Spencer didn't know what bought him to that particular spot on this particular night, but if he'd believed in fate he would have said it was that. But now, how to convince the woman to step away from the edge of the bridge.

A/N this is written in the "You" narrative but the reader character has a name. Please don't let this put you off. This story means a lot to me.
Spencer didn’t know what bought him to this particular spot on this particular night. But if he actually believed in fate, he would have said it was that. The sort of fate which you can’t work out if you’re pleased for or that you curse the universe for sending your way.

He’d finished up at the library, deciding to work home through Catton Park instead of his usual route through Main Street and down Second. He’d stop by the old ferry bridge he thought, he liked it there. It was peaceful and looking at the stars sometimes helped clear his head and he needed that tonight.

Bundled up against the cool November air he made his way through the park, the fallen autumn leaves crunching under his converse clad feet, enjoying the sound they made. It was 10pm so aside from the odd dog walker and late night jogger, the park was deserted.

Thinking back to the case that had taken up the past two weeks, he shuddered. The image of the two young girls that had been shot to death in front of him. The two girls he’d tried to save, but hadn’t been able to talk their captor down from his manic high, convince him that everything was going to be okay.

Shots had been fired, his own aiming straight for the unsub once Spencer had seen him squeeze the trigger. But he’d been too late. And the unfortunate positioning of the girls had meant that the bullet had ripped right through the first girl and into the second, an unpleasant and unwanted reminder of an incident not too long in his own past.

Once he was certain the unsub was dead, Reid had rushed over to the second girl seeing that she was still breathing, blood guzzling from between her lips as she tried and failed to gasp in air, her eyes frightened and starting to glaze over as she’d grasped for Spencers hand, needing to feel human touch in her last few moments of life.

She’d died two minute later, Spencers hands covered in her warm scarlet blood, as he begged for her to hold on for the ambulance. His supervisor SSA Aaron Hotchner had more or less needed to drag him away, realising afterwards that this had triggered the memory of that horrific incident.

The paperwork finished, Hotch had insisted that Reid take a few personal days, perhaps contact his therapist.

Spencer had agreed to take the personal days, but had no intention of contacting his therapist. He’d get over it…. Well, he’d file it away to the back of his extensive mind along with the other cases that made him constantly question why he’d chosen the career path he had.

Chosen wasn’t exactly the correct word to use either, he’d been groomed for the FBI from a young age, a visiting Agent had lectured during his time at cal-tech and had seen a certain quality to him.

Once Spencer had accepted that the FBI was where he was going to end up, he’d been offered a choice of entry positions. However profiling had been the only thing he knew he’d be physically capable of. He could ace any psychological exam or test within an hour, but still struggled to this day to qualify for the physical tests required. Due to his skills though, he was often given a free pass through, something he was grateful for but at times also resented. If he was perhaps pushed that bit harder and forced to actually have to qualify for the physical exams then maybe he’d actually push himself harder and eventually end up on the same fitness levels as Morgan or Hotch.
He doubted it though, sports and physical activity just wasn’t his thing, it never had been. Numbers and letters, linguistics and patterns; they were his thing, and they along with his true talent of being able to psychologically disarm someone rather than physically need to take them down, were among the things that made him indispensable to the team.

Continuing his walk home, he could see the old bridge approaching, but it didn’t look like he’d be alone in his stargazing tonight.

‘Damn it’ he thought to himself as he wriggled his hands inside his pickets trying to keep warm. Perhaps he’d just carry on home instead.

As he got closer he could see that the figure was a girl, her long auburn hair blowing in the cool breeze. He could hear sniffing, a light sobbing and it sounded like she was talking to herself.

It was only then that he realised she was on the other side of the bridge, her back to the railings, arms looped around the iron poles.

Shit.

He stopped, assessing the situation and not wanting to move any closer until he was sure on his course of action. Every few seconds she’d lean forward slightly, her grip loosening, and then she’d seem to lose her nerve and pressing herself back against the stone and metal barrier.

The water below wasn’t that deep, but it was freezing and the river was fairly deserted at this time of night. Due to the structure of the bridge, depending on the angle she fell at, she’d likely hit her head on the way down as well. There’s no doubt that if she went in she’d end up dead one way or another.

He could see a suitcase and a bag leaning up against the side of the barrier along with a pair of high heeled shoes, presuming they were hers. She looked too well dressed and too neat to be homeless so he assumed she was travelling. But what had bought her here, what was so bad that it had her hanging off the side of a bridge in a deserted Park at 10pm at night.

There was only way for him to find out.
“I don’t want to startle you but…….”

Shit. You gripped the railings tighter, the voice cutting through the breeze and making you jump slightly. You recovered your balance quickly, the cold metal feeling like it was burning your hands, you were gripping it so tightly.

Brilliant.

You were no longer alone. That was definitely going to make this harder than it already was.

Maybe if you ignored him, he’d just get bored and go away? Or maybe if you asked him, he’d go away? People didn’t want to involve themselves with this right? I mean who really wanted to watch a 29 year old girl plunge to their death?

Although given what you’d read on the Internet, there were a fair few sickos out there who would have.

Ugh.

You knew you should have gone for the pills instead. Or the razor. But that would have meant checking back into a hotel room. And you’d be discovered pretty quickly. You didn’t want that. The river below looked fairly fast moving, and you hoped that you’d be swept away and that it would take a few days for your body to be recovered and matched up with the suitcase and belongings you were leaving behind.

You should have waited until later in the evening. It had seemed quiet, and you’d been stood here for the last two hours and he was only the second person you’d seen come this way. The first had barely given you a glance, despite your crying. But then again, you’d been on the other side of the railings at that point.

Why was this so hard?

“Um…. My name’s Spencer Reid. Listen…. Is there someone I can call? Someone who you need to talk to? You don’t have to do this.”

You glanced over to where the voice was coming from, seeing a tall gangly man with messy hair, a dirty blonde colour. He was wrapped in a dark duffel coat, an aubergine coloured scarf around his neck, the ends blowing in the wind.

You looked back to the water and closed you eyes, taking a deep breath. You started to lean forward again slightly, the way you had been for the last twenty minutes. Hearing a rush, you looked back up. The man had suddenly bolted towards you and was now only a few feet away from you.

“Don’t come any closer. Please.” You managed to choke out, sure that the wind would swallow your words whole.

“I won’t…. I promise. Just… Let’s talk okay. What’s your name? I’m Spencer.” He held his hands up in a gesture of surrender, as if to prove that he wasn’t going to move. His hair was longer than the average males and you could see him fighting to keep it out of his face, the same way you were.
“I don’t want to talk. Just…. Leave me alone. Please!”

“I can’t do that now…. I’m sorry but I’m here now. I can’t walk away. I’m involved.”

“You’re not involved at all. Just leave. Please. Pretend you were never here.”

He rubbed his hands together, blowing on them to keep them warm. It was freezing out tonight. You could barely feel your fingers now and your legs and feet were starting to feel numb too, the wind whipping through the thin material of your tights.

“I can’t pretend. I AM here. And I’m not going to leave. Please just come over the railing. We can talk. We don’t have to go anywhere away from here. We don’t have to even talk about what ever it is that’s made you feel that jumping is the only way out….. We can talk about…. books or films, or colours. Or where you’re from. You’re British right?”

No shit…. You shook your head trying to shake your hair out of yours eyes again.

“What good will talking about any of that do? Please just piss off and leave me alone.”

“You’re wearing a lot of purple and lilac, so I bet that’s your favourite colour right… Mine too. See… …” He tugged on the ends of his scarf. “Purple…. And the bag down there. Is that a Cheshire cat keyring attached to it? I’m guessing you’re an Alice fan?”

“Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?’
‘That depends a good deal on where you want to get to,’ said the Cat. ‘I don’t much care where -’ said Alice.
‘Then it doesn’t matter which way you go,’ said the Cat. ‘- so long as I get SOMEWHERE,’ Alice added as an explanation.
‘Oh, you’re sure to do that,’ said the Cat, 'if you only walk long enough.”

The man read the quote verbatim without even seeming to need to think about it. Impressive.

But you could quote that book too, and one line in particular seemed very fitting right now.

“If everybody minded their own business, the world would go around a great deal faster than it does.” You raised your eyebrows at him hoping he’d get the hint.

“So you are a fan then? You know the Dodo in the book is actually based on Lewis Carroll himself… Due to his stammer he used to introduce himself as ‘Do-do-Dodgson….His stutter actually prevented him from his original career choice which was to become a priest, so he ended up becoming a mathematician and author instead.”

“I’m guessing you didn’t get the hint then.” You said, staring at the man in wonderment.

“Oh I got your hint. But I’m not leaving….And I’m really hoping you’re not still planning on jumping because that water looks cold and I really wasn’t planning on getting wet tonight… Well, aside from a nice hot bath which I could really do with now. I’m freezing. And your lips are starting to turn blue.” He talked fast, his sentences streaming into each other.

“Why would you have to get wet?”

“Well if you jump, I kinda have to jump in afterwards and save you.”

“But I don’t want saving, that’s the point.” You spoke through gritted teeth.

“And I don’t really want to plunge into a freezing cold river either, but it looks like neither of us
will get the ending we wanted. You jump, I jump.” He inched closer and you looked at him sharply. He stopped. If he reached out now, he could touch you.

“Are we in a James Cameron movie or something? Look I really don’t need a Jack Dawson coming to save me. I’m not some poor little rich girl, being forced into a marriage of convenience and last I checked, we weren’t aboard a doomed ship.” This was starting to get ridiculous. “Titanic right? I can quote that too.” For some reason, that didn’t surprise you. He moved oh so slightly.

“Just stay back okay. I’ll let go, I swear it.”

“No you won’t. You would have done it by now.”

He grinned at you. “Told you I could quote it.”

What….. Just what.

The grin faded as quickly as it had appeared as he tried again.

“Please…. Just, come back over the railing. We could do this all night. I’m not going anywhere and I’m fairly certain you won’t jump with me here, because you’re not the sort of person who would jeopardise someone else’s safety for her own wants.”

“How do you even know what type of person I am. You don’t know me!” You scowled at him.

“You’re right. I don’t know you as a person, I don’t know exactly what is going through your mind right now. I wish I did. I wish I could tell you that everything is going to be okay and I wish I could take away whatever pain you’re experiencing that has made you think that you have no other way out. Can we please stop pretending that you’re actually going to go through with this though. We both know you won’t, not with me here. Come back over, let’s go and get a coffee and talk. It might help. At the end of it, we’ll go our separate ways again and you’ll be free to come back here if that’s what you still want to do.”

He seemed to be getting desperate and you realised that he had a point. You weren’t going to jump with him here. You wanted to do this alone and you would do this alone. And he didn’t seem willing to go anywhere. You could have a coffee with him, and then come back later. Yes, that’s what you’d do.

“Okay. Fine. Have it your way. But I’m coming back later. And you better not follow me.” You turned around carefully, struggling to hold on with now numb fingers.

He moved closer ready to offer assistance, his hand reaching out and gripping the top of your shoulder as you carefully swung your leg back over.

Safely on the other side, you stood, smoothing down your dress and rubbing your hands together trying to get some feeling back into them, before bending and pulling your heels back in

The man suddenly lunged forward, wrapping his arms around you in a hug ignoring the startled look on your face.

You patted his back awkwardly, wondering how quickly the night got gotten weird.

Pulling away he had a sheepish expression on his face. “Sorry” he apologised. “I just had a really awful day at work yesterday and if you’d have jumped, you’d have pretty much killed my year. I’m Spencer. Spencer Reid.”
“Yeah you said. Three times now.”
He looked at you expectantly.

Ugh. Fine.

“I’m Seph.”

“Steph?” You’d expected that. It always happened.

“Seph. Persephone.”

“Oh! As in Queen of the Underworld right. Daughter of Zeus and Demeter.”

Not a question, but stated as a fact.

You nodded.

“Okay… So…. Erm, well…."

“You mentioned coffee?” You wanted to get this over with as quickly as possible.

“Yes! Coffee! Okay. Let’s go get some coffee then.” He reached down for your suitcase and you picked your handbag up.

“Which way Spencer Reid?”

“Erm…. Well. I only live like two blocks from here? Would it be weird for you if we went there…. There’s not that many coffee shops open right now. I swear I’m not a serial killer. ”

You laughed at the last part. “Considering the aim of this evening was for me to wind up dead, I really wouldn’t care if you were. Lead the way.”

A peculiar look crossed his face as he processed your words he rolled his bottom lip between his teeth before turning and dragging your suitcase away.

“It’s this way Persephone.”

“Seph.” You corrected him, seeing him walking away.

“I like Persephone. ”

You hurried after him. “Well it’s not your name.”

“You realise you had the perfect opportunity then, to turn around and jump.”

He was right, you did.

So why had you run after him instead?

…..
Spencer had no idea why he’d suggested that they go back to his place, he could have found an open coffee shop if they’d have walked for long enough.

He also had no idea why he wasn’t taking this girl to the nearest hospital either. She’d been about to commit suicide so she obviously needed help. Yet there was something stopping him. He didn’t know this girl from Adam, but she clearly had story. One that he very much wanted to hear.

He led her away from the park and out onto the main streets pulling her little suitcase behind him. He noticed the luggage tags still on them. She’d flown in from New York.

“So did you have to get a flight connection via New York to get here?” He asked her curiously, confused as he couldn’t recall a British Airline that flew to D.C via the Big Apple.

“Erm no, I live in New York actually. Have done since I was 22.” She replied, digging in her pockets for a tissue and wiping away some of the mascara that had made it way down her cheeks.

“How old are you now if you don’t mind me asking?”

“How old are you Spencer Reid?”

“Thirty Two.” He looked back at her seeing her eyes widen slightly. She had deep green eyes now he could see them properly, the light from the streets lamps illuminating her face somewhat. It was a shame that they were rimmed with so much red and black right now, he could tell she’d be quite pretty without any make up and without the evidence of tears splashed across her face.

“You don’t look it. You look younger than me.” She replied, studying his face as she navigated the sidewalk expertly in her high heels.

Now they were in the light he could see she was impeccably dressed, her clothes were clearly tailor made for her, him not recognising the brand. He could however, see the telltale flashes of red on the soles of her shoes.

Seeing him looking at her expectantly she sighed. “I’m 29. I’ll be 30 in three weeks. Well, 24 days actually. That’s one of the things that triggered this whole debacle actually.”

“Turning 30?” Spencer asked remembering how his team had initially forgotten his 30th, only throwing him an impromptu party at headquarters after he’d let it slip to Emily whilst on a case.

“Yes….. Me and my best friend made lists when we were fifteen of all the things we wanted to have achieved by the time we turned thirty. We kept them and I opened mine four months ago. From a list of thirteen, I’ve achieved two.”

“You made the list when you were fifteen. Things change. How many has your friend achieved.”

“Well considering she’ll never see thirty, she’s still managed to achieve eight out of her ten. And nine and ten would have happened within a few years time.”

Spencer turned into a side street leading Persephone with him and up the stairs to his apartment building.

“Wait… Why will she never see thirty?” He realised the answer almost as soon as the question left his mouth, feeling like the most insensitive dick around. It was obvious. “I’m sorry Persephone.”
He murmured. “How long.”

“Six month. Her and her fiance. Car accident. Least they were together, I guess. Her Mum found the lists in Alexs’ room. I hadn’t realised she’d even kept them all these years.” She cleared her throat, blinking back tears before closing her eyes. Shaking her head slightly she reopened them, the tears gone and a look of resolve on her face.

“Alex always went after what she wanted and she never let anyone stand in her way. I do. Because I’m scared of the consequences. I generally do what I’m told, when I’m told. I rarely fight for what I want. And that’s another reason I’m in this mess.”

The way she spoke gave Reid the impression that she’d had this conversation before, whether with herself or with another person. Her voice was tinged heavily with regret but he also got the sense that she knew exactly what her issues were. When some people contemplated suicide, they simply didn’t know why they were sad, they just were…… In fact, not knowing what was wrong was more common than knowing what was. Persephone seemed to know what her problems were, so if that was the case, why didn’t she change them?

“This…. This is me.” Spencer unlocked the door to his apartment, flicking the lights on as he went in.

Pleased his apartment was clean he led her in, watching her go straight to his book case her eyes flickering over the masses of books.

“You like to read I take it.” Her hand trailing across one of the shelves before she moved to the wall next to it, seeing his degrees and certificates which his mother had insisted he display.

“You’re thirty two… Some of these are dated years ago… Are you some kind of freaky genius Spencer Reid?”

“I don’t believe that intelligence can be accurately quantified…..” He stopped seeing the look on her face. “Yes I’m a genius.” Sometimes it was just easier.

“And an FBI agent too.” She got to his work based qualifications. “A profiler to be exact. So that’s how you were able to read me earlier then. Interesting.”

She read through the rest of the certificates quickly before spinning to turn him.

“So….. Coffee. I’ve kinda got things to do here.”

“Coffee.. Do you want to come through to the kitchen Persephone?”

“Sure thing Spencer Reid…. Who clearly does that.” She laughed at her own joke. “Sorry. I’m sure you get that all the time.”

“Not since school actually.” He flicked his kettle on, spooning coffee into mugs and adding sugar to his before sliding the dish over to her.

“How much sugar? Seriously? Why drink coffee if you ruin the taste of it?”

“I honestly couldn’t tell you. I’ve always drank it this way, and everyone always comments. It’s just habit more than anything now.”

She ignored the sugar, waiting for him to add the water. She ignored the creamer he offered her too choosing to take it black.
“So. Here we are. Drinking coffee.” She raised her mug in the air in a ‘cheers’ motion.

“Persephone….” He began, but she cut him off, knowing what was coming.

“Seph. And you said you wouldn’t ask why.”

“Sorry…. I just. I want to understand.” Looking at her now in the harsh light of his kitchen, she seemed familiar. Like he’d met her before somewhere.

“Okay… Fine. There’s lots of contributing factors to my decision Spencer Reid. But the simplest way of explaining it is this. Have you ever known where you are now, and known where you want to be, but you have no idea how to get from A to B. And that not knowing builds and builds and it eats away at you until it consumes you. You know what you should be doing, but you just can’t get there.”

“I can understand that feeling, yes.”

