. A blue shoe and pair of glasses were obviously Erudite items, a sheet of music and a feather in Amity, a picture of someone jumping into the net was obviously Dauntless, and a white headband in Candor. A picture of both team members with the fence could be done from any distance just like the rest of the items could be found anywhere along the way.

It was decided that they would head to Erudite and Candor first because they were the closest and they would keep an eye out for any of the random items on the way to Amity. Dauntless would be last because it only had one item and could be skipped if time ran out. They didn't bother with Abnegation because there was no fun in trying to convince someone to give you anything when it took no effort.
They approached the tall, brightly lit Erudite building and Olivia stopped Eric a few feet away from the doors. "You know this place well, right?"

Eric nodded. "There’s a lost and found room in the lobby. We can dig around in there."

Olivia frowned. "Where’s the fun in that? We should barter for the items," she urged.

He raised an eyebrow. "You want us to go in there and ask an Erudite to give Dauntless their shoe and glasses?"

"Yeah," she grinned.

Eric shook his head, probably thinking she was crazy, but a smirk appeared on his face as he looked back at the building. "Alright, challenge accepted."

It was so bright inside that Olivia felt like it was the middle of the day when they waltzed in. It was well past dinner time and most kids’ bed times but not for Erudite children who were still awake. Some were studying while others played educational games in the common area off the lobby. Eric went up to one of the little girls with glasses who was reading quietly by herself and crouched down in front of her.

"Hey there, do you need those glasses or are they for show?" he asked, dispensing with preliminaries.

Her big grey eyes looked at him over her book and she replied, "Why do you want to know?"

"Well, my friend and I need a pair of glasses that no one needs..." he tried to explain but the girl interrupted him with a snooty voice.

"They’re child size, so they won’t fit either of you."

"I know. We don't need to wear them..."

"Then why do you need them?" she did it again.

"If you’d let me finish, I would tell you," he said through clenched teeth and the girl closed her mouth. “We’re playing a game to collect items and one of them is glasses but the challenge is to make a trade."

"A trade?" The girl looked at him in speculation and then mischief appeared behind the intelligence of her eyes. "Okay, I'll trade my glasses for the correct answer to a riddle."

"Sure," Eric agreed with a light shrug and Olivia got the feeling he thought this would be easy.

“First think of a person who lives in disguise, who deals in secrets and tells naught but lies. Next, tell me what is always the last thing to mend, the middle of middle and the end of end? And finally give me a sound often heard during the search of a hard-to-find word. Now string them together and answer me this, which creature would you be unwilling to kiss?" The girl smiled smugly. “You’ve got two minutes.”

“Two minutes…” Eric began to argue but the girl tapped the top of her wrist and he shut his mouth; his brows creased in thought. “The first part is easy; it’s a spy. The second…” he looked over at Olivia for help but she had no idea and shrugged. “A sound made when thinking of a hard-to-find word? Uh…? Spy-Uh? That doesn’t make sense,” he shook his head. “Fuck, I need the middle part.”
He muttered under his breath for a while, trying to figure out the middle section of the riddle until the girl chirped, "time's up."

Eric growled low. "Look, kid. I'm a Dauntless leader so you better hand them over, and give me your shoe too for wasting our time."

"No way, I do need my shoes and you're not my leader, Eric," she said his name with emphasis. Olivia was surprised to see that she knew who he was and wasn't afraid of him.

"Alright, I can see there's some tension brewing here," Olivia interjected, pushing Eric out of the way. "My name's Olivia, what's yours?" she introduced herself to the girl.

"Camilla."

"Nice to meet you Camilla, I can see you have some potential for Dauntless. You know, having a Dauntless leader owe you a favor can come in handy if you ever join us. So, how about this for a trade?" she glanced at Eric and noticed the knowing scowl on his face. "You let us borrow your glasses and Eric will owe you a favor."

"Were you Erudite too?" The girl asked, her curiosity getting the better of her.

"Amity, actually." Olivia replied.

"Huh..." Camilla stared at her in thought before finally slipping the glasses off her nose. "Okay, I agree to your trade," She said, handing them over.

Olivia graciously took them from her and stood up. "Thanks. I promise to bring them back tomorrow," she said over her shoulder as she took Eric’s arm and steered him back to the lobby. Quirking a brow at him, Olivia asked, "how come you didn't get the riddle? I thought you were supposed to be as cunning as you are ruthless."

Eric’s lip curled into a half-smile. "I knew the answer; I just chose to play dumb."

Olivia looked at him opened mouth. "Why?"

"I know how Noses work. They want to feel like they've outsmarted you before they're willing to give anything up. Offering her a favor from a leader was a good idea. I just wish it wasn't from me."

Olivia rolled her eyes. "You'll be fine. She might not even remember in six years."

"You don't know Erudite very well, do you?" he shook his head. "They never forget because knowledge is power," he tapped his temple.

"Whatever," she smiled. "So, what was the answer?" she inquired a few seconds later.

"Spider."

"Ah..." A thought occurred to her and she said, "You played dumb to get her shoe thrown into the bargain too, didn't you?"

"Yes, not that it worked."

Olivia smiled at how disappointed he sounded. "Guess we're going to have to look for that shoe in the lost and found after all."

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While they had been digging around for a shoe in the lost and found, outside the rain had finally stopped and now their muddy feet left prints on the cement as they made their way over to Candor.

“Can I ask you something personal?” Olivia asked after the first initial moments of silence.

Eric’s brow went up as he glanced down at her. “Sure.”

"Why haven't you settled down by now? Are you that much of a tool that no one's wants to be with you long term or are you just not interested?"

"Neither,” he paused. “I just don't have the time and it wouldn't have been fair to my girlfriend if I let her sit at home waiting for me.”

"I don’t see how hard it would have been if you're making time for me." Eric was silent for a time. "You're part of my job so I have to make the time,” he finally answered.