“I knew where I was ten years ago. And I knew what I wanted to be by the time I was thirty. And I’ve achieved nothing….. Yes alright, I should be happy, I have parents who love me in their own way, up until this morning I had a fiance, who for all his flaws was a decent enough human being. And I had the bestest friend in the world up until six months ago. I was working my arse off trying to establish my dream as well. I was….. well I wasn’t happy. I’m not sure I’ve ever felt 100 percent happy with my life. But I was coping. I was getting on with it. And I was working towards my dream that would have made me happy. I was existing in an state that I could live with. Until Alex died and every went tits up. And until I saw this stupid list and realised how much I’d actually haven’t done. My dead best friend achieved pretty much everything on her list and I probably never will now. My whole life has been planned out for me by my parents, and I’m too chicken to go against their plans for me. I want more, I have my own plans and my own ideas. Except I don’t know how to achieve them, I don’t know how to do the things that will make me happy. And if I can’t make myself happy then what’s the point. Why carry on? Why put so much effort into a life that’s not going to reward me because I don’t know how to make it reward me. It’s too hard. And I’m not cut out for it. So why bother.”

To some, she may have sounded like a spoilt brat. She’s not admitting to being abused, not saying she had any kind of dependency problem. She simply wanted more out of life than what she was getting, but didn’t know how to get it. Plenty of people would see this as no good reason to end a life. But to her, it was all the reason she needed.

Spencer got it. He understood her. He thought he’d have cured schizophrenia by time he was 25 and he hadn’t. The disappointment he’d felt, the self loathing and lack of purpose. There was definitely more going on, a deeper layer to the issues. But in the simplest terms, she was holding herself back and she knew it. But she felt crippled, unable to do anything about it for some reason.

“Persephone……”

“Spencer Reid.” She interjected.

“Why do you call me by my full name?” He asked her suddenly.

“Because I must have told you four times already that it’s Seph. Yet you insist on calling me Persephone. I know what you’re trying to do.”

“I’m not trying to do anything, it’s just a pretty name.”

“It’s a ridiculous name. Especially when it’s paired with my surname.” She scoffed.
“Which is?”

Spencer watched as she reached into her purse, tossing her passport across the table to him.

He flicked it open to the photo page seeing her full name.

Persephone Bella-Morte.

“Stupid isn’t it…. And quite apt really.”

“Bella-Morte…. ” He clicked his fingers as it came to him. “I know who you are. I thought you looked familiar.”
"I know who you are! I thought you looked familiar."

Yep…… You’d thought he might. Not everyone would have recognised the family name, but given how smart he was and his line of work, he was bound to pay attention to business news.

Your family owned a large range of luxury business hotels, Lux. Your Great Grandpa and his brother had started them in the thirties, the business somehow surviving through the war. The brand had grown and expanded throughout the years and now almost every major city in Europe and the USA had a Lux hotel or two.

The Bella-Morte name was widely associated with the Lux brand, the hotel bars even having its own cocktails and dessert range featuring various puns on the name.

You had a love/hate relationship with your name. The surname itself was ridiculous enough without being paired with Persephone, Queen of the Underworld. Once your friends had started to study Greek mythology at school and learnt what the literal translation of your family name was, the nicknames had started. It didn’t help with the film adaptation of the Anne Rice novel “Queen of the Damned” coming out during your teenage years.

By then though, you’d started to embrace the name. You’d been heavily into the grunge scene, your parents having a fit when you’d come home with a lip piercing and your auburn hair dyed black, and the nickname your friends bestowed upon you because of your name, fit your look. Growing older, you’d replaced the lip ring with a nipple bar and a few tattoos in places that weren’t visible unless you wanted them to be, gradually returning to your natural hair colour.

“I am so pleased I came across you tonight then and stopped you. Your case would have ended up coming across to the BAU if I hadn’t.”

“Do the FBI routinely investigate suicides then?” You definitely didn’t think so.

“You’re a high profile name… Well, at least your family is. And with it happening in D.C too it would have definitely come our way.” He took a sip of his drink.

“Then it will still come across your desk then. Nothing’s changed. I still intend on doing it.”

“Really?…. Perseph…. Seph, I don’t understand though. Surely, given who you are you could have anything and everything you wanted? Your family are millionaires and from I understand you’d have a job there for life.”

“I can feel you judging me… And I know I lied when I said I wasn’t some poor little rich girl like Rose from that film. In fact, I have more in common with her than I’d like, right down to the red hair.” You pulled on a strand of your hair wrapping it around your finger before pushing it back off your face again.

“I’m not judging you I promise, I just…. If you’re going to come across my desk, help me understand.”

“I can’t though. That’s the thing. When I say it out loud, it sounds ridiculous. Because I SHOULD be happy. Alright, my best friend is dead, and my now ex fiance was a bit of a dickhead…. but I wasn’t overly into him anyway so whatever. But my family do love me and I can pretty much anything I want. But that comes with conditions.”
“Conditions?…. And ex fiance? Or is that another story?” He asked cautiously.

You downed the last of your coffee, looking at him and holding out your empty mug. “Got anything stronger?”

“Whiskey… Somewhere.”

“Well don’t just sit there Spencer Reid.” If you were going to keep talking then you’d need a stronger drink.

He rummaged around in a cupboard, coming up with two tumblers and a bottle of Jack.

“Technically it’s bourbon….. ” He poured two generous measures and handed one to you. “Do you want to actually sit down?”

“Sure.”

He led the way through to his living room bringing the bottle with him, taking a seat at one end of his couch. You removed your coat and slid your heels off, taking a seat the other end and curling your stockinged feet up beneath you. Taking a sip, the amber nectar warming your throat instantly, you began.

“Yes conditions. And the fiance… Ugh. He’s the reason I’m in D.C. I’ve been…. distant from him over the last few months, given what happened with Alex and well, you know, contemplating my whole existence and all. When I think about it now, I’ve probably been distant from him for a lot longer than that. In fact, I’m not sure I was ever really that close to him in the first place. He’s the son of one of Daddy’s lawyers. So gosh, maybe the marriage of convenience thing applies too, except from his side rather than mine… Anyway. So he’s here on business and I thought….well, I was bored so I thought I’d come surprise him. Maybe a good couple of fucks would have taken my mind off wanting to slit my own wrists or jumping off a bridge. So I get here this morning, go to his hotel which given his connections, was not a Lux. Obviously I know why now. I slipped the receptionist a hundred for the key to his room and find him balls deep inside of his secretary. A pretty little nineteen year old. Needless to say, me and him are over. Although, I’m surprising not that bothered. It just kinda helped my decision.” You saw the look on his face. “Don’t worry, I wasn’t going to kill myself because of him. I was planning it anyway. Today just… Made me want to get it over with sooner rather than later. Made me bring my original deadline forward. ”

You took another sip of your drink, holding it out for a refill. Spencer obliged, topping up his own which he was quickly draining. Poor thing, oh how you’d ruined his night.

“The conditions I referred to. Everyone in my family is expected to work at Lux. I don’t want that. I want my own business. I want to start my own clothing line, my own fashion brand. But the parents have my own future planned out for me. I worked there until until I was 27 and then decided I’d had enough and that I needed to try and get this business off the ground. But I’m expected to start working back at Lux the week after my thirtieth birthday. Apparently I’ve had ‘Enough time to arse around trying to make something out of myself.’ I was so close to getting it off the ground, but then with Alex dying, I missed some important business meetings and the funding fell through.”

“If you don’t want to work for your family, then don’t work for them. You’re an adult, you can make your own decisions. They can’t force you.”

“It’s not that simple…. Well. In theory it is. But it’s a family run business. They heard me out when I said I wanted to leave two years ago. They agreed to give me until my thirtieth birthday to do it on my own, which is how I wanted to do it. I could have taken their money, and to an extent
I did use some of my trust fund to help make a portfolio and designs and stuff but I won’t use their money or name to launch the brand. It was agreed that if I couldn’t do this by the time I was thirty then I go and take up my rightful place back at Lux. If I don’t, I get cut off completely. No trust fund, no nothing. And I don’t have any money of my own, I was meant to make some but that didn’t happen.”

“So still…. Talk to them again.” His brow furrowed.

“I have. After Alex died, I asked for an extention. And they were sympathetic, but refused. I’ve had long enough….. Look I sound bratty I know, and I’m a walking contradiction. I don’t want their business, but I can’t function without my trust fund. I don’t want to work for them, but I’ve failed at being able to work for myself. Lux doesn’t interest me at all. But I made an agreement with them. And it would would be letting the family name down to back out of said agreement and blah blah blah family honour and such. Have you seen Beauty and the Beast, the Disney film?”

Your sudden change in track surprised him, but he nodded.

“I’ve watched it with my godson a few times, yes.” He nodded and you explained your question.

“The first song…. There’s a part goes:

I want adventure in the great wide somewhere,
I want it more than I can tell.
But for once it might be grand, to have someone understand.
I want so much more than they’ve got planned.

You know it?”

“Yes, I remember it.” He pushed his hair back behind his ear, thinking. “So you feel trapped by your obligations to your family, downhearted because of your own perceived failure, and disillusioned by life because you haven’t achieved the things you wanted to. Add your best friend dying to that and…… whilst I don’t agree suicide is the way out, I can maybe understand how you might feel that it is.”

He could?

He could.

Oh.

Huh.

“Pers… Seph…. You mentioned an original deadline. What was it?”

“Erm… I was planning on doing it on my birthday. I figured… Why not.”

“Okay. Will you consider reverting to your original date?” He asked quietly, his eyes intensely studying you.

“Whhhyyyy?” You dragged the word out, suspicious.

“I want to see this list. Your birthdays twenty four days away right? Seph, suicide is never the answer, although I know it sometimes feels that way. You want more from life. Then let’s go and get more. Please. If I can help you tick off some of the items on that list, and maybe together we can come up with a way to get your business plan back up and running, will you reconsider it?”
He seemed so earnest.

“You want to try and fix me?”

“No… Because you’re not broken. You’re not even a lost soul that needs to be found. You know what you want, you just can’t work out how to get it. So let me try to help.” He reached out across the couch, hesitating before taking your hand. Normally you’d recoil if a stranger touched you like that when it wasn’t in a professional environment…. But you were in his apartment, on his couch. When you’d originally intending on taking up the throne next to Hades by now.

“Why do you want to help me?” You asked. He considered your question carefully before answering.

“Because maybe I need some purpose in my life too. I try not to believe in fate. It doesn’t fit in with my logic. But…. A lot of people would say that we met tonight for a reason. I don’t normally walk that way home, you’re not normally in D.C. I’ve had a pretty shitty year myself. Maybe this will help me too.”

“And if you don’t succeed and I still do it? Because I will.”

“Then at least I gave it my best shot.”

You considered his offer…. What was another twenty four days really?

Although he’d laugh when he saw how pathetic your list was. But…. Well, he was a genius. Maybe he could think of another way out of this for you. And if not… you could just stick with the plan. Another twenty four days.

Okay. You could stick it out for that long.

“Okay. Fix my life Spencer Reid.”
“Okay. Fix my life Spencer Reid.” Persephone…. Seph, he really needed to get used to calling her that, downed her drink and held out her glass for another refill. Spencer obliged, not filling it quite as much this time.

Fix the life a complete stranger. Could he really do that? Was he really going to try? Well he’d offered now so he couldn’t really not try. But how was he going to do this, and how would he feel if he failed and she did it anyway. Hell with the year he’d had, he’d probably join her on the bridge and suggest they jump together.

First things first though.

“Have you got this list then?” He asked her, needing to see what he was dealing with.

She nodded, her long hair falling forward as she leant to retrieve her bag from the floor. Looking at her now, he couldn’t believe he hadn’t recognised her sooner. She wasn’t in the press as much as a certain other hotel heiress but she’d definitely made a fair few appearances in the tabloids, photographed at various charity events and galas. Perhaps it was that her trademark dark eyeliner and plum lipstick had been rubbed off due to her crying that had prevented him from making the connection, although Spencer definitely thought she looked better sans the heavy make up she was rarely pictured without.

Seph pulled her bag onto her lap and rummaged through it pulling out two cellphones, one of which Reid could see was lit up with notifications of missed calls and messages. She retrieved a large leather purse, the material decorated with tiny skulls and stitched little potion bottles. Unzipping it, she searched through the compartments before pulling out a carefully folded piece of notebook paper which she then handed to him.

“Don’t judge me…. Well any more than you already are. I wrote this when I was fifteen. Some of them may seem juvenile, or just plain silly. And they’ll all probably seem easily achievable, which is what makes me not having completed them, more frustrating.”

Persephone grimaced as she watched him unfold the paper, his eyes quickly skimming the list.

*Bungee jump/sky dive  
*Make out with a total stranger  
*Perform at a bar. Karaoke/Open Mic night  
*Give someone a sexy strip tease  
*Learn to play chess  
*Hike the Inca Trail  
*Make love to a woman  
*Learn another language  
*Watch both the sunset set and then rise from the same deserted spot, having spent all night awake with someone special.  
*Start my own business and make it a success.  
*Spend 24 hours in bed with someone, completely devouring each other until we can’t move  
*Change someone else’s life, for the better.

Written in a different handwriting at the bottom of the list was another.

*Be happy, because you deserve it.
Okay, so she wasn’t lying when she’d said that some of these were easily achievable. In fact depending on her confidence levels, most of them were very easily doable. And he couldn’t see how her doing any of these apart from the business, would change her life enough to make it feel worth living. But it obviously wasn’t the actual things themselves, but the idea that she’d made this list and hadn’t achieved it.

“Was Alex’s the same?” Spencer asked, looking at her.

She bit her lip and shook her head. “No. We only had one item which was the same. Hers were all way harder, like hiking to Everest Base Camp and running the Boston Marathon. And she completed everything on her list apart from marrying the love of her life and cruising the world, both of which she had booked in to do.”

“Wait….. Alex. Alexandra Novak right?”

Seeing Seph nod, Spencer recalled the article he’d read about the daughter of a British property mogul and the accident that had taken hers and her fiancé’s life six months ago. The accident had been horrific, a car crash that had had the pair trapped for hours before they were found barely breathing. Alex had died when the fire crew and paramedics had been trying to remove her from the vehicle, a rogue piece of debris puncturing her lung. Her fiancé Luke, had been in a coma on life support for seven weeks after, before his family had come to the decision to turn it off. Oh god….. The details had been all over the news, so there was no doubt that Persephone knew the excruciating pain her friend must have felt whilst waiting for be rescued.

He decided against commenting on the accident, there was no comforting words he could offer her now.

“You mentioned you’d achieved two of these already? Which two?”

“Seven and eight. Seven was the one thing on both of our lists…… ” The eye contact she made as she said that, told Spencer everything else he needed to know about that point.

“What languages can you speak? I’ve picked up a few over my time.”

“Italian…. Obviously. Although despite the name we’re as British as they come, very “more tea vicar”. And I can speak a fair bit of Russian. One of the girls I went to boarding school with was Russian and it interested me. “

“Да неужели” Spencer offered.

“Да, действительно. Не удивляйся так.” Seph countered, her accent better than his. She smiled slightly, seeing his face. She should do that more often Spencer thought.

“Okay…..I need to think about these but we can achieve some of these fairly easily and without too much effort.”

“Really? So are you going to do a sexy strip tease with me Spencer Reid?” She asked the corners of her mouth twitching upward still. She had a very pretty smile, one that Spencer knew could stop people dead when it reached her eyes. He’d seen enough pictures of it before in print.

“If that’s what it takes to keep you on the safe side of the bridge then yes.”

She laughed, totally indifferent to the mention of her planned suicide. Reid found people often were once they’d made the decision to end their lives.

Checking her watch she announced.
“Okay.. Well, best call a cab and get them to take me to the D.C Lux. It’s late.”

“NO!” Spencer blurted out, looking around sheepishly when he realised how loud he’d been.

“No?”

“Sorry…. It’s just. Well, I don’t really think you should be going off alone right now.”

“I’m not going to off myself tonight now. I’ve said I’ll give you until my birthday. You have my word. And considering what I’ve explained to you, that should mean a lot.”

“It does…. But. I still don’t feel comfortable with it. Look, you can have my bed tonight and I’ll take the couch. We can work something out tomorrow.”

“So are you planning on watching me like a hawk for the next 24 days then…… Cos I’ll bore you very quickly. I’m not terribly interesting and I’m relatively weird.”

“I like weird.” He nodded at her, somehow doubting she would bore him at all. He wasn’t planning on letting her out of his sight if he could help it, except to sleep and to go to the bathroom. Although, he’d need to move some things out of his bathroom. Just to be on the safe side.

She sighed. “Fine…..I’ll stay. But I’ll take the couch.”

“Nope sorry. My mother raised me to be a gentlemen. And you’re in luck, I changed the bed sheets this morning.” Suddenly thankful that he had.

“That’s a shame. I was going to inspect them for strange stains….. Sorry, you’ll come to realise I have a strange sense of humour.” She gave another laugh and stood.

“So, Spencer Reid who definitely does read. Show me to your bedroom.”
You’d slept strangely soundly for the first time in what seemed like months. Maybe there was something to be said for “talking about your problems.” You’d just never really felt comfortable discussing the dark thoughts that clouded your mind sometimes.

This wasn’t the first time in your life you’d had these thoughts. Despite growing up and having everything you asked for pretty much presented to you on a silver platter, you’d struggled a lot when you were a teenager. You’d had friends and had been relatively popular at the boarding school you’d been enrolled in. But it always felt like everyone had a preconceived idea of who you were and what you’d be like.

You struggled to show people the real you because you didn’t know who the real you was. When you were alone you’d sit and think, contemplating if you’d ever know what you wanted from life or who you were. One of the reasons you loved the Alice stories so much is because you’d always felt strangely connected to her, wandering through life quite lost and never knowing which direction you wanted to go in. Just that you wanted to go somewhere.

From a young age you’d been told you’d be joining the family business. It was only when you were thirteen that you realised you didn’t want that, but you didn’t know what you wanted to do instead. You were fairly certain you wanted to do something to do with art, you had a talent for drawing and designing. In fact when Lux had rebranded a few years ago, it had been your design used on the logo, one of the few times you’d ever shown an interest in the business.

You struggled to confide in people as well, Alex being the only truly close friend you’d had. It was her who you’d tell all your secrets to, her who you’d spent hours laughing with and her who’d found your dragging a razor blade across your thigh when you were fifteen. It was that night you’d made the lists together, her telling you that you needed to have something to aim for, something to work towards. She’d spent all night talking with you, crying when she realised what you’d been doing to yourself for months and asking you why.

You couldn’t answer her. Because you didn’t know explicitly why you’d started. Just that it helped in some small way. Seeing the little red beads of fluid escaping your skin somehow felt like you were releasing some of the pent up frustrations you felt but couldn’t verbalise. Frustrations that made no sense to anyone else, not even you sometimes.

“I just want to know who I actually am and not who I’m meant to be. I want to achieve things for me, not for my family or other people.” You’d told her.

“So let’s do it. Tell me what you want to do, anything. Big or small. We’ll put it on a list. And we’ll make a pact to do them all.” She’d said, pulling out her note book. And so the lists had been born. And you’d put the razor blades away and tried to banish the thoughts you’d been having.

When you’d left school and started university, the list had been pushed to the back of your mind. You’d gained your degrees in Art and Design and finally sat down and told your parents that you didn’t want to be part of Lux. They were disappointed, the whole family worked there and for their own daughter to tell them that they didn’t want their business was hurtful. You felt guilt tripped and that you were letting them down. So you’d relented, going to work in the head office in New York, drawing and designing in your spare time. You started designing dresses, putting them together in the evenings and working during the day. Dresses turned into purses and bags, you taking courses in leatherwork and tailoring to enhance your skills when you were able to.

When you started wearing your designs to work and out with friends, people started to
compliment them and ask you to design them things. It was only during another conversation with Alex that she convinced you to pursue this full time. So nearly three years ago on your 27th birthday, you had. You’d sat down with your parents again, telling them you wanted out of Lux and why. You wanted to set up your own clothing brand; The Damned Dead Queen. Your grunge style from your teenage years had stayed with you and the designs were aimed at that scene. After a lot of deliberation and discussion, they’d agreed.

Setting out conditions, they agreed to release you from your family obligation temporarily. They’d fund your lifestyle until your were thirty allowing you the time to set up a portfolio, gain clients and make a name and brand for yourself. If you hadn’t established the business successfully by the time you were thirty then you come back to Lux, or they cut you off completely. It might sound harsh to some, but it was their way. They wanted you to follow tradition but also didn’t wish to stifle your ambition anymore as they could see you wanted it. So you’d made the agreement with them, thankful to them for listening and understanding. Except it became clear over the two years that passed that they didn’t really understand, and expected you to fail.

You’d worked hard, had business meetings with fashion houses, your designs were being recognised on the Internet blog page you’d set up and you’d had interest, you’d even assembled a team of seamstresses ready to go to work as soon as they were needed. But then Alex had died. And you’d struggled to get out of bed for three months, shunning almost everyone in your life including your fiance Edward.

By the time you’d managed to pull yourself out of your funk, the interest had dried up. The companies you’d had meetings booked in with but hadn’t turned up to, now not willing to take your calls.

Not wanting to use your family name, when you’d registered TDDQ as a company and trademarked it, you’d used your first and middle name, Persephone Dawn. Perhaps in hindsight you should have used your family name, the companies would have taken your calls then you’d bet. But you’d wanted to do this yourself. And you’d failed drastically. Failing at life seeming your speciality. Exactly what your parents had expected of you.

Tonight though…. Had been interesting. And unexpected. When you’d come to the decision four weeks ago about what you were going to do about your predicament, you hadn’t expected to actually end up talking to anyone about it. The only person you would have told, was no longer around and if you were to believe in the afterlife, you’d be reunited with her soon enough anyway. You hadn’t expected anyone to be able to talk you out of it. And…. Well you guessed Spencer hadn’t really talked you out of it as such, your original deadline had been your birthday and it had only been shitty circumstances that had made you bring it forward to today.

But… In a way, talking about it out loud made it seem real. And all of a sudden dying seemed that bit more daunting. No less inviting, the complications of life vanishing completely. Just daunting.

Spencer Reid had been an unwelcome complication initially, interrupting your plans and refusing to leave you alone. But you’d be lying to yourself if you said you weren’t as intrigued by him as he obviously was you.

He was clearly a very intelligent man although most people coming across a suicidal woman would have called for help and for some reason, he hadn’t. Although his job must have given him some experience in what to do, he still should have called for assistance or taken you to the nearest psych ward. And he hadn’t, the reasons for why, you didn’t know.

As you lay in his bed, the early morning sunlight streaming through his curtains you wondered why he hadn’t. As a trained FBI agent you knew it wasn’t in his interest to take random strangers home. Was it because he knew who you were, had that influenced it? He’d said he’d needed a
purpose in life. Which was curious. He was thirty two, had a good job and was a genius, as well as being an extremely attractive man, something you’d only noticed when you’d got back to his apartment. Yet... he had no photos of family around his apartment and no mention of a significant other, past or present. He’d told you that you’d have killed his year if you’d have jumped and that he needed purpose in his life too. Which, as an FBI agent, surely he had? He caught serial killers and saved lives for a living. Maybe he was looking for something more from life too. There was definitely a story there, which considering he now knew the majority of yours, you hoped to find out. Tit for tat right?

He’d slept on the couch last night after showing you to his room and clattering about in his bathroom before leaving with a bag, pajamas and blankets. When you’d entered his bathroom to clean up, you could see straight away what he’d been doing. No razor blades to be seen anywhere. And Spencer was clean shaven.

When you peeked inside his medicine cabinet, you couldn’t see any painkillers or any pills either, although weirdly there didn’t actually seem to be any empty spaces for them to have been. He’d definitely removed his razors though, which made you chuckle. No, if you were going to do it, it wouldn’t be that way. Bleeding out took too long. And you certainly wouldn’t do it in someone else’s home.

You got the distinct feeling that he had no plan on leaving you alone until your birthday now, and you didn’t intend on taking up his bed for the next three weeks. You didn’t object to him keeping an eye on you for some reason. He seemed to genuinely care about you and had taken an interest, something you hadn’t felt for a while. You’d give him a shot to do the things he’d said he’d try to. If he succeeded, then maybe there was hope for this life yet, you’d doubted it though. If not, well you could go through with your original plan and have spent your last week’s in the company of someone who cared.

But if you spent three weeks with this man and he failed, could you really do that to him? That was a question you’d have to come back to. It seemed callous to allow someone to put energy into trying to save you just to do it anyway. But then again, you hadn’t asked him for help. It wasn’t your fault he’d found you and stuck his nose in.

You could hear movement coming from the kitchen, and decided to get up and see what today would bring. A new dawn, a new day and all that. And maybe you would end up feeling good.

Stranger things have happened.

But first to deal with the slew of messages on your phone. Ugh.
Chapter 7

Spencer had lain on the couch for a good hour or so before he’d finally drifted off to sleep. He couldn’t work out why he felt compelled to help this woman who he barely knew but he did. He should have called for assistance, he should have taken her to a hospital for professional help, but something told him that she wasn’t mentally unstable and he could help her himself.

What he was doing went against every bit of his FBI training and if he’d reacted this way when he was out in the field then he would be seriously reprimanded for becoming emotionally involved. Yet, he didn’t care. This had happened on his own time, off duty. If he forced himself to look at the situation from an outsiders view he knew he was doing this for his own selfish reasons. He needed purpose. If he could change her mind and stop Seph from taking her own life then it would make him feel better about his own. It would validate him somehow, make him think that he was making a difference in the world. And he needed that. Especially after the year he’d had.

A distraction would be good. And Persephone intrigued him, there was something about her, her situation, that made him want to help. Plus, anyone who could quote Alice at the drop of the hat was worth getting to know. Anyone into literature was worth getting to know in Spencers opinion. As he drifted off to sleep he wondered what else he’d find out about her.

…..

It took Spencer a few seconds to work out why he was on the couch, and why he could hear a female voice coming from his bedroom. Once the events of the previous evening… well a few hours ago really, came back to him he started to wonder what his plan would be.

First things first, he needed to talk to Hotch. Spencer rarely took vacation time anyway and often had HR on his back each year badgering him to take his accrued leave. He often did what Rossi did most years, giving away his time off to other agents with family. They needed it more than him and he only ever needed a few days to go and see his Mom each year.

He’d taken more time off this year with what had happened with Maeve but that had gone through as compassionate leave, not affecting his holiday allowance. And if he couldn’t get the time off at short notice, he’d take it unpaid. He had savings, his salary being topped up by a few casino wins here and there before he eventually got banned. His outgoings were so few compared to his incoming, his main outgoing being the cost of his Moms care facility. But that was worth it. No, he could afford time off. Hotch would understand, although he may need to adjust his story somewhat. He could imagine the disapproving look on his supervisors face. “Hey Aaron, I need three weeks off to save a hotel heiress that I found threatening to jump off a bridge last night. And by the way…. I took her home with me last night and made her sleep in my bed.” Yeah, that wouldn’t go down well at all.

He picked his phone up, checking the time and scrolling through his emails. Garcia had finally convinced him to get an email account, telling him that he absolutely needed it and that he was missing out. He spotted one from an old friend, one he’d replied to a while ago but hadn’t yet deleted.

Hmmm.

An idea came to mind that could just work but first he’d need more details from Seph.

Seph…
Bringing up Wikipedia, he searched her name, scanning through the facts that he knew and some that he didn’t. Persephone Dawn Bella-Morte, age 29. Born and raised in London, England. He knew that. He didn’t know that her degrees came from Oxford and that she more than one. Art and Design, and Business Development, her coming almost top of her graduating class in both.

Her surname came from her great grandparents who moved from Italy to London in the early 1900s. Her family had remained in London until around fifteen years ago, when they’d transferred the head office of Lux to New York, having opened a string of new Luxs’ over here. She’d joined them in the States after graduating from university taking over the role of Brand Manager from her much older Aunt who had held the position for thirty years. So her parents had listened in some way at least, giving her a job in the design field.

He went on to read about the changes she’d implemented herself, remembering the rebrand that Lux had undergone four years ago and realising that Seph had been responsible for the redesign, the new, contemporary logo being designed by her personally. Profits had increased almost immediately after the rebrand, the company now appealing to younger clientele as well as the older, loyal customers. She’d done a fair amount for the company in the small time she’d been there, it was no wonder her parents wanted her back.

Lifting himself off the couch and folding the blankets, he dragged his pajama pants back on and wandered into his kitchen, flicking the coffee machine on and searching for some bread to make toast with.

“Good morning Spender Reid.”

He jumped, the voice behind him startling him. He heard a giggle as he turned to his guest, seeing her stood in an oversized “The Used” t-shirt and nothing else. He couldn’t help but glance at her bare legs, the material of her t-shirt only just skimming the tops of her thighs.

“Do you wanna like… take a picture? It’ll last longer.”

Shit… She’d seen. His faced flushed and he met her eyes, seeing an amused expression on her face. Not one of annoyance though. Her face was now completely free of all make up, her green eyes standing out against her auburn hair which was tied up messily.

“Spencer Reid, your bed is the comfiest bed ever. I slept so well and really did not want to get out of it. But….. I have. And now I need a shower.”

“Shower…. “ For a man so intelligent, he definitely sometimes struggled around attractive women. And having one stood almost naked in his kitchen seemed to have lowered his IQ significantly.

“Yes shower….I know you have one. I’ve seen it. But I didn’t want to just assume I could us it. Plus, I need towels. And a hair dryer if you have one.”

Shaking his head slightly his brain now comprehending what she was saying. “Yes yes, shower. That’s fine. Towels are in the cupboard to the left of the bathroom. And the hairdryer is in the drawer to the right of my bed.”

“Thanks! Be back in twenty.” She bounded off to his bathroom, stopping by the cupboard on her way. Peering after her, he saw the bottom of her shirt lift up slightly as she reached into the cupboard.

She was wearing panties, thank fuck for that.

“I told you, take a picture, it’ll last longer…. ” She called out, obviously feeling his eyes on her.
She grinned at him before slipping into his bathroom, the shower starting seconds later.

She seemed much more happy today, a total 180 from the women he’d come across last night. Was it the fact she’d talked about her issues that had caused the complete flip in personality? It wasn’t enough of a flip for him to wonder about her being manic depressive. He’d seen traits of the chirpiness and humour last night when they’d been talking. Whatever it was, he was pleased.

He set about making two coffees, remembering how she took hers and making himself some toast to go with it. Settling down, he busied himself with eating, not looking up when heard his bathroom door open and close, followed quickly by his bedroom door. A few minutes later, the sound of a hair dryer through the walls.

She emerged fifteen minutes later, dragging her suitcase. She was dressed in dark blue skinny jeans, an oversized tank top layered on top of another top, and a checked shirt, the buttons undone and sleeves rolled up. Her hair was pulled to the side, a loose braid over one shoulder and she wore a pair of black rimmed glasses. She looked totally different and around ten years younger than what she had last night. She caught him looking at her again.

“What?” She asked, eyeing the cup of coffee he’d put out for her and taking it gratefully.

“You look different is all.”

“Meh, I look like this most of the time to be honest. I’m comfy.” She laughed, sitting down on his couch and crossing her legs beneath her before pulling out her two phones.

“Everything okay?” Spencer asked seeing her wrinkle up her nose at whatever was on her screen.

“Yep… Just. I had to make some calls this morning. Edward had left about six hundred messages as had my parents. I’ve filled them in on the Edward situation and told them I’ll be in D.C for a while, hanging out with a friend. And then I finally called him back and told him to remove his things from my apartment before I get back there. Of course he tried to weasel his way out, blaming me and my lack of interest in him recently. Whatever. Don’t care. Just want him to move his shit out of my home.” she took a long swig of her coffee.

“How are you feeling about ‘things’ today?” He winced at how loaded the question sounded, seeing her raise her eyes at it.

“If by ‘things’ you mean the wanting to throw myself of a bridge? Meh…. I’m not thinking about it currently. You said you wanted to fix my life. Sooo fix it. For the next twenty three days, my life is totally in your hands.” She saw the daunted look on his face.

“Scary isn’t it. Thinking how the next twenty three days will decide if I live or die. Sure you still want to take this on? I can walk away today Spencer Re… Spencer. You don’t have any obligation to me. I’ll even do it in another State and leave a clear note saying it was intentional.”

She was giving him an out. The opportunity to back out of the offer he’d made to try to change her life. To make her life worth living in some way. No. He couldn’t. Because if he opened a newspaper and saw her suicide a headline, he’d never forgive himself for not trying. He had to do this, and he wanted to do this. There was something about her that screamed at him, telling him she was meant to be alive.

“I don’t back out of things Seph. If I say I’ll do something, I do it. I want to change your mind about this. Life can be beautiful. But sometimes, we forget. Sometimes I forget too.”

“Then okay. I’ll give you your chance, and I’ll give it my best shot to embrace whatever it is you’ve got planned. But I’m not staying in your apartment for three weeks.”
Yes, that could be an issue. He’d already thought of that this morning when he’d woken up. His couch wasn’t overly comfortable but he couldn’t expect her to sleep on the couch either.

“I kinda get the feeling you’re not going to let me go off myself and get a hotel right?”

He shook his head at her.

“Figured as much…. So, fancy moving out of here for three weeks? I checked this morning and we can rent an apartment in the centre of D.C, relatively close to where you work actually. The sort they rent out for businesses and stuff. I’ll pay, well my parents will pay, seeing as I’ve got you into this mess. And you’ll be closer to work too.”

“That doesn’t matter, I won’t be going in. In fact, I need to go in and speak to my boss at some point today.”

Persephone’s eyes widened slightly and then quickly returned to their normal size. “Is that a yes then?”

Spencer nodded again. Being on completely neutral ground may actually prove more beneficial for the both of them.

“Okay. So you go shower, and pack some stuff. And I will make some phone calls and get our new digs sorted out.”

Reid stood, picking up his plate and empty coffee mug, returning them to the kitchen before making his way to his bathroom.

A voice stopped him. “Spencer Reid?”

“Hmmmm?” He didn’t turn, sensing somehow that she didn’t want him to look at her.

“Thanks. For….. caring. Maybe if I’d met someone like you months ago, I wouldn’t have ended up there in the first place.”

He heard the catch in her voice, before I took a deep breath and collected herself.

“Right, phone calls. Luxury accommodation coming up!” Sunshine back in her voice.

Spencer carried on towards his bathroom…

…..
“Wow. This is where we’re staying?” Spencer let out a low breath as he looked around the airy loft apartment you’d taken him to.

You’d called your parents personal secretary Andrea this morning, asking her to find suitable accommodation in the city for two people for three weeks. She’d called back thirty minutes later with an address. Spencer had packed some belongings, and you’d made your way into the city. Andrea had excelled herself, the apartment was huge and on the top floor of an old converted warehouse by the looks of it. It had its own private balcony and when you saw the hot tub, you wanted to fly back to New York and kiss her. It had two large bedrooms next to each other, both with their own en-suites. Your parents must have been feeling sorry for you after hearing about Edward, to allow Andrea the spend this much money on temporary accommodation. It had been costing a bomb, not that it would make any real dent in their wealth.

Before you’d set off, Spencer had asked if he could look at some of your designs. You showed him the few pieces of clothing and accessories that you’d made that you had with you along with the mini portfolio that you carried everywhere.

“So erm…. Choose a bedroom and get unpacked I guess. Andreas having a delivery of groceries sent over for 6pm so we need to be back here for then, but then we can go out and you can start to show me what a wonderful world we live in.” The last part came out more sarcastically than you’d intended.

“I’ll take the one to the left. And I need to pop into headquarters, but it’s within walking distance. Your secretary did good. Does she know where I work?” Spencer asked, his brow furrowed obviously wondering how much you’d told them.

“Nope, I just asked her to look for somewhere in the centre of the city. And erm… Do I have to come with you?”

“Yes…. I’m still not sure I trust you being your by yourself.”

“You need to learn trust me Spencer Reid. I have no plans on offing myself for another 23 days at least. Promise, scouts honour.” You made the scouts signal with your hand, seeing the corners of his lips twitch up.

“Buuutt… I am kinda curious as to where you work. Can I watch you cuff someone and interrogate them…. Which reminds me, why do you have cuffs in your bedside cabinet? Are you really that kinky, cos you definitely don’t come across like that.” You watched his jaw drop and his cheeks turn bright red.

“W-w-w-what… W-w-w-why… Erm… Um… Ugh.. ” He was kinda cute when he stuttered.

“I opened the wrong drawer when I was looking for the hair dryer…..”

“I…I… I’m g-gonna go unpack.” He spun on his heel dragging his suitcase behind him.
“Spencer…. I didn’t actually look in the wrong drawer. Got the right drawer on the first try. I’m messing with you, I told you last night I have a weird sense of humour.”

“Fuck.” You heard him mutter under his breath. You laughed.

“Kinda wish I had opened the other drawer though now. Wonder what else was in there?”

You saw him shake his head slightly before continuing into the bedroom, you following suit and heading into the other.

Throwing things into drawers and wardrobes, you unpacked quickly and wandered into the bedroom next door when you were finished.

Spencer jumped again when he turned from hanging up with clothes, seeing you standing there.

“Do you ever actually announce your presence in a room, or do you just like to give people mini heart attacks.” He asked.

“Sorry…..I’ll try to make more noise next time. Are you about done? I’m bored.”

“Two minutes and I’ll be done.” He went back to putting his belongings away and you walked over to his bed and flung yourself down on it.

“Where are you from Spencer Reid?”