"Okay… So, you settled with getting laid a lot?"

"Something like that,” he mumbled.

"But,” Olivia said, puzzled at his answer, “don't you wish you had someone who knew you better than anyone else and loved you anyway? Someone you could talk to about anything?"

Eric stopped mid-step and glared at her. "Why do you suddenly care whether or not I'm emotionally complete?"

"I don't know,” she shrugged. “I guess I'm just curious and if we're going to be stuck together then we might as well get to know each other."

The steel in his eyes softened and he began walking again. "Alright, ask another then."

"Don’t you want to ask me something?" she frowned at his back and jogged to catch up.

"I already know what there is to know about you," he shrugged.

Olivia narrowed her eyes. "Are you implying I'm boring and predictable?" she said and pursed her lips in wait for his reply.

"You're not boring and definitely not a predictable Dauntless. Like I told you before, I pay more attention than you think." He shook his head.

"Prove it then," She demanded.

Eric sighed. "Besides the obvious painting and calls home? You like to run more than doing strength training, and even though you're an artist you don't seem interested in tattoos, unless you've been hiding them in secretive places," his eyes roved over her body. "You're loyal to your group of friends, you’re stubborn as a tree stump and you're afraid…"

"Afraid of what?" she inquired, completely lost to what he was talking about.

"Love,” he replied, watching for her reaction as they slowed to a stop again.

“I am not afraid of love.” She denied with a scoff.
“Then why have you avoided men for so long?” he pressed. “You hadn’t been on a single date until this fucking mess; you never even brought anyone home for a romp in the sac.”

Olivia glanced around. The street was empty and dark, and she crossed her arms over her chest protectively. “You pay way more attention than is necessary, Eric; its borderline creepy.”

“Add it to the list of things everyone thinks about me. Ruthless, cold, calculating, and creepy,” his full lips puckered before he turned and strode away.

“I…” she paused, unable to find the words. It was a surprise to see that he obviously cared about what people said about him and she called after him, “I’m sorry if I hurt your feelings, I didn’t mean…”

“Why would anything you say to me hurt my feelings? I don’t have any, remember?” he snapped without looking back. She caught up to him and yanked on his forearm. He growled at her insistence to stop but he did and glowered at her. “What?”

“Clearly you do otherwise what people say wouldn’t bother you, but you can hardly blame them when you never let anyone in,” she said.

“I have let someone in, you, and you haven’t noticed a damn thing because you’ve pre-judged me and that’s all you see.” His gaze was pained and yet hard as she stilled.

“What do you mean?”

“Never mind,” Eric shook his head slowly. “I thought we agreed to not argue?”

“We did, I’m sorry,” she apologized, realizing she had started the fight.

“It’s alright. Let’s just get to Candor and find that headband,” he said, turning back to the building down the block.

The rest of the walk to Candor was quiet like the streets. Here it was obvious people were winding down for the night as most of the building was dark and Olivia wondered if Lace’s family would still be awake. Her little sister would definitely have a headband they could use, but who knew what the kid would ask in return. Hopefully it wouldn’t be as difficult as anything she wanted from her sister.

Eric reached out and pulled on the door but it rattled against its lock and she remembered that Lace always took them to another entrance around the back.

“Wait,” she lightly touched his bicep to stop him from knocking on it to get the guard’s attention, “they always close the main entrance after business hours but there’s another that the residents use.”

He only had to nod to let her know she had the lead and she jogged along the building’s outer wall until she found the set of doors with Eric at her back. Beside them were a punch code panel, and a list of names and numbers. Olivia couldn’t remember which apartment Lace’s family was in but her finger trailed over the names until she found Abella and she quickly punched in the apartment’s number.

Being at Candor always felt odd to Olivia because Amity rarely got along with the truthful Faction but being Dauntless now, they didn’t give her the stink eye like they did when she was a kid. As it rang, Olivia's foot tapped.

"Hello?" the speaker crackled to life.
She snapped to attention at the voice. "Mr. Abella?"

"Yes?"

"Hi. It's Lace's friend Olivia," she said, wondering if he would remember her.

"Olivia, of course! Please, come on up," he said and she smiled to herself.

The speaker buzzed and the lock clicked. Eric yanked the door open before it could automatically relock and he gently ushered her in first with a hand on her lower back. The touch sent a shiver up her spine but she quickly brushed it off and focused on the Abella's number.

They lived on the 10th floor and the elevator dinged when they reached the correct level. The hallway was so sterile that Olivia felt bad for scuffing up the highly polished white and black checkered tiles with her dirty boots but Lace's dad was already waiting to greet them with a smile.

"Lace notified us of the game tonight but you're the first to arrive," he said.

"The others went to Dauntless first but you should see them soon though. We just need a white headband and we'll be out of your hair," she explained.

"Cindi should have plenty to go around. Why don't you come in and ask her?" He gestured for them to enter with a sweep of his arm.

She stepped into the sleek apartment and said hello to Lace’s mom and sister who sat at the kitchen table, looking over some papers. They glanced up at her voice and said hello but Mrs. Abella frowned at Eric.

"I'm surprised a leader has time to play games, even a dauntless one," she said upon recognizing him.

Eric smirked. "Dauntless always have time for games. We understand the value of blowing off steam instead of shoving it back up our ass. Ow."

Olivia quickly elbowed him in the side to shut him up. She didn’t want Lace’s parents mad at her.

"What is he doing here?" Cindi asked Olivia with open curiosity. It was the first time she brought anyone new in a long time.

"He's my date," she replied, trying to sound chipper.

"Well, at least he's way hotter than your last boyfriend." Cindi said, giving Eric a smile.

Eric grinned back and whispered to Olivia, “See, at least she appreciates what you have.”

Olivia nudged him again and cleared her throat. “We just need to borrow a white headband from Cindi if she has one.”

"Sure. Come to my room."