“Are you going to stop calling me that?” He asked, pulling another cardigan onto a hanger.

“Maybe…..What do you prefer. Spencer? Reid? I know FBI agents and cops sometimes use their last names. Spence?” You kinda liked using his whole name though. It rolled nicely off your tongue. Although he had stopped calling you Persephone. Most of the time at least.

“Anything…. Spencer or Spence is fine. “Reid” just reminds me of being at work. Just stop using my full name please. And to answer your question, I’m from Vegas.“

“Vegas Baby, Vegas? You’re a genius right, can you count cards?”

“Why does everyone assume that because I’m from Las Vegas and I’m a genius, that I can count cards.” He folded a pair of jeans, sliding them into a drawer.

“Can you?” You rolled over into your back, your head dangling off the edge of the bed slightly.

“Yes.”

“Can you teach me?”

“Why would you want to be able to count cards? Your family’s loaded. Plus, it’s not on your list, so no.”

“What if I add it to my list? And while I’m at it, I might add experimenting with the handcuffs I’m now sure you have in your bedside cabinet.”

He dropped the shirt he was holding onto the floor, hurriedly bending down and retrieving it.

“You don’t like it when I flirt with you do you? And…. That’s their money. Teach me to count cards and win at black jack and I’ll have my own money.”
“It’s not that I don’t like it… I’m just not sure how to take your ‘flirting’. Women don’t flirt with me. As for the blackjack thing, I’m banned from a lot of casinos.” His suitcase was nearly empty now.

“If you have handcuffs in your bedside cabinet, then I’m quite certain that woman do flirt with you. And take my flirting, any way you want to Spence.”

You tried out the shorter version of his name seeing how it sound on your lips. It amused you, seeing him mildly uncomfortable by your suggestive remarks. You were naturally a very flirty person, most of the time not meaning anything by it. You were sure he must find the change in your manner odd though. Going from suicidal damsel in distress last night to outrightly flirting with him.

“I’m sure we can find some you’re not banned from. Teach me. Teach me how to play poker too.”

“You don’t know how to play poker?”

“Nope.” You popped the p seeing that he was done unpacking and holding your arms ups. “Pull me up please.”

He sighed and leant over the bed, grabbing your hands and tugging you to your feet.

Hmm. His grip was strong yet gentle at the same time and as you stood, you wobbled slightly, grabbing his upper arm to steady yourself. Spencer looked wirey and lanky but you could definitely feel tone and muscle. You bet he had nice arms under the dark green cardigan he was wearing.

“I’ll teach you to play poker and count cards in two months time okay?”

“Nice try Spence…. But I’ll hold you to that, if I’m still here.”

“And I’ll do it. I promise, if you’re still here.”

He looked down at your, his hazel eyes searing into yours. He had pretty eyes, expressive ones. In fact his entire face was expressive, although if he was banned from casinos he must have one hell of a poker face.

“Ready to go? You can’t quite watch me cuff someone, but I’ll show you around the office. If I remember rightly, only a few of the team will be in today anyway.” He said, his hands still holding your arms.

“How do you know they’re not out on a case? That’s what the BAU does right? Goes out into the field to catch killers and stuff. I did my own Googling this morning.”

“I messaged my supervisor early. He’s in, they haven’t got a case today. And yes, we spend a lot of time out in the field. But there’s also an alarming amount of paperwork that has to be done on a weekly basis. And we do other stuff like lecture at schools, mentor new recruits, review cold cases.”

“Sounds interesting.”

“It is. Now let’s go.”

Quickly grabbing your bag from the living area, you followed Spencer out of the building and onto the streets. Hopefully, his colleagues wouldn’t ask too much about what he was doing with
Because you were fairly certain that he’d be in serious trouble if the truth came out.

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter 9

The walk to the BAU headquarters took twenty minutes, both Seph and Spencer wrapping up warm against the cool November air. Despite the bright sunshine, it was freezing out and the unlikely pair walked quickly through the streets, Reid leading the way.

They stopped off at a local coffee house for a quick bite to eat and a coffee, Seph asking questions along the way.

Spencer found himself telling her more about his life than he ever normally told someone he’d only just met. She listened intently to him and Spencer could see her processing the information he was giving her. He knew he was rambling as he told her about his teenage years and his mother’s condition, surprised that these details were all coming out.

“Does it worry you? Knowing that it’s hereditary?” She asked him quietly.

“Sometimes yes. About two years ago, I started to get really terrible migraines and the doctors couldn’t find anything wrong. I kept think….. is this the start of it? Am I gonna end up like my Mom, completely lucid one minute and then a totally different person the next.”

“Did they find out what was causing them in the end?”

“Nope. Which made me worry even more. So I made contact with a geneticist to see if she could figure it out.”

“I’m guessing she couldn’t?”

“No but after talking to her, the headaches stopped. I haven’t had them as bad as that since. I mean, I still get headaches occasionally but they’re just the normal ones that everyone would get.”

Spencer could see headquarters approaching in this distance, and quickened his pace wanting to get in from the cold. He felt a tug on his arm.

“Slow down… You’re like almost a foot taller than me, one of your steps equals two of mine.”

He slowed his pace again, muttering a sorry under his breath.

“S’okay. I’m cold too. So do you still speak to her if you don’t have the headaches anymore?”

“No. I can’t. She…. she’s dead.” The BAU almost in sight and then he could stop this conversation before it when any further.

“Oh. Erm…..I’m no profiler but….um. I sense a story. But one that you don’t want to tell. So, I won’t push. If she was helping you though, then I’m sorry she’s no longer here.”

“Thank you. We’re here anyway.”

Spencer led her through the doors, flashing his ID badge at security and quickly filling out a visitors form her Seph.

“What name do I put down for you? Are you okay with people knowing who you are and that you were here?” He asked her, suddenly thinking how weird it would look if she did go ahead with her original plan and they somehow checked the visitor records and saw she was here as his guest. Shit. Maybe he should have left her at the apartment. Still…. They were here.
“Just put Seph Dawn, it’s the name I use if I’m attempting to be incognito. It’s not like I, personally am well known. It’s that stupid surname. Why couldn’t I have something normal and boring like Reid?”

He handed her the visitors pass, raising his eyebrows at her comment.

“Not that I think your name is boring…aw crap. Spencer definitely isn’t a boring name, it’s a really nice name.. And Reid isn’t boring either, it’s just, not…. Well it’s not the sort of name that makes people laugh like mine does…. I’m rambling, I’ll shut up.”

Spencer chuckled. “It’s nice to meet another rambler. People get annoyed with me all the time, especially my work colleagues. I can’t help it though. When I’m nervous I just talk and then I lose track of what I was originally talking about. I can actually see people shutting down and switching off, but I can’t stop.”

He led her into the elevators, selecting the floor he needed.

“I could quite happily listen to you ramble Spencer Reid. I like listening to interesting people talk.” Seph unzipped her coat, the heat from the building now beginning to seep through her layers and warming her.

“You think I’m interesting?”

“Don’t you?” Seeing the surprised look on his face she continued.

“Not many people, FBI Agent or not, would do what you did last night Spencer. Not many people who offer to do what you’re attempting to do either. So yes, I find it interesting and curious as to why you have, and I’m very interested in learning more about you. Plus….. You have a nice voice.”

“Most people find it annoying.” He could feel himself blushing slightly, not used to compliments.

“I’m not most people.”

No, she definitely wasn’t. And it wasn’t because of her name that he thought that either. Reid was somehow drawn to her, he felt connected to her. Whilst, not on the same level as her, Spencer had had thoughts before. Wonderings of what it would be like if he wasn’t here. But he didn’t dwell of them for too long. Unlike Seph who had dwelled on them long enough to want to make it a reality.

“What’s our story anyway?” The elevator came to and halt and the doors slid open.

“Story?” Reid asked.

“Well won’t your colleagues wonder how we met. Something tells me you don’t routinely bring random girls into work with you.”

Good point. And one he should have thought of long before now.

“Hey Genius! I though Hotch was making you take time off? What are you doing in?” The chirpy voice and the BAU’s technical analyst Penelope Garcia filled his ear, and he turned to see her standing next to him, a box of files in her arms.

“I am. That’s why I’m here. I need to talk to him. Is he in his office?” he was very conscious of Garcia’s eyes drifting over to Seph, a curious look on her face.
“Of course. Rossis in there with him though.” She was now openly staring at his companion.

“Alex, Morgan and JJ are out today aren’t they?” He asked her, praying that their guest spot at the local college hadn’t been cancelled. He could just about handle Penelope, but wasn’t sure he could deal with Morgans questions right now.

“They are indeed. Now… Erm. Who’s this? You’re being very rude Dr Reid. Introduce me to your friend, whose bag I have to say, I adore.” Garcias eyes had drifted to the hand bag Persephone was carrying.

“I’m Seph. Hi.” She gave a little wave, similar to one Spencer himself would normally give.

“Seph this our Technical Analyst Penelope Garcia.”

“Technical Analyst? Technical goddess more like. How many times have I saved your life from the comfort of my computer chair Spencer?…. I deserve a better introduction than that.” She slapped him playfully on the arm, smiling at him before looking back at Seph.

“Okay fine! I’m sorry.” He laughed at the little pout of his colleagues face. “This is Penelope Garcia, soul saviour of the BAU and the very heart of our team. Better?”

“Much…..You go through and see the boss man. I’m going to drill Seph for details on how you two know each other and why I do not know about her.”

“There’s nothing to know Pen.”

“Oh sweetie, this is the first time you’ve bought a girl into work with you, there’s always something to know.”

He should have definitely left her at the apartment. He shot Seph a look, her tilting her head slightly at him. ‘Go’ she seemed to be saying ‘I’ll be fine’.

“Okay. I won’t be long.” He started to walk through the bull pen and up to his bosses office, hearing Penelope pulling Persephone along with her to Spencers desk.

“Sit sit…. Now how do you know our resident boy genius?” He could hear her asking.

“We erm, old friends. We met a few years ago in a bookstore and exchanged details ….. We lost touch for a while, only reconnecting recently.” Nicely done Seph, met in the bookstore. Just please don’t weave too elaborate a tale, he thought to himself before knocking on his bosses door.

“Come in.”

He entered, seeing his Supervisor Aaron Hotchner behind his desk, and Agent David Rossi sitting opposite, piles of paperwork between them. Cold cases, Reid saw recognising one the names.

“Sir…. I was hoping I could talk two you about the personal time you suggested I take. I…. erm, I’d like to extend it and use the rest of my owed vacation time.”

Reid pulled up a seat next to Rossi, seeing his boss studying him carefully.

“Is there any specific reason for this Dr Reid? Dave, do you mind excusing us for a few moments.” Agent Hotchner spoke to the other agent obviously deciding that he needed to speak with Reid in private. It wasn’t often Spencer asked to take time off so his request must have alarmed him somewhat.

Rossi stood to leave but Reid held his hand up. “Rossi it’s fine. There’s nothing I can’t say to
Hotch that I can’t say in front of you. I just… need some personal time is all. I know it’s short notice and I’ll take it unpaid if I have too, but somethings come up that I need to deal with. And it’s going to take me a while to deal with. I can still consult on things if it’s urgent, but I’d need to do it from home.”

Please don’t ask questions, please please please.

“Is it your Mother Spencer? Has something happened?” Aaron watched his reactions carefully and Spencer worked hard on keeping a neutral expression. He shook his head.

“It’s nothing to do with my Mom. It’s… erm a friend, who needs help with something.” She was kinda a friend right? They were going to be spending the next three weeks together at least. That wasn’t something you did with someone who wasn’t a friend.

“Does this friend happen to be the Bella-Morte you walked in with?” Rossi piped up glancing at Reid’s face.

How the hell could he tell? She looked totally different from her publicity pictures.

“Didn’t think we’d notice kid?”

“Nope. How for you know she’s a Bella-Morte though?”

“I know her father. I’m Italian, her family is Italian… well the name is. I’ve been to a few of their Galas and Charity events in my time. The question is… How do you know her. What is Dr Spencer Reid doing with Persephone Bella-Morte?”

Spencer glanced between the two profilers wondering how much to say. It wasn’t his story to tell and it definitely was not his place talk about it with someone who knew her father.

“Reid?” Hotch questioned.

“I met her last night okay. And I’m helping her with some issues. Some personal issues.”

“Personal issues that her family or fiance can’t help her with?” Rossi shot back.

“Ex fiance. And no, they can’t.” Spencer folded his arms across his chest, glancing out of the office window and seeing Seph and Garcia still deep in conversation, Garcia admiring the bag again.

The two men exchanged looks, unable to hide their concern and wondering what their coworker had gotten himself into.

“Look it’s nothing bad okay. It’s nothing illegal, nothing that’s going to cause problems for me.” Well, providing his plan worked. “I just met her last night and got talking to her and it turns out we have some things in common. She’s going through some things and I offered to help. Now can I have the time off as vacation or not?”

“And if I say no? And refuse to process the request for unpaid leave?” Hotch looked out of the window, watching Persephone interact with Penelope.

“Hotch this is important to me. This is something I need to do and I will do it. I’ll write my notice out, it’s that important.”

It was. It really was.
“Spencer, I’ll grant your request. But will you ask your friend if she’ll come in here and speak with me privately for a moment?”

“Okay. But she might not want to.”

“That’s fine. Ask her please. Dave, I’ll need you to leave to if she comes in.”

Spencer left the room, asking Seph if she’d speak with his boss. She looked confused but agreed and followed him to the office.

“Persephone, long time no see. How’s your father?” Rossi greeted the girl, leaning in and kissing her cheek.

“He’s good, thanks Dave, he missed you at the black and white ball. ” She smiled at the older man, her eyes shifting to Hotch cautiously.

“Ah well, saving lives sometimes gets in the way of me having a good time. I’ll hopefully make the next one. Spencer, shall we wait outside?”

He left the room reluctantly, wanting to hover outside the closed door until Rossi led him away to where Garcia was still seated.

He barely paid attention to her questions, him wondering what the hell Aaron was asking her.

They emerged fifteen minutes later, Hotch escorting her back to the bull pen.

“Persephone, I wish you luck with your endeavors and hope that you’ll return our resident genius to us in one piece.”

“Persephone? You’re The Damned Dead Queen? That’s how you have that bag, you made it. I follow your blog! Oh honey, you need to bump me up your waiting list for one of these babys.” Garcia exclaimed excitedly as Hotch pulled Spencer off to one side.

“What did she tell you?” He asked nervously.

“That you found her hanging off the side of a bridge and that you’ve made it your personal mission to save her.” His Supervisor spoke quietly, his tone neutral.

“Reid, whilst I applaud you for trying to do what you think to be the right thing here, you’re surely aware that this could and possibly will end badly?”

“I am. But I have to try right? It’s like I was there for a reason. And you know I don’t believe in fate. If I fail, then I fail, but I have to try.”

“To try and fail is acceptable, but to fail without trying isn’t. Do what you have to do Reid, I’ll grant you the rest of your holiday. But be careful. Please.”

“I will. Thank you Sir.” He started to walk away from his boss, Seph seeing this and breaking away from Rossi and Garcia and making her way towards him ready to leave.

“Oh and Spencer?” Hotch called after him, stopping him in his tracks.

“To me, this is very clearly about Maeve.”
Chapter 10

You followed Spencer out of his office quickly, seeing the unhappy look on his face.

Something his supervisor had said had obviously annoyed him and he stalked away from his boss without a backwards glance.

You hurried after him as he hit the pavement outside, his long legs putting him strides ahead of you.

“Spencer….. SPENCER.” He didn’t respond and he didn’t slow down either.

“SPENCER REID.”

He stopped and you caught up with him finally.

“Are you okay? Stupid question actually, you’re clearly not.”

“I just want to get back to the apartment.” He started walking again, his pace slightly slower than before to allow you to walk in line with him.

“Who’s Maeve?” You asked quietly.

“What?”

“To me, this is very clearly about Maeve. That’s what your boss said. Who is Maeve, and what does he mean?” You’d seen the expression on his face change when Agent Hotcher had mentioned that name and you knew it was that which had triggered his reaction.

“I don’t want to talk about it here.”

“But you will tell me about it? Because the way he said it makes me think he means you’re only helping me because of her, whoever she is. I want to know why.”

“Later maybe. Look, can we please just get home. It’s five already. Didn’t you say the food delivery would be here soon?”

You nodded.

“Okay, later.”

………

It was much later when you saw Spencer again. You’d gotten back to the apartment and he’d gone straight to the bedroom he’d chosen for the next three weeks and shutting the door hard.

Considering how reluctant he’d been to leave you in the apartment alone, you’d been very surprised that he’d shut himself away. He must be upset but you didn’t know him well enough to know whether you should pry or not. You chose to leave him alone for a while, accepting the grocery delivery Andrea had arranged for you and unpacking it, pouring yourself a glass of wine as you put everything away. Andrea had thought of everything, all the basic food items plus toiletries like bubble baths and soaps.

Feeling at a loss, you decided to have a bath, taking the wine bottle into the bathroom with you.
The tub was huge and as you slid under the bubbles you felt a sense of calm settling over you. You loved the bath, you could spend hours in one just reading or thinking, occasionally falling asleep and waking up to cold water. Closing your eyes you felt yourself drifting off and decided to just let the tiredness over take you.

When you woke up, a good hour and a half had passed. You quickly washed your hair and shaved your legs, wrapping yourself in the towels the apartment rental company had provided and heading back to your room to moisturise and get changed. You slipped into the oversized t-shirt you slept in, pulling a pair of sleep shorts on too and wandered back to the living area. The door to Reid's room was still closed, he’d been in there for a good three hours now. Time to intervene. You grabbed another wine glass, tucking the bottle under your arm and went to knock on his door. Not hearing an answer you tentatively turned the handle to the door pushing it open.

He was lying on his bed on his side, music playing quietly on the laptop he’d bought with him from his home. Mozart, you recognised. Although Spencer's eyes were closed, you could tell he wasn’t asleep.

Placing the two glasses and the bottle on the bedside table, you crawled on the bed next to him and lay behind him. Unsure how to proceed at first, you made a judgement call and scooted closer to him.

Reaching out with your hand you began stroking his arm gently seeing him stiffen to begin with. You continued, remembering how Alex used to climb into bed and do this to you whenever you were feeling down. She didn’t have to say anything, but you knew she was there and that made all the difference.

He slowly began to relax and after a while you wriggled closer still so that you were almost spooning him, but not quite touching him. Although properly spooning him would have been out of the question anyway, him being too tall. You let your arm drop, your hand resting near his, not quite sure whether you should take it into yours as Alex would normally have done.

“Sorry.” He whispered quietly, his voice slightly croaky.

“You don’t have anything to be sorry about Spencer Reid.”

“Yes I do. I shouldn’t have taken you with me, shouldn’t have let Hotch interrogate you like I’m sure he did.”

You flexed your fingers slightly feeling for his wrist in the dark and tentatively stroking the little bone that jutted out.

“He didn’t interrogate me. He was concerned about you and why you suddenly felt compelled to take time off work and help someone you barely knew. So I told him the basics. He assured me he wouldn’t say anything to anyone but that he’d strongly recommended that I seek professional help and guidance from someone other than you.”

“He said that?” Although his voice was still barely above a whisper, you could still detect the annoyance in it.

“He said you’d had a rough enough year already and that if you became attached to me and couldn’t save me, then it would pretty much break you. Not in those exact words but that was the gist. He was very nice about it and offered to put me in touch with a professional. I don’t want that though. But I don’t want you to feel that you have to do this. He was right. We barely know each other. Aside from what Google will have told us. If you want to leave then leave. You don’t owe me anything, Spencer.”
“I don’t want you to kill yourself. Please don’t do it.”

“I can’t say that I won’t. Because it feels like the best way out still. An end to the disappointment that is my life. An end to the feelings of worthlessness and failure. And an end to feeling like I have to please everyone else but myself.”

“You don’t have to feel that way though. You’re not a failure. You at least tried. Some people don’t even manage that.”

“I do feel that way though. I’m just tired of trying. Tired of existing..... If it means anything to you though, I’m glad you found me last night. It’s enlightening to know that some stranger would stop and actually act like they care about me.”

It was, and it was one of the only things making you reconsider your choice.

You’d known Spencer Reid for less than 24 hours but you knew that if you went ahead with your original plan, it would impact on him. Nevermind what it would do to your friends and family. You’d gotten over that four weeks ago when you’d come to the decision that you were going to end your life. But this kind hearted stranger who taken you into his home and was willing to give up three weeks of his life trying to change your mind.....

That bothered you. More than you wanted to admit.

"I’m not acting Persephone. I do care. I think you could have a fantastic life if you wanted to. You could make it fantastic."

Your hand found his in the dark, you sliding your fingers through his and squeezing.

“I don’t know how to though.”

“Which is why I’m going to help you. I said that I would and I’m not backing out. Regardless of what Hotch thinks. He may be may be right but I need to try. In fact, Hotch summed this up himself. ‘To try and fail is acceptable, but to fail without trying is not.’ So I’m going to try to change your life. Starting with tonight.”

He squeezed your hand back before pulling away from you and rolling off the bed. Standing up, he moved to the chest of drawers and picked up a wooden box.

“You wanted to learn to play chess right? Let’s go. Let’s cross the first item off your list.”

Chess. Well, it was on your list. Why you’d added it when you were fifteen, you didn’t know. But it was there, and you had a man willing to teach you how.

“Okay. But first. Food. I need something to soak up the wine if I’m going to learn how to kick someone’s ass at a game.”

He laughed. “The only way you’d win, is if I let you. But I’ll go easy on you to begin with.”

“I’d much prefer it if you went hard on me, Spencer Reid.” You purred in your best flirtatious voice, grinning at him.

He just laughed, the sadness from earlier evaporating.

“Come on Persephone” He emphasised your name. “Let’s get some food. I’ll begin on easy, and then if you can handle the pressure, I’ll go harder.” He raised his eyebrows at you and your grin grew wider.
So the boy could flirt after all. Nice.

You crawled off his bed and followed him to the kitchen. You’d press him for details on this Maeve person another time.
Chapter 11

A hour later, and Spencer and Seph were sitting outside on the balcony, heating lamps turned on to ward off the autumn chill, a bottle of wine and a chess board between them on the table.

Spencer set the board up, Seph watching him intently her legs crossed underneath her on the chair and a blanket she’d found in one of the closets wrapped around her shoulders. They had a quick dinner of pasta and chicken, Seph melting cream cheese and using it to flavour the pasta.

Spencer could tell that Persephone had wanted more details about Maeve and why it had caused him to storm off when Hotch had bought her up. Shutting himself off from her as they got back to their home away from home, he’d thought back to his bosses words, realising that to some extent he was right. He hadn’t been able to save Maeve, he’d done his best to negotiate with her killer but she’d seen through his ruse and pulled the trigger anyway. This was a different situation, he was trying to save someone from themselves rather than another person even though he knew that really, the only person who could truly save Persephone was herself. But essentially it was the same thing. Spencer Reid trying to come to the rescue. He wondered how badly this would break him if he failed. And that was why Hotch was worried about him.

He’d been surprised when she’d joined him on his bed, her touch startling him initially but then calming and soothing him. He would normally have shrugged anyone else touching him off and asked them to leave him alone. But she’d left him alone for long enough and well, he needed to stop brooding. The incident had happened ten months ago now, but it still cut like a knife to the bone whenever someone mentioned her.

Surveying the chess board in front of him, he took a sip of his wine before glancing at his opponent.

“How much do you know about chess?” He asked Seph, wanting to gage her knowledge first.

“That I have to check mate someone? And to protect my King at all costs right?”

“Kind of.” Spencer went on to explain the basics and how the game worked, surprised to see that her eyes didn’t glaze over as people’s normally did when he talked about a topic for any length of time. She actually looked interested, leaning forward in her seat and interrupting him to ask questions if she didn’t understand something.

“The important thing to remember is that you shouldn’t be trying to check mate your opponent in the opening. You should be focusing on getting your pieces to their optimal places on the board. You ready to try?”

“Ready as I’ll ever be Spencer Reid. Just… Go easy on me.” She wriggled on her seat, uncrossing and recrossing her legs.

“I thought you didn’t want that Persephone.” The emphasis on her full name again. He could see this was now going to be their thing. Wow… Knowing someone for 24 hours and already having a thing. Hopefully a thing that wouldn’t be over in 23 days.

“I see you’ve chosen to take my flirting in the good way.” She grinned at him and took a gulp of wine.

He nodded at her, a slight smile on his lips. He had chosen to take her flirting in a positive way. Initially he’d felt awkward and wasn’t sure how to take her remarks, but seeing the smile on her
face when he bantered back was worth any awkwardness he felt. It was a smile that reached her
eyes too, not one that looked false and plastered on.

“Okay so white goes first so I’ll move okay. Just ask if you’re not sure and I’ll try to hint at what
you should do without out rightly telling you.”

He moved his first piece, waiting for her move.

…..

Three hours later and Seph was staring intently at the chess board. They’d played through three
games already, she’d picked it up quickly after the first go and Spencer was actually enjoying
playing against her.

It was rare he lost a game of chess, the only person who’d been able to beat him had been Gideon.
Normally he was very good at anticipating an amateurs next move, having already mapped out the
game in his head. Seph wasn’t playing like an amateur though. He could see her studying the
board, her lips moving as she recounted the rules in her head, running through her possible moves.
And when she did move, it was often the opposite to how he’d expected her to go, causing him to
actually have to think his turn through. A bit more practice and she could actually turn out to be a
formidable player. But she wasn’t going to win tonight. Nope.

She moved and he checked the board seeing what she hadn’t. Three moves later and “Check
mate.” He had her King trapped, with no available moves on her side.

She let out a groan of frustration, closing her eyes briefly. When she opened them she stared at
him. “I thought I might have had you then. But I doubted myself and went a different way.”

She thought she might have had him?

“Show me what you would have done differently.”

She reset the board back to two moves prior and showed him.

“I thought if I moved this piece to here” She mimicked her actions on the board “Then you would
have had to move here, and then I could have moved this piece to that square and checked you.
But I couldn’t remember if it was an illegal move or not and I didn’t want to ask.”

This girl would definitely be a formidable player after a few more practices.

“You should have gone with your instincts Seph. If you’d have done that, then I would have lost
for the first time in five years….. To an amateur as well. Wow.” He couldn’t hide the astonishment
from his voice.

“Can we play again another day?” She asked.

“We definitely can. But I have to say, I’m exhausted. Which is my only excuse for not being able
to see that move you could have pulled in the first place. And it’s quite late. So bed? Tomorrow
we’ll see about how we can accomplish some of these other points okay.”

“Okay.”

Spencer stood to go inside, packing up the chess pieces and board. Seph made no move to follow
him. He turned to her about to say something when she beat him to it.

“I’m just gonna stay out for a bit longer okay. It’s nice out here. Don’t worry, I won’t fling myself
over the edge, I promise.” She gave him a small smile, pulling the blanket around her tighter.

“Okay…..let me know if you need anything.”

Her mood seemed to have dropped suddenly and he sensed that she wanted to be alone for a bit. He didn’t think she’d try anything, him now believing that she would keep her word.

Just as he was about to go through the door, he heard her say to him softly “Thank you.”

……..

Spencer couldn’t sleep. He’d been trying to for an hour but it wasn’t coming. His mouth felt dry so he heaved himself off the bed and made his way to the kitchen.

To his surprise, the heating lamp was still on outside and as he made his way to the balcony door, he could see that Seph was still outside.

Her knees were tucked up to her chin, her arms wrapped around them and he could make out the movement of her shoulders racking gently. She was crying.

Did he go out to her? She’d stayed out there because she’d wanted to be alone.

But then again, she’d come in to him earlier and her presence had helped.

Making a decision he opened the door and stepped out, walking over to her and kneeling to the floor in front of her.

Her face was buried in her arms but he’d seen her move when he’d opened the door. She knew he’d come out to her.

Wordlessly he placed his hands on her arms, his thumbs making small stroking gestures. She sniffed and raised her head, her red rimmed eyes meeting his, tears streaming down her face. Lowering her knees she moved forward suddenly, wrapping her arms around his neck and clinging to his t-shirt, her face now buried into his shoulder her tears soaking the thin material.

Surprised by the sudden contact, he acted quickly and pulled her closer, his own arms now around her waist and rubbing her back in what he hoped was a soothing measure.

Not knowing the words to say to ease he pain, he just let her cry. He couldn’t take away her pain, but he could hold her whilst she cried through it.

He’d hold her for as long as it took.
You’d been crying for at least forty minutes before Spencer had come outside to you.

You hadn’t even wanted to cry, you’d just wanted a few moments to yourself. And then you’d seen a fucking shooting star in the sky. The only other time you’d seen one had been with Alex and that had been a few a years ago when you’d taken a beach holiday to Greece together. Seeing the star had just made you remember that night with Alex and as you thought about your dead best friend, the tears had started to fall, turning into loud sobs shortly after.

Spencer had come outside and just been there for you. Without saying anything. This person who you’d known for a day, had bought more comfort to you by just holding you and letting you cry than your family and friends had.

You didn’t know how long you’d clung to him, but he never made you feel as though he was annoyed with you for crying on him. He’d just rubbed your back and smoothed your hair, wrapping the blanket that had slipped off your shoulders back around you both. When you were all cried out, you’d pulled away from him and apologised, now exhausted.

“You don’t need to be sorry, Seph. Are you okay now?” He’d asked quietly, eyes full of concern.

“I think so. Thank you…. for that. It’s actually been so long since someone else has seen me cry but I seem to be doing it a lot around you.” When he’d found you, you’d been crying. It always seemed to happen outside, near large drops. Huh.

You thanked him again, reaching up and kissing his cheek lightly before taking yourself off to bed to sleep, the darkness of sleep coming almost instantly.

……

When you awoke the next morning it was to the smell of bacon cooking and the sounds of clattering coming from the kitchen. You checked your phones quickly, seeing messages from your Mum, Edward, and Helen. You ignored the one from Edward, quickly replying to your Mother and then reading Helens.

She missed you, and wondered when you’d be coming back to the city. She’d heard about Edward and was sorry he was such a dickhead.

Helen was your ‘sort of’ assistant. She’d started working at Lux when she was 17 and you 23, on a work based apprenticeship and she’d been placed in the Branding and Design department with you. Despite the age difference, you and her had struck up a friendship and she’d been taken on at Lux full time when her apprenticeship had ended.

When you’d announced you were leaving, she’d begged to come with you and work as your assistant. But you couldn’t afford to pay her. So she’d remained at Lux, working her arse off there and then coming to help you in the evenings and weekends wherever she could. You’d promised her that if TDDQ did ever take off, then you’d hire her full time and pay her back pay for all her help and efforts. She was genuinely as excited as you’d been, wanting to be part of something new and she had an eye for design and detail too, as well as a brain full of ideas.

She was another person who you’d shut out when Alex had died, and you knew you’d hurt her by doing so. You replied to her message telling her that you missed her too and that you’d hopefully be back in a few weeks, and you’d meet up for dinner with her. If you WERE still here.
in a few weeks, then you’d had every intention of doing so. She replied almost immediately saying she couldn’t wait and to let her know if you needed anything. You’d forgotten how kind and caring the girl was, someone you hadn’t really considered in your decision making process.

Pulling yourself out of bed and slipping your shorts and t-shirt on, you made your way into the kitchen, seeing Spencer plating up bacon and eggs, the bacon only slightly burnt.

“I was just about to come and wake you up.” He said when he saw you enter.

“The burning smell woke me up.” You teased, smiling at him as you pulled up a seat at the breakfast bar and poured yourself a glass of OJ from the jug on the table.

“Well I had to toss the first lot, I forgot they were under and they were burnt to a crisp. These aren’t quite as bad, but I can make more?”

“Nah, they look fine..I prefer my bacon slightly burnt anyway. Although I’ll always prefer English bacon to this American stuff.”

“What’s the difference exactly?” Spencer placed a plate in front of you, along with a knife and fork and climbed onto the seat next to you.

“I can’t explain it, you’d just have to taste it to know..... If you go to England, you’ll have to try it.”

“Well maybe you could take me to somewhere in England to try it. What’s better than trying something English, in England, with an English person?”

You glanced at him out of the corner of your eye, seeing him doing the same thing back as he took a mouthful of scrambled eggs. You knew what he was doing, trying to get you to make plans for the future.

“Maybe.....”

“Maybe.”

“We’ll see.” You countered.

“I can work with that. Now.... Your list. We’ve crossed chess off right? You can now play and you very nearly beat me. Clearly a fluke......But that’s one thing done.” He took another mouthful.

“Yep. One thing down.” You agreed.

“The Inca Trail, we’re not going to be able to achieve that in the next 22 days. Can we put that on hold for after your birthday? I’d love to visit Machu Pichu but it’s not something we can do at the drop of the hat, we need permits and a guide. So.... I was thinking we could book it for next year”

“We? And next year......”

“I’m working on the assumption that we somehow achieve everything else and you change your mind. And yes, we. It’s something I’d like to do as well. So, could we do it together?” He was nervous asking the last question, his voice going up an octave.

You considered his request.

“Okay. If my mind gets changed, then it’ll be a pleasure walking the Inca Trail with you Spencer...
“Okay so the next thing, performing at karaoke or an open mic night. I presume this means you can sing?”

“People tell me I can, and I was in a few shows at school. But I’ve never really performed anywhere. Never really had the guts to do it. Alex made me put that one on the list too. She thought it would be good for me to get out there. That it would give me confidence.”

“Can you sing for me now?” He asked, finishing the last of his breakfast.

“Nope….. it’s too early for that shit. Pull up youtube on your phone and search for Alexandra The Great. It’s a YouTube channel she made years ago, and she posted a video of me singing when I was about twenty. I presume it’s still there. I was recording an audition tape for a reality show in Britain and she found it.”

“Did you apply then?” He pulled out his phone, searching.

“Oh I applied, and I was asked to come in for the televised auditions. But my parents found out and told me if I went, they’d cut me off. They do that lot, threaten to cut me off. It just wouldn’t do to have a Bella-Morte appearing on some trashy TV show.” You mimicked your Mother with the last line.

“Okay, I’ve found her account. There’s two videos showing a Seph Dawn. Maybe and I’m so sick. I don’t think I recognise either of the song names.”

“Ones a Kelly Clarkson cover, that was my audition, and the other is me pissing about on the game Rockband. It’s a band called Flyleaf. I forgot she’d posted that. Don’t watch it, it gets a bit…. screamy. Also… Wear headphones please. I don’t need to hear myself right now.”

He slid off his stool and strode into his bedroom, returning with his ipod and headphones. He disconnected them and plugged them into his phone, sitting back down.

Finishing your breakfast, you collected the plates and rinsed them off, loading them into the dishwasher along with the dishes and utensils Spencer had used to prepare your breakfast.

Ten minutes later he removed the headphones, turning on the stool to look at you.

“You’re good. Very good. And the Rockband one…. The noises that came outta your mouth. Woah. You can play the guitar too?” In the Kelly Clarkson cover, you’d accompanied yourself on an acoustic guitar.

“Piano too. The boarding school I was at focused heavily on music as an extra curricular activity. And yeah…. The noises hurt, but I wanted to see if I could do it.”

“And you could. Okay. We can cross this one off your list fairly easily. I just need to speak to Garcia. She’ll know somewhere that has a decent open mic night. Do you know what you’d sing?” He started texting on his phone.

“I think so yes.” You had a good idea of a song you’d sing and if the bar had a keyboard, you could accompany yourself too. If not, you’d just buy one.

“Good… And maybe the kiss a complete stranger could come off the back of this… If we’re in a bar anyway, they’ll be plenty of willing men I’m sure. If he’s someone you like, then perhaps the spending a whole 24 hours devouring someone could come from that too.” He blushed slightly as he mentioned the last point, and you giggled.
“Maybe…. Who knows? Have you ever done that Spencer Reid, spent a full 24 hours in bed with someone?” You watched him open and close his mouth a few times before answering.

“No. I haven’t. It’s not often I spend a full night with someone. Generally it’s just sex and then one of us leaves. And it’s not very often it happens either.”

“And why not?” Why not indeed. Spencer was definitely attractive enough, but then again he did seem somewhat awkward. He was missing that raw confidence that some men had. If he had that, he’d be unstoppable you were sure.

“It just doesn’t.” He looked away from you as he spoke, embarrassed.

“But you’d like it too?”

“I don’t…. I don’t know okay. Most girls don’t like me. I ramble, my hair’s too long and I’m weird. I don’t know how to to talk to girls unless it’s in a professional manner.”

“Some girls like weird… And you talked to me. You managed to talk me back over to the other side of a bridge. Alright, you’re not conventionally attractive. I’ll give you that. But you AREattractive. And you’re kind and genuine and smart. And you care. That counts for a lot.”

“You think I’m attractive?” Was that all he’d taken from that?

“I do actually. Which is odd because you’re not what I’d normally find attractive. But yes, I think you’re hot.”

He blushed even deeper than before, fidgeting in his seat. Maybe he could be your “change someone else’s life for the better”. If he was lacking a partner it seemed to be because he didn’t realise what a catch he was. Perhaps you could help him realise and help him find someone. In three weeks.