They followed the 15 year old to the room she once shared with Lace even though there was a 10 year difference between them and Cindi closed the door behind them.

"There's something I need to ask in exchange for it." She said, biting her lip.

"Sure." Olivia said, curious what had the girl so nervous.
“There's this dance at school coming up and I've got a date but I don't know how to dance. Can you show me?”

“No problem,” Olivia assured her, "dancing is easy. Which Faction is he from?"

"Dauntless," she blushed.

"Okay,” Olivia said, jumping into the lesson. “We don’t have much time so we’ll keep it simple and do something that will loosen you up. First you’ll want to bend your knees and bounce up and down, like this,” Olivia said as she moved and smiled when Cindi followed her lead.

“Good, now keep the bounce and step to the side, bringing your feet together, and again to the other side. When you get a bit more comfortable you can add some arm moves in there to make it look more relaxed and just follow the beat of the music, like this, 1 – 2 – 3 - 4 - 5 – 6 – 7 – 8,” Olivia counted as they stepped side to side.

Cindi’s moves were slightly jerky but she understood the concept and with a little practice, Olivia was sure she’d be fine. With luck, her date wouldn’t be a jerk and help her out by staying away from anything complicated too.

“What about slow dances?” Cindi asked once they were done.

Most kids did the old ‘arms around the neck and shuffle in a circle’ thing, but Dauntless kids… They were obviously braver than most and their tastes ran a bit more risqué. Olivia cast Eric a glance to see what he thought and he shrugged.

“I don’t know Cindi. It might not be something you would be comfortable with.”

“Please! I don’t want to make him hold back because of a silly dance.” Cindi pleaded.

Olivia sighed, giving in. “Alright, Eric and I will show you one, but that’s it.” Cindi grinned and nodded enthusiastically.

Unsure she should be doing this she bent her knees, with her legs spread apart and began to rock her hips from side to side. Eric came up behind her and placed his hand on her hip as he matched her movements. Together they rocked with only an inch of space between them and Olivia pretended that they were at the club with the music pulsing around them instead of awkwardly grinding up against each other in a teenaged girl’s room.

Feeling the beat in her head, she rolled her hips in a circle and her partner naturally copied, his crotch gently brushing against her bottom and out of habit, she bent lower so they were pressed closer for a time. Then, she slowly straightened back up and they slowed. Eric trailed his other hand along the length of her arm, sending shivers down it, and gripped both her hips to stop her from stepping away.

“Don’t move.” He whispered in her ear, his warm breath brushing her neck.

Olivia didn’t have to guess what it was and stiffened like a statue. Again? Did getting none really make it that sensitive for men? She smiled weakly at Cindi.

“That was hot,” Cindi said, her eyes round as she took in the way they stood. “Is Paul going to get a hard on too?”

“Uh…” Olivia hesitated.

“Yeah, probably,” Eric said behind her. “Just try and not be Candor about it and embarrass the kid.”
“Okay,” Cindi agreed and stared as Eric adjusted his growing junk behind Olivia’s back.

“Mind if we get that headband now?” Olivia reminded her and the girl blinked. She quickly turned around and rummaged through a drawer in her desk and pulled out a plush headband covered in a white fabric. Olivia stuffed one end into her back pocket and let the rest hang out. “Thanks,” she said as she pushed Eric out of the bedroom and through the apartment with quick farewells. She felt bad for rushing out of there so rudely but she really didn’t want to explain to Cindi’s parents what happened if they noticed.

“You need to control that,” she said firmly as they walked to the elevators. “We still need to get to Amity, Dauntless and back within an hour and 15 mins.” Olivia punched the down button.

When Eric didn’t give her a snarky reply, she looked at him out of the corner of her eye. His face was unreadable as he watched the elevator numbers go up but his left fingers tapped against his leg beside her.

Was he trying to distract himself from his arousal or was he holding back from starting a new fight? She couldn’t tell as she continued to watch him until the elevator dinged and the sounds of squabbling grew louder as the doors opened to reveal Lace and Maxi inside.

“We’re not taking all of my sister’s headbands just so no one else can get one, because that would be cheating.” The look Lace gave her lover was heated. When she turned to exit the elevator and saw them, Lace gave Maxi a haughty smile. “See, we’re too late anyway. Hey guys, what did my sister make you do?”

“She wanted us to show her some Dauntless moves for an upcoming dance,” Olivia replied as they exchanged places. “Apparently she’s got a hot Dauntless date.”

“My little sister with a Dauntless? Ha, I knew it!” she grinned. “Self-righteous brat is never gonna live this down,” Lace said as the doors closed and Olivia smirked.

Growing up, Olivia would have given anything for a brother or sister but it never happened and now she found it amusing to watch Lace and Cindi’s dramatic love/hate relationship.

“Those two are always fighting. Sometimes I can’t tell if they love each other or not,” she smirked, pushing the main level button.

“That’s generally how siblings work. My brothers loved to hate on me,” Eric said as the elevator slowly began its descent.

Olivia glanced at him, eyebrows raised. The thought that he had grown up playing with other kids seemed odd and she realised that she always assumed he was an only child like her. “Oh? How many did you have?”

“Two, both older,” he replied.

“How come I’ve never heard you mention them before?”

Olivia saw the muscle in his jaw jump. “I don’t like to talk about my family.”

Frowning, she had to ask, “Why?”

“Because they prefer it that way; they don’t like people to know that they have a black sheep in the family.” He clapped both of his hands in front of him and stared at the door.
“What?” her brows creased. “How could any Erudite not be proud that they have a leader for a son?”

Eric closed his eyes briefly and released a breath, like he came to a decision and looked back at her. “Look, I’m the first to defect in my family out of generations of Erudites and they didn’t like that. From the beginning they knew I didn’t belong but they pushed books and lessons on me anyway, like they hoped I would change.” He shook his head. “When I didn’t and told them I was going to Dauntless they told me to never contact them again.”

“Not even when you made leader?” she gaped at him.

“You would think that would make them happy but I ran into them on my first official trip to Erudite and they said a Dauntless leader was just a glorified babysitter appointed to watch over dumb Neanderthals and I haven’t spoken to them since.”

“That’s terrible,” Olivia frowned.

No wonder he pushed everyone away with his contempt… The people who were supposed to love him no matter what didn’t and left him with no one to confide in… except he was telling her, she realized. He really was treating her like a real girlfriend and it dawned on her that this was what he wanted out of their bargain; a real connection, even if it was forced. Not having the heart to deny him it, she decided to try and be his friend.

She took his hand and said, “If you ever need to talk, I’m here, even when our act is over.”

Tightening his hold on her hand was the only acknowledgement he heard her and without letting go, they exited the elevator and made their way to the train to Amity.

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The little cottage still had a light on and the sound of guitar music drifted out of the open window as they drew closer. David must have been working on a new piece to still be playing this late and Olivia knew that meant he had tons of unwanted music sheets lying around.

When Eric firmly rapped on the door the music stopped and a head of curly blond hair and a pair of big brown eyes peeked at them through the window, followed by the flash of a grin before he disappeared again.

“Olivia! Long-time no see!” David said when the door swung open and he threw his arms around her in a big hug.

“Yeah, it has,” she said hugging him back.

When he let go, he held her at arm’s length. “Have you seen your parents yet?”

“No,” she shook her head. “We’re doing our scavenger hunt tonight, so there’s not a lot of time to visit them. But they did come to Dauntless a few days ago.”

“Oh, right, the scavenger hunt. How’s it going so far?”

“Good,” she smiled, remembering how chatty he always was. “We’ve got a couple of things left to get and that’s why we’re here. Do you by chance have any sheet music lying around that we could have?”

“Of course, but I will require a trade for it,” He feigned seriousness.
David often helped them acquire items for the game and knowing he enjoyed playing along, she nodded and asked what he wanted in exchange. David contemplated it for a second and then grinned.

“I would like a song that is sung.”

“Sure…” Olivia hesitated, wishing he had picked anything else.

“Not by you, dear, him,” he gestured to Eric. “We both know you couldn’t hold a note to save your live, but maybe he can,” he said, peering at Eric with interest.

She glanced at Eric to see how he felt about doing it and found his brow puckered in thought. She expected him to say no but was surprised when he started to sing in a low and raspy voice. She could tell he didn’t use it much but it was still pleasant to listen to and Olivia recognized the song.

“An unforgivable tragedy
The answer isn't' where you think you'd find it
Prepare yourself for the reckoning
For when your world seems to crumble again
Don't be afraid, don't turn away
You’re the one who can redefine it
Don't let hope become a memory
Let the shadow permeate your mind and
Reveal the thoughts that were tucked away
So that the door can be opened again
Within your darkest memories
Lies the answer if you dare to find it
Don't let hope become a memory
When you think all is forsaken
Listen to me now
You need never feel broken again
Sometimes darkness can show you the light.”

Eric was surprising her left and right that night and she gaped at him as he trailed off. The song he picked was dark with emotion and he had sung it from memory like he listened to it often. It wasn’t the type of songs he played loudly when he had guests at his apartment and she wondered when he did listen to it.

“Bravo, sir!” David clapped. “Give me a moment while I get your prize.”

He disappeared into his cottage and came back with a crumpled piece of paper with scribbling on it. After smoothing it out against his thigh and handing it to Eric, Eric unceremoniously stuffed it into the bag they were using to carry their items in and Olivia rolled her eyes.

“Thanks, David. Can you do us one more favor before we go?” she asked, pulling out her communication pad from her pocket. “We need a picture of us both with The Fence in the background. Do you think you can take it for us?”

“No problem,” he said, taking the fancy gadget.

Olivia noticed the way he stared at it in his hands and reached over and pushed a few buttons to bring up the camera. “Just push this button when you’re ready.” Nodding to Eric so he’d follow her, she squelched her way through the mud to the wood fence that surrounded David’s house and climbed up. Beyond it you could see The Fence in the distance.
When Eric hopped on the rounded rail beside her his hand slipped on the slick surface and he fell back, landing in the thick mud with a wet thud. When he looked at his hands in disgust, he flicked them to get the mud off without wiping them on his clothes and Olivia burst out laughing.

Sending her a dirty look he said, “A little help here?”

Still chuckling, Olivia climbed down and offered him her hand. He gripped it and she pulled but he was heavy and sucked in good. Leaning back to put her weight into it, his hand slipped out of hers and she fell on her rump. Eric’s deep chortle rumbled next to her and she grinned back at him as she brushed her hair out of her face, leaving smears of mud on her cheeks. Forgetting about trying to stay clean now, they both managed to get on all fours and stood up. Eric’s foot slipped once but he steadied himself with Olivia’s arm and looked at her face.

“You’ve got mud on your face,” he laughed.

Grinning, she swept her fingers down his face, cheekbone to chin, and said, “So do you.” With broad smiles on their faces they stared at each other and Olivia felt her anger melt away in that moment.

“Say cheese,” David said.

Completely forgetting that they weren’t alone, they both turned to look at him and a bright flash went off. Olivia blinked rapidly to chase the spots in her vision away and took back the offered camera.

“Thanks again, David, you’ve been a big help.”

“No problem, Olivia. Where are you off to next?” he asked.

“We still need to get a feather, some scrap metal, a bath item and a picture at Dauntless but we’ll have to see how much time we have left,” Eric answered for her.

“Well, the chicken coop is right over that way,” David pointed to the left, “you can get some feathers there and Terri recently broke his plow and had to weld it back together; he might have some metal lying around his shed you can dig through,” he suggested.

“We’ll check it out, thanks. See you around.” She waved good-bye to David as they jogged over to the chicken coop.