His phone started to ring and he frowned at the number, before realisation dawned on his face and he stood, quickly retreating to his bedroom, explaining that he needed to take the call.

You continued tidying up the kitchen as you waited for him to finish, wondering what the plan for the day would be.

He returned fifteen minutes later.

“How easy would it be for your clothing designs to be altered?” He asked you, had phone still in his hand.

“If they were being taken in, fairly easy. If they were being let out, it would take a bit more time but it would still be doable. Why?”

“Can you have your designs couriered here? Along with your materials. Specifically these five dresses?” He swiped through pictures on his phone that were attached to an email.

“I can probably have them here tomorrow if I needed to.”

“Okay. Do that please. We’ll need to make plans to get to LA too.”

“Wait why?”

“I can’t say right now. But….. Can you do it? And I’ll sort travel arrangements out.”
“No you won’t…. If this is to help me, take my credit card.” He fought you for a bit, but you were stubborn too and eventually he relented, taking your card and tapping away on his phone some more.

You called Helen, her gushing when she picked up the phone. After speaking to her for a few minutes, you got down to business, asking if she could go to your apartment and arrange to courier the items along with your sewing materials over to you. She’d get on it ASAP she told you, agreeing to text you when the arrangements had been made. You chatted for a while longer, realising how much you’d missed talking to her. When you hung up, you were definitely intrigued, wondering what your new friend had in store and how it involved LA.

Finding him in the living area you asked him what your plans for the day were.

“Some more chess?” He offered.

“So you don’t want to go back to bed for 24 hours then and help me tick that off?”

His mouth resembled a gold fishes again.

“Chess it is.”

…..
Chapter 13

The rest of the morning had been spent talking with Seph and playing chess in the apartment. Spencer couldn’t help but feel excited about his plan to help her with her business. The contact he’d spoken with had been genuinely excited about the designs and depending on what happened in three days, this could have a huge impact and hopefully be enough for Seph to get the business started.

He’d been surprised to hear her singing, her voice not at all what he’d expected from talking to her. Her speaking voice changed dramatically depending on what she was talking about anyway, Spencer had picked up that when she was happy, it was more bubbly, more tone and variance to it. If she was flirting or being sarcastic, it was a drier tone, more dead pan and drawn out and lazy sounding. And if she was sad or contemplative, it was quiet and soft, and she sounded very young and somehow more English. Her singing voice wasn’t like any of sounds he’d heard coming from her, it was strong and clear, powerful yet sweet. He’d asked her before they set about playing chess, what plays she’d been in and who she’d played. And he hadn’t been surprised to discover that she’d had roles like Eponine and Elphaba in her schools productions, her voice clearly being able to handle the songs. The Flyleaf song had shocked him though. He wasn’t familiar with the song and when it kicked in and he’d heard the scream, he’d jumped a little, wondering how someone so small could make that noise. She’d told him that it hurt, and that she could no longer do it and he wasn’t surprised.

He’d messaged Penelope asking for a decent bar than ran open mic nights, her immediately pestering him for more information. When he’d told her it was for Seph, her immediate response had been “The Damned Dead Queen sings too? Oh my sweet sweet genius, I am definitely coming to see that.” He wasn’t sure how Seph would feel about that piece of information, but he was sure he’d work something out.

She messaged him again a few hours later, giving him the name of a bar that had an open mic night tomorrow and had a spot left. They had to go sign up in person though.

Eating a quick lunch together, they got ready and headed back out into the city. The bar was a fair few blocks away, taking them a good twenty five minutes to walk there.

They talked as they walked learning more things about each other and discovering that they had a similar taste in TV shows and films. Seph loved movies, all movies, and given her connections she’d been to a fair few film festivals, including Cannes.

He was jealous and expressed his feelings so, Seph laughing.

“I’ll tell you what, I’ll take you next year okay?”

Realising what she’d said a few seconds later, she clamped her hand over her mouth.

“Seph it’s okay you know. You can make plans for the future.” He stopped in the street and tugged her hand away from her mouth, finding the gesture somewhat intimate in a way.

“But it’s a future I haven’t decided if I’m living yet…. ” She whispered quietly, continuing to walk on.

“You don’t have to decide yet, but make plans. Give yourself something to look forward to. Like Machu Pichu. We can do that together and we can do Cannes together, and you can take me to England to eat bacon.” He caught up with her, catching a look at her face and seeing her mouth
set in a thin line, her eyes glazed over and her thoughts now somewhere else.

“I’m sorry.” He said gently, pulling her to the side of the pavement. They were at their destination although Seph had nearly walked past it.

She looked down at the ground for a moment, briefly closing her eyes and taking a deep breath. “It’s okay. Are we here?”

“Yes. Garcia says this is the place… Although, she erm… wants to come and watch.”

Seph shrugged her shoulders. “That doesn’t bother me. I’ve asked Helen to send a bag for her as well seeing as she actually follows my blog and knows the brand. So I need to see her again anyway.”

“You realise if she comes, she’ll end up dragging the rest of the team with her right?”

“Your supervisor and Rossi will be discreet about who I am, I’m sure. And Agent Hotchner promised he wouldn’t repeat my conversation with him, unless it was with a coroner.”

“They’d be discreet. But Garcia is an Internet whizz….. She’ll have discovered who you actually are by now, now that she’s met you and knows you run that site.”

“Ah…. Okay. Well…. Hmmmm. Okay.”

“Pen can be discreet too if she has too.”

“Alright, let’s go sign me up.”

They entered the bar together, seeing that it was quite busy already even though it was only mid afternoon. They went straight to the bar, a young girl in a black polo shirt bearing the bars name coming over to greet you.

“Hi! What can I get you?” She asked, a grin plastered on her face.

“My friend called up earlier, has the spot for the open mic night tomorrow been filled?” Spencer spoke to her, leaning over the bar slightly to talk to her.

“Are you Penny’s friends?” The girl responded, grabbing a notepad from behind the bar.

“Er yes, we are.”

“She gave me a name on the phone…. Persephone Dawn. I presume that’s you?” She looked at Seph quizzically. Seph nodded.

“Awesome, great bag by the way.” She nodded to Sephs bag where she’d placed it on the bar. “So I told Penny that ya just needed to come down, and play us something first. We kinda pride ourselves on showcasing the best undiscovered artists.”

“I have to play for you now? Like live?” Anxiety suddenly coating Persephone voice.

“We prefer live yes, just because recordings can be doctored. We’ll go into the back room, you don’t have to do it out here. I’m Ariadne by the way. I’m the entertainment manager here at The Blue Spark. Do you have something you can sing for me?”

“Erm…. I think so yes.” Spencer noticed a slight increase to Sephs breathing, she was nervous.

“Okay, come round to the back.” She signalled to a door to the side of the bar, yelling to one of
her colleagues to cover her. Seph walked around, looking behind her to make sure Spencer was following her. He was.

She walked through the door, meeting Ariadne in the hallway and following her down the corridor and into a store room.

“Do you need any music? Something to accompany yourself with?” she asked her.

“Do you have a piano, or keyboard?” Seph looked around the room to see what she could spot.

“We have a keyboard, let me grab it and set it up.” She disappeared from the room for a few minutes.

“You okay?” Reid placed a hand on her shoulder, feeling how tense she was all of a sudden.

“Yeah…. It’s just been a while since I’ve actually done this in front of anyone.”

“Just breathe okay. I’ve heard you, you’ve got a fantastic voice.” Spencer rubbed her shoulder slightly, watching her lean into his grip and roll her neck trying to relieve some of the tension.

Ariadne returned a few minutes later carrying a huge electric keyboard. She placed it on some crates and dragged them over to Seph, stronger than she looked. Disappearing again, she returned with an extension cord and plugged the instrument on.

“Sorry, most people bring their own instruments. We have this and a few guitars lying around for those who don’t realise they need to audition for us.”

“Yeah, I didn’t realise.. Sorry.”

“It’s fine… So, whenever you’re ready.”

Ariadne perched on another crate across the small room and Spencer stepped away too.

He watched as Seph ran her long fingers over the keys, testing them out first, before starting to form a melody, an opening to a song he didn’t recognise.

Clearing her throat, her eyes closed, she began to sing.

“I push all my problems to the back of my mind
Then they surface in my dreams, they come alive
I sweep all my issues to somewhere I can’t find
In hope that I’ll forget but there’s just so many times

Why can’t I be strong and just confront all my fears?
When my fear is hurting you by being sincere
But how many more days can I run? How many years?
Emotions flooding and now it’s all seeming so clear

Crying for no reason, feel the tears roll down
I felt strong but am I breaking now?
Crying for no reason ‘cause I buried it deep
I made promises I could not keep
‘Cause I never faced all the pain I caused
Now the pain is hitting me full force”

Spencer definitely didn’t recognise the song, wondering if it was one she’d written herself.
“Katy B, right? I love her…… My friend from London told me about her a few years ago.” Ariadne grinned at Seph.

Obviously not an original song, just an artist Reid hadn’t heard before. Very interesting song choice though. But more importantly, he wanted to know if she’d got the gig.

“Okay! You go on at ten tomorrow. You need four songs, preferably a mix. If you have backing music then you can drop it in tomorrow and we’ll check it plays. If you need instruments and don’t have your own with you then you can use ours. We have a dressing room too if you want to change here. Tables fill up by seven though, so if you have friends wanting to come then tell them to get here early okay.”

“Erm….. Erm…..”

“Hun relax, you’ve got a great voice. They’ll love you okay. Everyone’s gotta start somewhere right. Paramore played here once when they were starting out, so did John Mayer.”

“Okay. Thanks. We’ll erm.. see you tomorrow.” Seph stood and started leading Spencer to the door, stopping before she exited.

“Ariadne….. Is there a music shop that’s sells instruments anywhere nearby? I need to practice and I don’t have anything with me. I need somewhere I can get a keyboard and an acoustic guitar”

Ariadne thought for a moment, wrinkling her brow.

“All the other players tomorrow have their own instruments…. Your friends of Penny’s and she’s a good friend of mine. You can take ours okay.”

Persephone looked taken aback. “Are you sure?”

“Yes yep… It’s fine. I know Penny’s good for it. I’ll grab the guitar for you now, just unplug the keyboard.”

She left the room again and Spencer unplugged the instrument, wrapping the cord around it and tucking it under his arm.

“We’ll get a cab home okay. I need to practice. And think of four songs.”

He nodded at you and Ariadne returned, handing Seph a guitar case.

“I look forward to seeing you again Persephone Dawn. And I’m interested to see what songs you choose.”

Spencer was too.
You disappeared into your bedroom as soon as you got back to the apartment, loading up youtube on your phone and searching for song ideas. Spencer placed the keyboard on your bed and then retreated, telling you he’d be in the living room if you needed him. He’d bought his laptop with him when you’d moved into the apartment, so you wondered whether he’d actually end up doing work.

Nerves were starting to invade your body now. You’d not performed in front of anyone properly for years and even then it had been either very close friends or an audience of your school friends parents. Somehow, performing in a theatre was less scary than performing to a bar full of people. You didn’t know why. You didn’t even know why you’d put this thing on your list, it wasn’t that you actually wanted to be a singer. Just…. Maybe to prove that you could do it? Because if you could stand up in front of a roomful of complete strangers and have them cheer you, maybe you stand up in front of two people you’d known your whole life and tell them what you didn’t want?

Hmmmm.

……..

“Who’s actually coming tonight?” You asked Spencer nervously. You’d arrived at the bar early, Spencer wanting to get a table close to the stage, whereas you’d wanted one closer to the back. You compromised, settling for the middle.

You’d spent the rest of yesterday rehearsing in your bedroom, sure that you had be doing Spencers head in, repeating the same songs and music over and over. When you’d left the bedroom for an aqua break, you’d seen him slumped on the couch asleep, headphones on and music playing through an ipod.

You woke him up and made a quick dinner, eating together and watching reruns of Firefly that were showing on TV for a few hours, before heading to bed for a hopefully early night.

Sleep had come quickly and easily again, although when you’d woken up in the morning you’d had a moment of sadness, quickly shaking yourself out of it. Today was going to be a good day, you told yourself.

Alex’s Mum had messaged you overnight, asking how you were and letting you know that she’d be able to make your birthday celebrations in a few weeks.

Ugh. You’d forgotten about that. In fact…. You had better mention it to Spencer. The New York central Lux was playing host to your thirtieth birthday celebrations, a party that would mainly be your parents friends and business partners, as well as your entire family. Any excuse for a big celebration, and you knew that your Father was expecting to be able to make a speech, welcoming you back to Lux.

One way or another, that wasn’t happening.

At around midday, your courier delivery from New York had arrived. The five dresses Spencer had pointed out, plus a few other tops, bags and accessories as well as your sewing kit and materials you might need to make alterations. You were very curious about what he was planning. Your flights to LA had been booked for late tomorrow evening, although he wouldn’t tell you what it was for, other than that it could give you some major leads and that he’d planned something else from your list too.
Spencer had inspected your creations, fingering the dresses carefully and complimenting you on your designs and workmanship.

“You make these completely by yourself?” He asked you, admiring the two longer, fancier dressers he’d told you to have shipped.

“Yes. From the paper, to the very last stitch. One hundred percent my work.” You were extremely proud of these dresses, not having had a chance to wear them out yet.

“So what happens if this business takes off? Are you wanting to provide tailor made clothes specifically designed for certain people, or clothing available to the masses. How would you cope?” A very good question, one that you’d had to answer on multiple occasions when presenting your pitch.

“Both actually. The accessories, tops, skirts and the shorter dresses could easily be mass produced, whilst still remaining original. I’d visited a few fashion schools with Helen and we’d assembled a team of designers and seamstresses that would have been graduated three months ago. I believe most of them are working dead end jobs now, waiting for their moments to shine and to work in fashion. I would have given them that. The Damned Dead Queen name would have covered the more mainstream, and easily accessible items. Whilst dresses like these, would have been on a commission base and would fall under a sub brand, Alexandra Dawning. I had it all planned, I just needed investors and a platform to launch the clothes from. And I nearly had both. But then….. well, the accident happened.”

He’d nodded at you, asking to read your business proposals. You’d had them shipped to you as well and handed them to him, him reading them astonishingly quickly and commenting that they were extremely well thought out and put together.

You’d thought so too. Now if only you could get the designs back out there, and get people interested.

You turned to Spencer, seeing him take a sip of his drink before answering you.

“Penelope is definitely coming….. And she does know who you are by the way. She can find almost anything out online, but she’s assured me she won’t mention your name. She’s bringing Morgan and I believe Alex.” He winced.

“Alex?”

“Alex Blake. She joined the team last year, she’s very nice and she’s one of my closest friends. She helped me a lot earlier in the year when I was going through some….. things.”

Maeve, you’d bet. Although you’d yet to steer the topic back to the mysterious person who’s name had caused Spencer to storm away from his boss.

“In fact….. I can see them now. They’ve just walked in.” He stood, waving across the room to his friends.

You stood to, smoothing down your moss green dress and quickly adjusting your hair. You recognised the blonde girl from the other day, her infectious smile grinning at you as she walked over.

“Hey Spencer! Hey Seph, great to see you again. I’m so excited to hear you singing, Ariadne text me after she’d seen you, thanking me for filling her empty spot. She must have thought you were good! She doesn’t take just anyone.” Penelope hugged you, doing the same with Spencer as you felt two other pairs of eyes surveying you carefully.
“Pretty boy……. You gonna introduce us to the reason you’ve abandoned us at work?” The tall dark man stood directly to Penelopes right spoke, you detecting a hint of resentment tinged with wonder.

“Erm, Morgan this is my old friend Seph. Seph, this is Derek Morgan and this is Alex Blake.” He turned to the other woman stood there and she smiled at you. She was older than what you’d expected, but still very pretty, her eyes kind and smile warm.

An announcement came over the speakers, explaining that the first act was about to begin and asking people to take their seats.

You sad back down, Penelope taking the seat next to yours as Derek went quickly to the bar to get drinks.

“I…. I erm, have something for you Penelope.”

“Presents! For moi?” She grinned widely and you reached under the table, handing her the paper bag you’d bought with you.

She opened it quickly her eyes lighting up when she saw what you’d given her. It wasn’t quite the same as your bag, which she’d been eyeing up the other day but it was similar in design. She turned it over, inspecting it and running her hands over the soft printed fabric.

“Is it okay? I can get you a different one. Or I can just make you a new one?”

“You made that?” Alex leant across the table, Penelope passing the bag to her.

“Yeah… It’s kinda what I do. Or at least, what I want to do. I’m trying to start a fashion line. I erm… I made this dress too.”

“Wow….both are beautiful, Seph. With talents like this I’m sure you’ll have no trouble. So… Where did you say you met Spencer again.” Her question threw you off, Spencer catching it quickly.

“Seph and I are old friends, Alex. We met in a bookstore years ago. She picked up a first edition of an Alice book which I wanted and we started to talk.” Spencer explained, you paying attention to the lie he was telling and storing it away.

“So who got to keep the book then? And why have you never mentioned her to us before……. You shouldn’t keep a pretty lady like this away from your friends, Reid.” Derek had returned, placing a tray on the table with five more drinks.

“I let Seph have it provided she could answer the Mad Hatters riddle.” He glanced at you making sure you were following.

“And could she?”

“I have no idea!” You and Spencer said together, laughing at the confused look on his friends face. You looked back over to Alex, seeing her grinning too. She’d got the joke and it seemed you’d won her seal of approval. Or so you’d thought.

The first act began and you settled in to listen, the group talking quietly amongst themselves, working to include you in the conversation. It mainly consisted of Derek teasing Spencer about various things and Spencer blushing.
Hearing the other acts sing, you were worried. Every one of them was amazing, and you could see why you’d had to audition. Penelope caught you watching the stage and must have noticed the nervous look on your face.

She leant in, whispering “Relax sweetie. Ari wouldn’t have given you the spot if she didn’t think you were good enough. I can’t believe you’ve never done open mic or karaoke. Spencer told me it was some kind of birthday bucket list right? What songs are you singing?”

Christ… What else had he told her? Although… You didn’t think he would have. And you guessed he had to give her some reason.

“Yeah a birthday bucket list. That’s one way of putting it. And as for the songs…. ” Shit…. A familiar tune started to play and you groaned, Spence looking up at catching your eye. He’d heard it too.

“I was gonna play this. I can’t now… Fuck fuck fuck.”

“Have you got something else you can play?” Penelope asked you.

“There’s another song I can play on the piano…. But I’m not sure it would go down very well.”

“What is it?” she leant in again.

“Um…” You whispered it into her ear.