The pen’s yard was empty but the occasional sound of tired clucking and feathers rustling said the chickens were asleep in the coop and Olivia quietly unhooked the gate and entered the pen. She closed it behind her so no chickens accidently got out and Eric waited by the fence while she used her flashlight to search the ground for any feathers. It didn’t take long as she spotted a long brown one with white spots on the tip blown up against the chain links and she snatched it.

Successfully finding the feather, they made their way to Terri’s cottage and found a pile of metal lying just outside his shed. Eric bent down and sorted through it until he found a small useless piece and put it in the bag with the rest of their items. With two items left to get and only half an hour to go, they ran back to the train.

“I think we should call it quits,” Eric said after they got on. “It will take us at least twenty minutes just to get back to the hub, never mind Dauntless.”

“Unless we’re really lucky, two missing items could cost us the game,” Olivia said, leaning against the train car wall and crossing her arms over her chest.
“Maybe not,” Eric replied, digging out his communications pad. “No one said when the picture had to be taken, only as long as one of us was in it.” He grinned when he finished typing away on it and held it out for her to see.

It was a picture of Eric flipping the bird to the camera, mid-air, before he fell into the initiate’s entrance. Olivia had to guess he was around seventeen when it was taken.

“We were messing around, having one last night of irresponsibility before I became an official leader. John took the picture for me but it should still count,” he pocketed the pad.

“Yeah, it’ll do…” she said, watching him, “you know, I had fun tonight, Eric. You were actually a pretty good partner.”

He looked back at her, his eyebrow rising. “I had fun too. I suppose that means I should take back when I said you needed to loosen up. You’re not as uptight as you seem.”

“Ha!” Olivia chuckled. “Yeah, I guess so,” she trailed off, remembering how she hated him at the time he said it, but now - no longer knowing for sure about how she felt about him - she looked out the window to avoid his gaze. It was amazing how one night could change things.

She watched the world outside wiz past the train until it was their stop and they had to jump off. Eric took her hand again once they were off and it surprisingly didn’t bother her as much, even though this time they were the first to arrive, and they waited quietly for the others.

“What happened to you guys? Did you have sex in the mud or something?” Maxi blurted as she and Lace walked up.

“We were taking a picture in Amity and fell,” Olivia replied, feeling her cheeks redden at the memory of it.

“Uh-huh,” She replied, unconvinced and looked at her watch. “Well, if Jamie and Nate don’t show up in five, they’re disqualified.”

While they waited, the two groups laid out their findings on a nearby bench and Maxi cursed when it was obviously that Eric and Olivia had three more items than them. She tried to protest Eric’s jumping photo but the sound of laughter momentarily distracted her as everyone watched Jamie and Nate come back, arm in arm. Jamie’s long blonde hair was a mess and both of their clothes were dishevelled.

“Now there’s a couple who definitely took the time for some fun tonight.” Maxi smirked at them.

“Sorry, it was Lace’s sister’s fault. Apparently Eric and Olivia showed her some naughty Dauntless dancing and she insisted we show her some more. Things got a bit…” Jamie giggled as she looked at her fiancé, “hot and we…” she trailed off, letting everyone know what she meant.

Lace glanced at Olivia. “You and Eric, huh?”

“It was quick and not as hot as theirs, apparently,” she defended. “She’s going to be trouble, you know that right?” Olivia referred to Cindi.

“Oh, I’m going to have my hands full next year if she transfers, that’s for sure.” Lace agreed. “But it’s getting late and I want to go home, so let’s find out who won.”

It was close. Nate and Jamie were missing the things from Amity, the feather and music sheet, and it was Eric’s picture that gave them the last minute edge over them or it would have been a tie. Newly
branded winners, they hopped back on the train with Olivia’s friends and sat side by side in the corner.

“I feel so crusty. I can’t wait to get home and have a shower.” Olivia sighed and leaned her head back against the rattling metal wall.

“Speaking of going home,” Eric said, “maybe I should spend the night at your place tonight.”

Olivia slowly looked at him. “I thought we agreed, no sex,” she whispered, quickly glancing at her friends.

“It would be just for show.”

“I don’t think it’s a good idea to create too much temptation,” she frowned.

Eric’s eyes sparkled with surprise. “Are you saying I could change your mind about sleeping with me?”

“No,” Olivia was quick to deny, “I’m saying twice you’ve already shown that it won’t take much to tempt you and…”

“I see.” The sparkle died as his gaze hardened. “You still don’t trust me to keep it in my pants,” he said, fists clenching between his bent knees until they relaxed again. “Can you at least rest your head on my shoulder so it looks like you trust me?”

Olivia bit her lip in thought. His last request wouldn’t hurt either of them and she let her head fall against him. He still wore the cologne that made her think of Amity and she relaxed as she breathed it in.

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Rubbing a towel through her hair to dry it off, Olivia sat down on the corner of her bed and picked up her discarded pants to rummage for her phone. She wanted it out just in case she was called in to work in the morning and finding it, she put it on her bedside table. She then got up and draped the towel over the desk chair before turning off the light and crawling into bed.

The sheets were fresh and the blanket warm but neither could stop the guilt that kept her awake. Would it have been so bad to let Eric sleep on her couch for one night? He already proved to her that he could restrain himself, even while aroused, so why did she insist on letting him think she thought he couldn’t? She already knew the answer. It wasn’t him she didn’t trust, it was her.

She reached over and grabbed her phone. It wasn’t hard to find the picture and she pulled it up. They looked so happy, like a real couple in fact, all covered in mud but their eyes shining bright and Eric’s smile was genuine. She didn’t think she’d ever seen it before and it was breathtaking. She traced a finger over his lips, mesmerized by how handsome he looked in that moment and she realized that she definitely found him attractive. Olivia always knew he was but his personality had easily made that fact trivial to her, until now.

When he asked to stay the night she felt an undeniable tingle and it scared her. She could keep those feelings in check out in public, but if they were alone… Who knew what four years of abstinence could do to her when temptation was so close? She couldn’t chance it. She needed their relationship to stay professional because he was a one night type of person and she wasn’t. It would break her if she grew to feel something for him only to find out that he didn’t return her feelings.

With a heavy sigh she turned the phone off and curled herself up in her blankets. She closed her eyes
tight against the night’s memories and hoped for sleep.
Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

Holy crap. I can't believe how long this chapter took to finish. I'm so sorry for the wait, but I got pregnant and, of course, morning sickness made it hard to write, and then the baby took even more time. But when I did write, this chapter just wouldn't go right. I think I made 5 or 6 different versions and none of them felt right. I think I got it right this time, plus I'm so exhausted just looking at it to be honest. Anyway, I want to THANK EVERYONE who voted on what they wanted to have happen, and especially those who have waited for so long and stuck with me. I really hope this chapter is good. I've become so numb to it that I'm not sure it has the emotional feels that I was looking for. Please let me know if it does or not! Also, warning, there is sexual content in this chapter.

The sexual tension in the cab of the truck was palatable as Eric parked. Not being able to stand it any longer, Olivia unbuckled her belt and climbed over the shift. Straddling him, she leaned in close, her mouth hovering by his as if to kiss him, but whenever he tried to close the gap, she'd move away with a smile. After the third time, Eric slid his hands into her hair and gently tugged so her chin titled up.

Whispering against her ear, he said, “Stop teasing me, Olivia. I want to hear you scream my name, but that won’t happen if I finish before we’ve even started.”

Olivia chuckled and slid her hand down the waist band of his pants as his mouth crushed against hers. The kiss was hungry as his tongue darted between her parted lips and swirled around, stroking and flicking, as if he was eating her pussy.

Moaning into his mouth, she caressed his growing member until it was straining against the material of his pants and he growled in frustration when she unzipped it one tooth at a time before it finally sprung free. Knowing she was as wet as slip n’ slide, she blindly fiddled with her own panties until they stretched to the side and allowed her to gently ease herself down on him. Without seeing it, she knew he was large by the feel of him slowly stretching her out and she moaned when he filled her completely.

Then, she rocked against him. Slowly at first but her speed increased with each stroke as a hunger that wouldn’t be satisfied grew inside her. When Eric pulled her dress over her head and unclasped her bra, the feel of him suckling her nipple as she rode him hard put her over the edge and she arched her back as a ripple of pleasure ripped through her body. But he wasn’t done with her yet...
and pumped harder as her climax subsided and his grew. He took her other nipple in his mouth and swirled his tongue around it as he softly kneaded the other breast and the pressure between her legs built up once more.

“I want to hear you cum for me again,” he said, his hot breath tickling her wet flesh when he spoke and her nipples stiffened even more. Olivia closed her eyes at the sensation and moaned as he took control and gripped her hips as he thrust into her, his breaths ragged with the effort to wait for her climax.

“Deeper. I need you deeper,” she panted in return. He responded with harder thrusts that she was sure hit her cervix and the constant pressure deep inside her built up, and up, and...

BEEP.....

Olivia woke up with a snap to the sound of her alarm clock. Breathless, she looked around the dim room and realized she was alone. There was no Eric, no truck and no sex, even though her body still begged to be satisfied. Groaning, she swung her legs over the edge of the bed and ran a hand through her messed hair.

Eric invading her fantasies was not good. It meant she liked him, but she’d be damned before she let herself fall for a guy who’d ditch her faster than Zayne did. There was only one way to get her shit together before she saw him again, and that was a cold shower.

Padding her way through the dark room to the bathroom just across the hall, her hand blindly searched the wall for the light switch. When it came on, Olivia had to squint against the sudden brightness of the tiny room to see where she was going and shuffled her bare feet over the smooth linoleum to turn on the shower. Her arm was mid-reach when the gentle sound of snoring from the other room reached her ears and Olivia’s head turned to the door to hear better. When it came again, she peeked out to find Eric asleep on her couch for the second time.

Annoyed that the root of her current problem had explicitly ignored her need for privacy, she stomped over, sweeping his shirt up off the floor as she went and tossed the fabric at his face. “How did you get in here?” she demanded when he snorted awake.

Eric’s voice was husky with sleep. “I picked your lock,” he replied, casually dropping the t-shirt
back on the floor. “Had to prove I can sleep over without turning into a sex maniac, now didn’t I?”

Rolling her eyes, Olivia put her hands on her hips. “You can’t go breaking into other people’s homes just to prove a point, Eric.”

“Then, what’s the point of being a leader if I can’t use it to my advantage?” he said as he stretched out, the muscles of his abs rippling with the movement and catching her eye.

The sight of his nearly naked body sent a tingle through her still sensitive one, and she swallowed the lust filled lump in her throat. “You need to leave,” she said next to him, hoping he’d go before she did anything she would regret later.

“No, not until you admit that you’re wrong about me,” he said as he yanked her down by the wrist. When she fell on top of him, his arms wrapped around her, effectively trapping her body against his.

“Hey! Let me go,” she protested, pushing against the expanse of his hairy chest.

“Just say it and I will,” he said, his warm breath tickling her cheek.

She didn’t want to, though, and kept fighting. But every time she squirmed, his knee rubbed against her sensitive area and as sweet heat built up, she no longer moved to free herself, but to relieve the pressure between her legs.

Eric quickly caught on, but instead of asking what she was doing, he began to match her rhythm. She was near climax when he suddenly flipped her beneath him and captured her lips with his. This kiss was softer, more loving, than her dream’s and, desperately wanting to feel loved again, she returned it as his hands roamed her body. They left a trail of fire over her breasts and stomach as he released her mouth and leaned back to cup her ass. Angling her hips up, he rubbed the length of his boxer clad shaft over the wet patch on her pajama shorts and she moaned.