“Oh baby cakes you should definitely sing that. I love it… And I’ve never heard a female sing it. Only the luscious Jared…. Oh, if only he’d be mine.”

Okay… Maybe if she thought so, she’d obviously been here before so would know what would go down well.

You felt a hand take yours under the table, squeezing it and then dropping it quickly.

“You good?” Spencer asked now he’d got your attention.

“I think so…. It might sound a bit rough though.”

“Rough is sometimes better.”

“Now now now, Spencer Reid….. We don’t need that type of talk here.”

Everyone laughed and you relaxed again

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“You all ready Seph? You’re up next babe.” Ariadne came over, placing her hand on your shoulder.

“I think so. Slightly worried cos I’ve had to change a song. Someone else has done it, but I think I know my replacement well enough.”

“Do the replacement first then. Then if it’s not as good, you can improve from there. You’ll be fine.” She smiled at you before turning to talk to Penelope.

You excused yourself quickly, wanting to freshen up in the ladies, seeing Alex following you.

Carefully reapplying your lipstick, you could see her watching you carefully.
“Please…..” You addressed the older woman. “Say whatever it is you want to say to me.”

“Okay, Spencer is an amazing man and a brilliant friend. I’m concerned as to why he’s taken so much time off work to help out someone he’s only just met.”

You started to talk but she interrupted you.

“I’m a profiler, and I know Spencer pretty well. I know you two haven’t known each other as long as you’re making out. I’m not saying you’re a bad person because you seem nice enough, but I have concerns that you’re going to hurt my friend. And he’s had enough of that this year.” She wasn’t being mean, you could tell she was genuinely worried.

“I have no plan on intentionally hurting your friend Alex. And I don’t know what he’s been through exactly, because that’s his own business. But he’s helping me through some pretty serious things right now. You’re right, we haven’t known each that long. But I like him, he’s kind and caring and he just might be what I need right now.”

“But will he be what you need in six months time?” She asked.

“Six months time seems like a lifetime away when I’m barely able to think about tomorrow. Look, I’m not here to mess with him or take advantage. I didn’t ask for his help, he offered and wouldn’t leave when I said no. So I’m taking it. And if in six months time Spencer Reid is still part of my life in some way, then I’d be happy with that. I can imagine he makes most people in his life happy.”

Her face softened slightly, her seeing that you meant what you were saying.

“I think I heard them announce your name.”

“So did I… Shit.”

“Go get em… I’m sure you’ll do fine.”

You hoped so.

……

Twenty minutes later and you were overwhelmed by the applause. You’d started off shaking, you missing a few notes on the keyboard and your voice cracking on the chorus of “The Kill” but as you’d moved over to the guitar, you’d felt more comfortable.

You could feel Spencers eyes on you as you’d belted out “Ignorance”, strumming along, noticing that a few appreciating smiles from other people in the crowd. As you lowered the tempo for a cover of “Why” you’d started to feel slightly emotional, especially as you sang the last verse of the song.

For your last song you’d been even more nervous, considering how it started and that it wasn’t the sort of song you’d usually sing. But you and Alex had sung this song in a talent contest at school during your teenaged years, and since then it had been your thing, starting off as a joke but becoming something you sang at each other to cheer the other up. Alex had always started the song though, she could rap and you….. couldn’t.

You’d been certain you’d fuck up it but you didn’t, or at least you didn’t you think you had. But you’d felt cringy only smiling when you could finally sing the line you’d opened so many phone calls from Alex with.

“Shorty get down, good Lord
“Baby got ‘em open all over town”

You’d changed it slightly, to fit an acoustic guitar and not having your best friend with you to do the bits you couldn’t. And you’d thought it had sounded okay.

The applause and grins from the audience as they bobbed along with beat told they agreed.

You thanked the crows as Ariadne came on stage to announce the final singer, high fiving you before you left.

“Girl…… No Diggity….. You are a girl after my own heart. I can’t believe pretty boys been keening you for himself all these years.” Derek grinned at you, punching Spencer in the shoulder.

“Was it okay?” You asked, looking to Spence for approval. He nodded, rubbing his arm slightly.

“Sweetie pie, it was more than okay.” Penelope agreed, handing you a glass of wine.

You talked some more, listening to the last act before Derek checked his watched.

“Baby girl we best head out, boss man wants us in early tomorrow.”

Penelope and Alex stood with him, hugging you and Spencer goodbye, Garcia’s embrace tighter than Alex’s and saying their goodbyes.

Yours and Spencers drinks not finished, you sat back down.

“You were really good by the way. I loved the cover of ‘Why’.”

“Thanks! I actually adore the song. I saw Kelly Clarkson perform it that way years ago and I know it’s sacrilege to say, but I prefer her cover to the original.”

“I think I might prefer your cover to the original too. Sooo… Can we cross that off your list too?” He asked you, pushing his hair back behind his ear and fiddling with the sleeve of his shirt.

“I think we can indeed. Two items ticked off. You definitely weren’t kidding me when you said you’d help.”

“I’m thinking we can cross another off too. That guy over there by the door, he’s been watching you all night. He’s with a group of guys and I’m fairly certain from his behaviour that he wouldn’t mind being the stranger you kiss.”

He nodded and you followed the direction he was motioning in, seeing an attractive blonde guy. He smiled when he saw you looking at you gave him a small grin back.

“Maybe….. As we leave? I’ve never walked up to someone and just kissed them.”

“Just tell them it’s a dare or something…. I get it a fair amount from girls out on their bachelorette parties and things.”

“And do you indulge them, Spencer Reid?” He really didn’t seem the type to.

“Sometimes.”

“Let’s have another drink first. It’s too early to leave.”

One more drink turned into three and the conversation between you and Spencer flowed, you speaking to him like he was a real friend. Well…. given the circumstances, you guessed he was.
Before you knew it, it was half past midnight.

“You ready to leave?” You asked your friend, checking to see if the blonde guy was still around. He was, now surrounded by a group a guys.

“Yep…. You gonna do it?” Spencer followed your gaze.

“I think so. Wait for me by the door. Let’s see how courageous I actually am tonight.”

You watched Spence walk away, seeing him posting himself just inside the door.

Taking a deep breath, you strutted over to the blonde, his friends parting when they saw you approaching and nudging him. As you got closer, you realised he was a fair few years younger, possibly a college student. Still, no going back now.

“Excuse me…. I kinda have a bet with my friend over there. He bets that I won’t kiss a complete stranger, and I wanna prove him wrong.”

“Be my guest sweet thing.”

Sweet thing… Ugh.

You stood on your tip toes pressing your mouth to his and feeling his arms slip immediately around your waist. He quickly parted his lips, pushing his tongue sloppily into your mouth, tasting of cheap beer and breath mints.

You kissed him for at least twenty seconds, thinking that to be the acceptable amount of time for it to class as 'making out’ with someone, before pulling away.

“Thanks!” You plastered a smile on your face and turned to walk away.

“Wait! Don’t I get your phone number or your name or something?” The boy called after you.

“Sweet thing, if you were paying attention to my set, you’d know my name.” You heard his friends chuckle as you hurried over to Spencer, grabbing his arm and dragging him out of the door.

“And another item bites the dust.” Spencer commented.

“Ugh… I should have removed that one. There’s a reason I’m normally picky about who I kiss. Now…. Back to the apartment for more wine? I need something to take away the taste of college frat boy.”

Spencer laughed and started to lead the way, you momentarily wondering what it would be like to kiss him before pushing the thought away.

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Chapter 15

“Flying when hungover….. I’ve remembered now why I don’t do that very often.”

Spencer glanced over at Seph as she settled into the cab that was to take them to their hotel. She looked beat, and he didn’t imagine he looked any better.

When they’d got back to their apartment last night, they’d continued drinking and talking, not realising that it was 4am until it was too late. They’d moved from one topic to another quickly, consuming another three bottles of wine between them.

Seph had been on a high from ticking another two items off her list and Spencer had felt that same rush from helping her do them. They’d sat out on the balcony together under the heating lamps just laughing and talking.

Spencer was starting to worry. He liked this girl. She was fast becoming a close friend, someone he felt he could confide in and talk to about his thoughts and feelings. She was someone who didn’t mock his intelligence and make fun of him for his quirks. And he could talk to her, about life. Not just work. He still hadn’t told her about Maeve and she’d not asked again, but he could sense that it was a conversation that would happen soon.

They’d finally gone to bed when they realised how late it was, setting their alarms for midday. They didn’t have to be at the airport until eight. The flight to LA was an overnight one, meaning hopefully they could sleep.

When he’d woken up though, he felt like he’d been hit with a ton of bricks. Red wine hangover. Not good at all. Reid had dragged himself out of his bed, heading into the kitchen in search of water. Quickly drinking a full bottle, he made two cups of strong coffee, placing them on a tray along with another bottle of water and a packet of aspirin he’d found.

Knocking on Sephs door, he heard a noise that resembled a “What?!? Go away…. I’m dying.”

He was almost pleased that she was feeling as bad as he was, but he pushed open the door anyway, balancing the tray on one hand as he did so.

Persephone rolled over in her bed to look at him. She hadn’t bothered to take her make up off last night and her eyes were rimmed in smudged black eyeliner which trailed down her cheeks. Her hair was all over the place.

“I bought coffee and aspirin.” He told her, placing a mug on her bedside table before looking around for somewhere to sit so he could drink his.

“In which case, I apologise for telling you to go away. Is that aspirin I see too? Share…..”

He laughed at her before deciding it wouldn’t seem too weird to climb onto the bed with her. Spencer set the tray down and handed her the painkillers and water, and then made his way to the other side of the bed, settling back onto her pillows.

She fiddled with the blister packs, popping two pills and swilling them down with water, before offering them to him.

He shook his head declining.

“Have you already had some?” She asked, obviously confused as it was a fresh packet.
“No, I, err… don’t take any sort of pain relief. Unless I’m in hospital and it’s beyond my control.” He told her, taking a sip of the hot coffee.

“Am I allowed to ask why? Or is that too personal?” Seph wiggled back down, pulling the covers up.

“You can ask, I don’t mind. I’ve asked enough about your life.” He had, he felt like he knew her life story now. Continuing on, he explained.

“A few years ago, I was kidnapped by a serial killer the BAU were hunting. He…erm, had multiple personalities one of which tortured me, whilst another would inject me with dilaudid to numb the pain. I kinda got addicted to it for a while afterwards. It was stupid of me, risking my career like that.”

Seph didn’t say anything, she just looked at him waiting for more.

“I’m clean now, I normally don’t even drink that much either. But I won’t touch any sort of painkiller. Unless it’s out of my control.”

“Do you still….. erm, get cravings?”

“Yes. More than I care to admit. If I’ve had a particularly bad case then sometimes I’ll find myself wanting the numbness that it will bring. So I just try to find a meeting as soon as I can, or I message my sponsor. I haven’t relapsed. But there’s been times I’ve been close. Very close.”

“Would one of those times have anything to do with Maeve?”

So she hadn’t forgotten then. He’d kind of hoped she had.

“Yes it was. And….. I will tell you about her, I promise. Just not today okay.”

“Okay. You don’t have to if you don’t want to, Spencer Reid.” She touched his forearm lightly.

“No I want to, Persephone. You’ve told me about all of the important parts of your life, so I’ll do the same. I want to tell you. I actually feel like you’d understand.”

“I’ll try. Whenever you’re ready. Thank you. For trusting me, and for treating me like a friend.”

“We are friends, right?” Spencer asked.

“I guess we are.”

They’d stayed on her bed for a while longer just talking about the previous night until it was time for them to make a move and start packing for their mini trip.

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The flight had been horrific at the start. When they arrived at the airport they were told there was a three hour delay. Add that to a nearly six hour flight, with screaming children in the seats in front and behind them, whilst they were both still extremely hungover, and both Spencer and Persephone had felt like they might cry.

Spencer was normally a patient person, especially when it came to children. But as the child in the seat behind him kept kicking the back of his chair, it was all he could do to restrain himself.

In charge of booking the flights, he’d booked economy not wanting to run up a huge bill on Sephs card. He could see her looking longingly at the curtain that separated them from first class as she
rubbed her temples.

“I’m sorry.” He said helplessly.

“It’s not your fault. You didn’t know we’d end up sitting between people who clearly are unable to control their children.” She said the last bit loud enough for both families to hear, causing the Father in front to turn around and scowl at her.

“I’ll be right back.” She unbuckled her seat belt and rummaged in the over head compartment for her purse before walking down the aisle to where the cabin crew were.

Ten minutes later she came back, accompanied by a blonde Air Hostess with an apologetic look on her face.

“Grab your bag Spence. We’re moving.”

He looked at her confused, but grabbed both his and her bags from the overhead locker and followed the Hostess through the curtain and into first class.

Showing them to an empty row of three seats by a window she apologised profusely.

“I’m so sorry Ms Bella-Morte. I don’t quite understand how the mix up could have happened. Is there anything else I can get you to make the journey more comfortable for you?”

“It’s fine, don’t worry. It was probably my companions error in the first place, but I do thank you so much for assisting. My family uses this airline a lot. Perhaps some pillows and blankets would help?” She smiled sweetly at the blonde, her voice now very professional and business like.

“Of course, of course.” She scurried off, returning minutes later with two pillows and two blankets before leaving them to it.

“I’m not even going to ask what you said to her because I’m fairly certain that they’re not meant to reseat passengers mid-flight. But thank you so much. I think I would have had a melt down if those children hadn’t stopped screaming.” Spencer took the pillow she offered to him, leaning it against the window and placing the blanket over his lap.

“No problem. And you’re right. She shouldn’t have moved us. But she did and she’s now a few hundred dollars richer and I no longer have to worry about committing murder aboard an airplane. Do you mind terribly if I lean this on you?” She held up her pillow to him and Reid shook his head at her.

Seph adjusted the armrests so that they were upright and placed her pillow on his lap. Curling her feet up, she lay cross the two seats, covered herself in the blanket and settled her head onto the pillow leaving Spencer no choice but to rest his arm on her.

“Is this okay?” She asked him, realising the intimacy of her position.

“It’s fine. Try and get some rest. I know I’m going to.” He told her, shutting his eyes and praying to be able to sleep for the remainder of the flight.

He’d dozed for a bit on and off, waking up to see Sephs eyes closed and her mouth slightly parted as she slept, her hair falling awkwardly over her face. He reached out to smooth it back behind her ears.

As he watched her sleeping, he wondered what was going on in the mind of hers. Was she still seriously considering killing herself? Or was she starting to come around to thinking that maybe
life wasn’t so bad after all.

If it reached her birthday and she told him she hadn’t changed her mind, he wasn’t sure he’d be able to walk away from her.

In fact, he knew he wouldn’t. He felt closer to this woman somehow than some of his friends. And he wasn’t about to let her kill herself. He’d have to take drastic measures which he’d feel guilty about doing, but he’d them none the less.

He just hoped he wouldn’t have to.

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The ride to the hotel took around forty minutes and Spencer could see Seph nodding off again, her eyes slowly closing and her shaking herself every few minutes.

The sleep on the plane didn’t seem to have done either of them much good. With the delay and the time difference, it was approaching 6am in LA. They weren’t meeting his friend until 6pm.

They reached the hotel and checked into their separate rooms. He’d requested adjoining rooms and he’d told her this when he’d made the booking. Just in case. She hadn’t minded, finding it more amusing and making a flirty comment at him.

“How long can I sleep for?” She asked Spencer through the open door.

“We’re not meeting my friend until this evening and I didn’t really have anything planned for today. I’ve been here before and I assumed you had too.”

She nodded, LA had a Lux, of course she’d been here before.

“Maybe sleep until midday if you can and then we’ll go in hunt of food.”

“Sounds like a plan.” Seph closed the door between the rooms but didn’t lock it, and Spencer quickly stripped down to his boxers and crawled into the bed.

Texting his friend to say they were here, his shut of the light and fell into a deep sleep.
Chapter 16

You woke up an hour before your alarm went off. Although you’d only had another five hours sleep, you felt a lot more refreshed and ready to face the day.

Checking your cells, you started responding to the messages you were letting build up.

Your Mum, asking when you were coming back to New York - Just in time for your birthday, you told her. You still hadn’t broached the topic of your party with Spencer. He’d come with you, right?

Edward, asking if you could meet up and he could explain - Nope, not a chance in hell. He’d fucked another woman, which, okay you could understand that you’d pushed him away. You weren’t even mad, not really. But you didn’t love him and you didn’t want him.

Helen, asking how things were going and had the delivery arrived okay - Yes it had, thank you. And things were okay, you were meeting someone today that may just have an impact on things. You’d let her know.

Various other messages, one from HR at Lux advising that your office was being refurbished in time for your return. You didn’t even bother replying to that. You weren’t going back. One from Penelope, thanking you again for the bag and saying that she couldn’t wait to spend more time with you. You assumed she’d got your number from Spencer. Or… He had said she was a technical whizz. Is it possible she found it herself. You weren’t listed anywhere but if the girl was that good?

Stretching out in bed, you cracked your neck feeling the release of tension that had been building.

Shower. And then coffee. You called for room service, asking them to bring up a pot of coffee in twenty minutes, giving you enough time to shower.

Room service arrived just as you were wrapping a towel around yourself. You let them in and then shrugged the plush hotel robe over the towel before opening the interlocking door into Spencers room.

He was still lying in bed, but he wasn’t asleep.

“Hey, I bought coffee.”

“Thank god. I still feel like death.” He pushed himself up in bed so that he was sat against the headboard, his hair even messier with sleep.

You poured two cups, adding five cubes of sugar to one and then handing it to him.

“Can I get in? My legs are cold.”

“Uh huh.”

You pulled down his bed covers and climbed in, scooting closer to him on the mattress and getting comfortable.

“So when are you planning on telling me why we’re here?” You asked him, taking a sip of your drink. Hmmmm, it was good coffee. Strong and rich.
“I’ll tell you now actually. A few years ago the BAU had a case involving a young actress. One of her assistants was going around and attacking people close to her. I became friends with her during the case and we stayed in touch. She’s quite a big name now and I sent her the pictures of your designs and told her you were an up and coming designer. She has an awards ceremony coming up and she said she love to wear one. She’s only available today and tomorrow though, so any alterations would need to be done super quick. I just thought that if a Hollywood actress could wear your clothes to a red carpet event, she’d get asked ‘who she was wearing’ or whatever it is that fashion reporters ask, and it would get the name out there and help you get business.”

A Hollywood actress wearing your clothes to a red carpet event. What a genius idea! One you’d actually had yourself but you hadn’t known who to approach.

That would definitely help, it was one of the first things actresses were asked at these events.

You wanted to hug Spencer so much right now, but settled for leaning over and kissing his cheek lightly.