Who knew Eric was so good at foreplay? She blindly thought, and then remembered that she did. After years of listening to it from the other side of the wall, she knew he had plenty of moves to please a variety of women and that’s when she remembered this was the man she swore she’d never sleep with.

Panic setting in, she pushed at him. “Stop, I can’t do this.”
“What do you mean?” he asked, slowing and meeting her gaze.

“I mean, I don’t want to sleep with you,” she replied, wiggling out of his grasp and standing. Her body begged to go back and let him finish what she had started but her mind wouldn’t allow it. Instead, she began pacing the room.

“This is about Zayne, isn’t it?” Eric asked, getting up himself. She didn’t want to acknowledge the hard edge in his tone and so, only shrugged in reply. He scowled in return. “I don’t fucking get it, Olivia. He broke your heart and left it in pieces for four years before he bothered to apologize and you’re still pining for him?” he said, every muscle on his body tensed with anger. “Are you so damaged that you can’t move on?”

His words hit a nerve and she rounded on him. “You know what, Eric? Maybe I am,” she yelled, her arms spread wide.

“Then what the hell was this?” he gestured to the couch before pointing at himself, “Because you wanted me, I know it.”

Olivia shook her head and kept pacing. “That was just a lapse in judgement. A mistake that shouldn’t have happened,” she said.

Eric scoffed. “So, you were going to use me until you realized what a mistake it was?” When she didn’t reply, she could feel the anger radiating off of him as he grabbed her arm and forced her to face him. “Ralph was right, you really are a tease,” he hissed at her.

Frozen with disbelief, Olivia stared at him before slapping his cheek, hard. “Get the fuck out,” she said, her voice cold. But Eric remained rooted, angrily staring at her.

She screamed, then, and shoved him hard in the chest. His balance faltered briefly before he righted himself and she did it again, and kept doing it until he stumbled all the way to the door. Once she finally managed to shove him out, she locked it and pushed a chair under the handle to stop him from picking it again.

Wanting to cry and scream at the same time, she continued to pace the room. What right did that man whore have to call her a tease? Besides that morning, not once did she lead him on. She even told him from the beginning that sex was off the table, so what the fuck? As for Ralph, he was a
delusional misogynist who only saw her as an object to be desired. In fact, all men seemed to…

Olivia’s pacing faltered. Was Eric, right? Was she somehow teasing them?

Torn between rage and self-doubt she wanted to hit something, but going to the gym was out of the question when there was a good chance Eric would be there. The next best thing was to burn it off with a run. Satisfied with her idea, she went to her room to get changed and spied the bag of items from last night near the pile of dirty clothes. It reminded her of the promise she had made and, glad for a purpose, Olivia quickly dressed and left with the little Erudite girl’s glasses tucked in her pocket.

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Over the years the path from Dauntless to the Hub was ingrained in her muscle memory and she normally ran it on autopilot. Today wasn’t any different as her mind wandered through her thoughts, unable to escape from her last conversation with Eric. Tears blurred her vision as Olivia made her way through the small crowd until her shoulder bumped into someone. Managing to catch herself mid-stumble, she turned to apologize but the Erudite man was quick to snarl at her.

“Watch were you’re going, Dauntless,” he said as he leaned over to pick up the book he had dropped during the collision.

Pretty sure he wouldn’t have let her run into him if he had been paying attention, she said, “Look, I’m sorry I bumped into you but it’s not like you saw me either.”

“That’s because I was busy reading something important,” he snapped.

Doubting anything could be that important, she asked, “What was it that it couldn’t wait until you got home?”

The man glowered at her, but answered, “It’s a study that pre-dates the war about the similarities between the human mind and a chimp. It was revolutionary. Not that I expect someone like you to understand.”

Already tired of men presuming things about her, she stepped closer. “What’s that supposed to mean?”
“Really?” he sneered. “I thought Eric would have trained you to be smarter by now. He was always so adamant that Dauntless weren’t completely mindless.”

Just hearing Eric’s name made her blood boil, but at the same time, she was curious what this man’s connection was with him. “How do you know Eric?”

The man’s eyebrow raised. “I don’t know him. Not anymore. We disowned him long before he ever spilled his blood on the hot coals.”

Disowned him? She wondered and then remembered Eric’s story back in the elevator. “You’re one of his brothers, aren’t you?”

“Like I said, not anymore.”

His cavalier attitude toward neglecting his own blood was appalling and it only served to switch her anger from Eric over to him. “You’re the reason he’s such an asshole, you know?” she snarled. “All he ever wanted from you was your approval and you couldn’t even do that when he made leader.”

“It’s hard to give approval for something he was only second best at,” he replied, sounding bored. “Did you know their first choice was a boy from Abnegation of all places? Eric only got the position because the other boy turned it down.”

“I’ve heard the rumors,” she reluctantly admitted.

“Rumors,” he scoffed. “I’ve heard rumors, too. Like the one where he has all of you wrapped around his finger because you’re all afraid of him. But I guess a girl like you finds her own way of convincing him of things.”

“What’s the supposed to mean?” she growled, her fists tightening at her sides.

“Judging by your reaction, you already know what I mean,” he said, eyeing her. “So, did you have to fuck him more than once to get what you wanted?”
His comment barely even registered when pain shot through her fist and she realized she had broken his nose. Watching him try to staunch the blood that flowed down his chin and onto his blue jacket, she wanted to hit him again, but someone shouting at her from behind stopped her.

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The sun was hot that afternoon and it beat down on her back as she sat on the curb, waiting for someone official to pick her up. When the black Dauntless truck finally arrived her mood quickly went from irritated to furious as Eric stepped out.

What the hell was he doing there? Eric was supposed to be busy smoking out Zayne’s attacker, not escorting delinquents to jail.

When he spotted her, flanked by a couple of armed Dauntless patrol officers, his jaw clenched and Olivia looked away. His footprints crunched on the gravel as he approached and it took everything she had to not claw at his face when he stopped.

“What happened?” he asked her guards, ignoring the fact that she was sitting less than a foot away from him.

“She was witnessed assaulting an Erudite man half an hour ago, sir,” the younger one replied.

“And, where is he?” he asked and then, looked in the direction the boy pointed off to. The Erudite man was getting his nose taped up by a medic in blue clothing with a red cross stitched on her back. Eric’s voice was clipped when he saw who it was and said to her guard, “I’m going to need a minute to ask her some questions. Alone.”

“Yes, sir,” the kid said and followed his partner down the road to join the rest of their squad who were keeping onlookers away. Olivia remained sitting, arms crossed and tight lipped.

“What the fuck?” he barked at her. “Did you pick a fight with my brother just to get back at me?”

Olivia scoffed inside. Of course, he’d think this was about him.
“Olivia, answer me,” Eric demanded but she stayed quiet. “You can’t ignore me, I’m your leader and you’re in shit. So, if you want me to fix this mess, I suggest you start talking.”

“I’d rather spend the night in a cell than talk to you,” she growled.

Biting his bottom lip, Eric glanced away; a fist clenched at his side. “Alright, fine. I know you’re pissed at me. What I said this morning was way out of line and I didn’t mean it like that...”

Olivia’s eyes snapped upward. “How did you mean it, then? Because if you meant, I don’t put out, then fine, we can do it right now. Right where everyone can see since it’s what’s expected of me, right?” she said, angrily standing up and reaching out to unfasten his pants, but Eric quickly tried to stop her.

“What are you?... Stop, Olivia... Stop!” he said when she struggled to fight past his hands. Managing to finally wrestle her away from his crotch, he held her tightly by the wrists. “What has gotten into you?”

“Nothing, besides the truth,” she said. “I’ve come to realize that I’m worthless and I might as well just go with it. Let myself be passed around like a piece of meat until I’m all used up and then thrown away like common garbage. It’s how everyone see me, isn’t it?”

Eric’s grip tightened on her wrists and he growled, “Did my brother tell you that?”

Olivia shrugged, now numb down to her core. “He might as well have,” she said.

Lips flattened into a thin line, he told her to stay put just before he stormed off toward the medic truck and his brother, who didn’t see Eric’s fist until it collided with his already broken nose. The force of the blow pushed him to the ground as guards quickly jumped in to detain Eric from hitting him again.

As they pulled him back, his brother spat blood at Eric’s feet and sneered. “Looks like you got everything you wanted, dear brother. Power and a whore who is as violent as you are!”

Enraged, Eric wrestled away from the two guards holding him and yanked his older brother up by the collar. He repeatedly punched him until his brother’s head lolled back and then dropped his limp body to the ground. Everyone stood frozen as he then waltzed over to the guards with his wrists out.
“Do your fucking job and cuff me!” he growled when they only stared at him in fear. Finally, one of them did as told, although rather hesitantly, and without waiting for them, Eric began walking again. As he passed her, he said, “You are not worthless,” and then got in the back of the truck without another word.

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Gossip really did travel fast in Dauntless because as soon as they walked through the doors, cuffed and guarded, almost everyone found a way to sneak a peak as they were guided to Max’s office. Olivia even saw Lace in the Pit during their walk of shame looking utterly shocked by the scene. She mouthed ‘what happened?’ to her when their eyes met but Olivia could only mouth back that she’d tell her later and kept walking until they were ushered into Max’s office where he was waiting for them.

“What the hell is wrong with you?!” he demanded Eric, as he slammed a folder down on his desk. “I’ve got reports stating that you’ve sent a man to the hospital, and your brother by the sounds of it, too,” he said. “Care to tell me why?”

“A brother’s quarrel, nothing more,” Eric replied, standing tall.

“That’s some quarrel, because he’s probably in a coma,” Max replied. “What was it about?”

“Nothing,” Eric said, jaw clenched.

“It wasn’t nothing,” Max shouted while leaning forward with his palms planted on top of the desk. “You’re a leader and Jeanine is demanding retribution because of it. If I don’t punish you accordingly, there’s going to be hell to pay; you know we rely on Erudite for their technical advancements,” he said and then glanced at Olivia. “And how is she involved? I was told she assaulted Tom Coulter a good thirty minutes prior to your arrival.”

“Olivia had nothing to do with it, Max,” Eric was quick to say and Olivia side glanced at him, confused. Why was he trying to protect her when he was in deeper shit than she was?

“I highly doubt that,” Max replied, unconvinced. “What were you doing there?” he asked her specifically.
“I was returning something to Erudite when I ran into Tom by mistake. We had an argument and when he insulted me, I hit him. Eric was just defending my honor, sir,” she explained.

“I see,” Max said, looking between the two of them. “You know, I heard about the two of you being an item but I wasn’t sure if I believed the rumors. Eric doesn’t seem the type to settle down, but here we are…” he paused and sat down. “Well, I hope she’s worth it, Eric, because you’re demoted.”

“You can’t possibly…” Eric began to argue but Max stopped him by raising his hand.

“It’s already done. The other leaders agreed to it before you arrived and Jeanine has been notified. Someone will pack up your office and send you your things later in the week while we vote on someone to take your place. I’ll let miss Spence off with a warning this time.”

“This is bullshit!” Eric snarled as Olivia stared in stunned silence.

“It was either this or send you to the Factionless sector. Which would you prefer?” Max snapped back, his brown eyes challenging him to keep fighting. Thankfully, Eric kept his mouth shut. “Smart choice,” Max said, relaxing into his chair. “Now, get out.”

They were escorted back to their apartments and as soon as Olivia closed her door, she could hear things crashing behind the wall in her bedroom as Eric raged on the other side. Full of guilt, because this was all her fault, she slid down the wall and cried.

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