He jumped slight and blushed. “What was that for?”

“For just being you, Spencer Reid, I know we don’t a have a conventional friendship, you know, friendships aren’t generally born from one person trying to keep the other from offing themselves. But I’m glad I met you. That is a fantastic idea.”

He blushed even darker.

“Will you be able to alter the dresses fast enough?”

“I should be able to yes. If she’s an actress, she’ll probably be slimmer than me anyway and I have my kit. It doesn’t take too long if you know what you’re doing. Now…. Tell me about this actress. Who is she?”

“Erm… Lila Archer.” He said naming one of the hottest actresses out there right now.

She’d started off one some cable lifeguard show, similar to Baywatch, but her career had taken off when she’d landed a role in a Christopher Nolan movie, showing that she wasn’t just a pretty face. Now she was a lead on one of the highest rated TV Crime Shows. She was stunning as well, but known for being utterly charming and down to earth during interviews.

“You’re friends with Lila Archer?” That was a surprise.

As was the blush and the lip bite that followed.

“You were more than friends with Lila Archer?”

“Erm…. Kind of. We had a thing not long after the case ended. We met up a few times and had dates but then we both decided that the long distance thing wouldn’t work. We still keep in touch regularly and meet up for dinner if one of us is in town.”

“You had a thing with Lila Archer. Oh my god did you….. Well you know?”

He nodded.

“Well you are just full of surprises. Didn’t she date Jared Leto for a while?”

He nodded again.
“Okay so hypothetically, if me and you were to have sex, then by proxy, I’d have banged Jared Leto. Nice…..”

He looked shocked, his mouth falling open.

“I’m joking. Unless of course, you want to…There’s still that item on my list. You said you’d help remember!”

“Erm…. I’m still thinking of how to achieve certain points.”

“Of course you are.”

He didn’t say anything.

“I’m hungry….. Can we go find food?”

“Sounds like an excellent idea. One I fully support.”

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“Spencer, I’m nervous. What if she doesn’t actually like them?”

You were back in your hotel room waiting for Lila Archer to arrive. She’d texted Spencer telling him she’d come to you because it was easier. You’d hung your dresses up, borrowing a steamer from the hotel laundry service to lift the creases caused by the suitcase out and now you were pacing the room.

“Seph, she’s already told me she loved the way they looked. She can have her pick of designers, she wouldn’t wear something she didn’t like. Even as a favour to me. Calm down. She’ll be…..”

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK

“Here soon.”

Spencer rose to his feet and opened the door.

“You!”

The gorgeous blonde creature that was Lila Archer threw her arms around Spencer’s neck kissing his cheek. He shut the door behind her quickly, embracing her back.

Pulling away from him and grinning, she turned to you.

“And you must be Persephone. The creator of these amazing dresses Spencer showed me. I can’t wait to actually see them, although I must say I was surprised to be receiving fashion recommendations from Spencer.”

You laughed at her and held your hand out to her. She ignored it and hugged you instead.

“I don’t have too long annoyingly. My schedule is so jammed packed these weeks, especially as it’s awards season right now, it’s a wonder I’m finding time to sleep at all. Otherwise I’d have taken you both out for dinner.”

“It’s fine. I completely understand. Do you… erm, do you want to see the clothes.” You offered, feeling shy.

“Yes! Please.” She kicked off her heels, stripping away her coat and tossing that and her bag onto
the bed.

You led her through the door to your bedroom, taking her to where the dresses were hanging. She reached out feeling the fabric of them and smiling.

“These are amazing. They’re so different too, beautiful and elegant but still contemporary. Spencer explained that it’s two different lines you’re trying to establish?” She picked up the hanger of a floor length scarlet dress, holding it up against herself.

“Essentially yes. The longer dresses, and evening wear would be made to order for each individual. They’d fall under a line called ‘Alexandra Dawning’. And the shorter dresses and the rest of the clothes could be mass produced and made widely available, hopefully in stores and online. They’d fall under the name ‘The Damned Dead Queen’.”

She picked up one of the shorter dresses, a fifties style halter neck decorated with flowers and skulls, and scrolls with various translations of the words dead and Queen.

“I love the names too. A play on your names I guess? Spencer told me who you are.”

You glanced over at him and he looked away sheepishly.

“I totally get it by the way, that you want to do this for yourself. My parents didn’t approve of me acting, so I left home and set about making a name for myself. It was hard work, but I got there in the end. Are they not supportive?”

You shook your head at her.

“That’s a shame. Because your designs are brilliant. Can I try them on and see how much they need altering?”

“Of course…. So you think you might actually want to wear them?”

“Persephone, I want to buy them…..and if you’re looking for investors, I’d definitely be wanting in. Spencer said you had a business proposal. Can I take a copy with me to show to my lawyers. I know that once people see me wearing these clothes, people will want to buy them.”

You could feel your heart swelling inside, was she really saying she wanted to help endorse your line and get it up and running?

She started stripping off, not bothered at all that Spencer was still in the room. Well… You guessed they seen each other naked anyway. You still couldn’t quite believe that either. Not to say anything against him at all, but you’d just never have guessed it.

You helped her into the red evening dress, zipping it up.

“So, how about a stool anywhere?”

He went off in search of one and you began adjusting the dress, taking measurements and noting them down, pinning the dress in places.

Lila wasn’t that much slimmer that you, not conforming to the size zero Hollywood ideal, she was curvy and all the more attractive for it. It was no wonder she’d managed to snag one of the industries most eligible bachelors. The sizing would only need fixing slightly, and when you checked the hem, you realised you wouldn’t need the stool after all. In heels, the dress would fall perfectly.
Lila admired herself in the mirror and you admired the dress on her. It really did look amazing.

“So I’m going to the after party too and normally, I like to change. I want to try one of the shorter dresses too please.”

You helped her out of it, being careful not to pull on the pins. She slipped into the halter neck she’d been looking at.

“That would look great with some dark lip stick and thick eyeliner.”

“Exactly what I was thinking too. Can you take this one in too for me and I’ll buy them both? I’d need them doing by tomorrow though, that’s the only thing.”

“I’ll be able to do them overnight, they’re only small alterations.” You assured her.

She got changed again and you hung both dresses back up.

“So… What sort of prices are you looking at charging?”

“I can’t bill you! Not if you’re helping me.”

“You can and you will. Otherwise, you’ll never get anywhere. You said that the shorter one is to be available for everyone right? Here’s what I personally think you should charge for each.”

She named two prices, the price for the shorter dress being pretty much bang on what you’d thought you’d sell them for, if you ever managed to. You wanted everyone to be able to buy them and for them not just to be available to those with a disposable income. The price she gave for the evening dress though, was nine hundred dollars more than what you were thinking.

“Do you really think people would pay that much?”

“Persephone, it’s haute couture. People will pay for exclusive, made to measure personal designs. I’m sure you’ve paid a similar price for clothes before right? You know what woman will pay if they want something beautiful and unique. And this is, beautiful and unique.”

She was right. You’d paid some extortionate prices for made to measure dresses before you’d learnt how to sew your own.

“I’ll come back tomorrow evening around the same time if that’s okay. Text me if there’s any issues getting them done in time. Do you have that proposal, I’ll drop it over and at my lawyers tonight and we can let you know what we think.”

You rummaged in your suitcase pulling out a copy that you had had pre printed.

“You run a blog right? That’s where you currently take orders through? If I was you, I’d seriously invest in setting up a proper website, between now and next week if you can do it. The ceremony is on the sixteenth, so your brand name will be in the papers from the day after.”

“Already on it.” Spencer called over, a sly grin on his face.

“You are?”

“I contacted your assistant Helen and put her in touch with Penelope yesterday. Lila’s right. You need a proper website, one that can accept actual orders and payments. They’re using the photos from the portfolio you set up and Helen is contacting the seamstresses to check they can start work asap if needed.”
“Oh my god…. If this takes off, well have to work from my apartment initially. I hadn’t expected things to move so quickly.”

“There’s no absolute guarantee they will. But the last time I promoted something that was relatively unknown, they quickly sold out. So be prepared. I have to run. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

Lila hugged both of you before exiting the room, leaving you standing staring at Spencer, gobsmacked.

“I can’t believe you did this.”

He just shrugged, looking like it was no big deal.

You closed the gap between you and wrapped your arms around his neck embracing him tight and pressing your whole body against his. He quickly slipped his arms around your waist.

“Thank you. I swear you’re some sort of guardian angel Spencer Reid.”
The light that Spencer had seen in Persephone’s eyes last night when Lila had left had given him hope.

Hope that he was going to be able to talk her out of killing herself, without having to take drastic measures. Hope that she was going to be able to get her life back on track and live the life she wanted to live rather than the life she felt she was expected to lead.

When she hugged him and thanked him, calling him her guardian angel, he’d felt a sense of accomplishment. Seph could do this, she just needed a push in the right direction and hopefully Lilas involvement would help.

He’d be surprised when Lila had said she’d want to invest, but pleased. He’d know Lila for nine years now, had watched as she’d gone from a small cable TV show to the leading lady she was now. Her name being behind the brand, her promotion, would do what Seph was so loathe to use her own surname to do. Give the brand worth, and value.

After Lila had left, the pair had gone out for a quick bite to eat and then had a drink in the hotel bar, talking before bed.

“I still can’t believe you had a thing with Lila Archer and that she’s going to help me. You’re amazing! You must have been very good at that thing for her to want to do a favour for you.”

“Erm… Thanks…. I think. It’s not a favour though, she genuinely likes them. Just remember what she said though, there’s no guarantee it will mean success.”

“I know I know. But if she wears my clothes to an event and names them, it will mean the brand has been in the press. Recognition in its own right. So my parents can take that, and suck it. Speaking of my family….. I need to ask you something.”

“Okay.” He drained the last of his drink and signalled to the waiter to bring two more.

“My family are throwing me a party. They do it every year but I know this year they’ll be planning a huge speech to welcome me back to the business. Will you come with me?” She played with her hair, wrapping it around her finger nervously.

“I’ll come with you sure. Are you planning on telling them that you’re not going back to the company?”

“Yes. But not yet. I need to wait and see how this thing with Lila pans out. I’m not going back though. One way or another.”

“One way or another. The other way still being….. ”

“Don’t ask a question you know you won’t like the answer to Spencer. It’s a question I don’t know the answer to myself. But keep doing what you’re doing. Please. Having you in my life is giving me hope.”

“I’m giving you hope?” The waiter set two new drinks down in front of them.

“Yes. You’re giving me hope. You care, and you listen to me. You remind me of Alex in a lot of ways you know. You’d have liked her.” She looked sad for a moment, before smiling at him, something he was seeing more and more of.
“I’m sure you’re right. Seph.” He smiled back at her and they finished their drinks before heading back to their rooms.

…..

The next day Seph was hard at work altering the clothes for Lila, and Spencer was messaging Penelope back and forth seeing how the website was coming along.

Very nicely it seemed. Penelope and Helen had been working hard on the website, skyping with each other when Penny finished at the office. Spencer had spoken with Helen too, unbeknownst to Seph.

The girl was enthusiastic about this but had been confused as to why Spencer was helping Seph and how he knew her. He gave the old friends story that he’d fed to the rest of his team and she seemed to buy it. She was sweet and had said she missed Seph, Spencer assuring her that she’d be back in New York soon. Hoping that she’d be back there to stay.

By the time Lila had come back, the dresses had been altered and when she tried them back on, they’d fit perfectly.

Lila had written Seph a cheque for the two amounts she’d suggested last night, Seph refusing to take it initially.

“Take it. And cash it! I’ll check and if the money hasn’t gone, I’ll set Spencer on you.” The girls had laughed and hugged, Lila telling her that her lawyer would be in touch and that she definitely did want to invest.

Reminding them of the date of the awards ceremony she left, hugging Spencer goodbye and telling him not to leave it so long between messages next time.

“So… Persephone Bella-Morte. How does it feel to have your first big sale? And a Hollywood actress interested in invested in your line.” He asked her, his face aching from the wide grin.

“It feels fucking amazing Spencer Reid. And this is all down to you. How can I thanks you?”

“You know how. By still being here in ten years time.”

Her face dropped at his comment.

“Spencer…… I’m elated by this, I really am. And it looks very positive. But let’s not count our chickens… Well, my chickens. Plus, there’s still list stuff to tick off. You promised you helped me achieve as many as we could. I want adventure in the great wide somewhere, remember…. ”

“And we will. Speaking of your list, be ready tomorrow at 8am. We have somewhere to be.”

“But our flight back to DC is tomorrow?”

“Its an overnight flight again… And don’t worry, I called the airline and changed us to first class. What I’ve got planned will only take a few hours.”

“Ah okay….. So it’s not the fucking.”

He laughed. “Definitely not….I still haven’t worked that one out.”

“Trying to deny your feelings for me Dr Reid?” Seph flirted, batting her eyelashes.

“Me? Never. You’ve got me sussed……Now, let’s go and celebrate your first big sale.” He
proffered his elbow to her and she took it.

“Yes, let’s indeed.”
Spencer had been driving for about forty minutes, not checking the map since he had gotten into the car, or using the satnav that had come in the hire car.

“How are you doing that? You said you’ve never been here before yet you know the way?” You asked him.

The way to where though, was something he still hadn’t you’d you. The only thing he had said was for you to wear pants, rather than a dress or skirt.

“I have an eidetic memory. I read the directions before we left and checked the map. I don’t need to recheck it.”

“Eidetic memory? Like… Total recall? You remember everything you see? That must be handy for those nights you spent with Hollywood’s top television actress.”

Spencer guffawed at you and signalled to turn off the main road you were on, starting to wind upwards.

“Not quite everything. It works mainly with texts rather than actual images. I can do it with some conversations too but it depends on how much I’ve been paying attention. But it’s useful. Especially in my job.”

“I’ll bet.”

Around five minutes later you spotted an attraction sign. “Bridge To Nowhere.” Spencer signalled again and pulled onto the track.

“Is that where we’re going?”

“Yup.”

“The Bridge To Nowhere. Sounds kinda poetic, don’t you think?”

He didn’t answer and a few yards later pulled into a parking lot.

Looking around you spotted signs. ‘Bungee America’.

“You’re shitting me. You booked a bungee jump for me?”

He grinned at you. “For us actually.”

“You’re doing one too? Are we doing a tandem one?”

“No. This specific company won’t allow tandem jumpers for first timers. You’re jumping first and then me.”

“Fuck.”

He laughed at you again, parking the car and getting out.
You slid out a few moments later, legs feeling slightly unsteady.

You looked around, but couldn’t see a jump platform anywhere, only a large building and other cars.

Spencer placed his hand in the small of your back and nudged you forward towards the building.

“Are we really doing this?”

“Hey, it’s your list.”

He was right, it was. Something you’d wanted to try for years, either this or skydiving. Just to experience the moment of free fall before being caught and lowered to safety.

You entered the building and Spencer walked over to the checkout desk where a girl in khaki shorts and a shirt bearing the company logo was sat.

“Hi. We’ve got two jumps book for 10am, under the name Reid.”

The girl checked her computer and grabbed a few forms, placing them on the counter in front of her.

“Are you both first timers jumpers?”

You both nodded.

“Excellent. I just need you to sign these forms for me and then one of our jump masters will take you through and start getting you sorted. There’s two jumps happening now and then it’s your turns. We’re not very busy today, so you won’t have much of audience I’m afraid.”

“Thats good. I don’t think I can handle a bunch of strangers hearing me scream.”

“Some people like the audience. Seeing people watching them gives them a sense of pride. They’re less likely to back out if they think there’s people watching.”

You scanned through the release form quickly, just your standard ‘I promise not to drag the company through the nine circles of lawyer hell if anything goes wrong’. “ You squiggled your signature at the bottom, sliding it back across the counter. The girl called into the office behind her.

“Jack, your ten o clock jumps are here.”

A tall, sturdy looking blonde men strolled out of the office. He was taller than Spencer by at least two inches and had biceps that looked like they might rip open the sleeves of his shirt.

“Hey guys. Welcome to Bungee America, The Bridge To Nowhere. I’m Jack and I’ll be your jump master today. I’ll talk you though everything and take you out to the platform.” He looked at you expectantly.

“Seph.”

“Spencer.”

“Okay! Seph and Spencer, do you wanna follow me through and we’ll get you both weighed up. You should be able to see the jumps going ahead now from the kit room.”

He led you down a small passage way and into a room with floor to ceiling windows on one wall.
The other walls were lined with harnesses, ropes and weights.

Jack led you over to a set of scales, the display turned so that only he could see the read out.

“Okay, Seph you’re jumping first right. Hop on up here so we can check what harness you need and see what length we need to set the ropes at.”

You climbed onto the scales, finally seeing the view outside.

The attraction was set on what looked like a gorge, a large bridge connecting between the two sides. In the middle of the bridge there was a large platform where you could make out a small blonde girl with a guy stood next to her. Thirty seconds later and the girl jumped, almost diving off the platform head first and her arms outstretched. You watched as the long thick cord followed her down. Down, down, down, before eventually catching her and pulling taut.

You couldn’t see whether there was water below or not but when she rebounded she looked dry. She rebounded a few times until you could no longer see her and the rope hung straight, swaying.

“Fucking hell.” You muttered, your eyes wide.

“You’ll enjoy it Seph, trust me. Once you get up there and jump, the adrenaline rush you feel is so powerful. It’s completely safe, we’ve been doing this here for fifteen years and we’ve not had any accidents.”

“First time for everything.”

“Actually the most common reported injury associated with bungee jumping is related to eyesight. It comes from the abrupt rise in upper body intravascular pressure during the bungee cord recoil.” Spencer said, watching the rope being pulled back up the bridge.

“Not helping Spencer Reid.”

“You don’t have to do this, Persephone. But it was on your list. Here’s your adventure.”

“List? A bucket list type thing.” Jack asked you, recording your weight down on two different pieces of paper and selecting a harness off the wall. “You can climb off the scales by the way. I’ve got your measurements.”

“Kind of yes. Is there water down below?”

“Yes. But we won’t let you hit the water. Some companies used to, but most have stopped. The impact of your head against the water can be problematic. But essentially, if anything were to happen then you’d fall into the water rather than onto a concrete surface. The measurement we’ve just taken, let us know how much rope we can use based on your weight. When bungee jumping first came around, jump masters had to change the ropes for varying weights. Now we have a machine the holds the excess rope and either feeds it out or holds it back, depending on height and weight. The less permanent jumps still have to change bungees if they have jumpers of very different height and weight classes.”

You could see the men on the bridge kneeling down and fiddling with machinery as the girls male companion inched along the bridge ready to be harnessed.

“Spencer, hop on the scales man. Let’s get you sorted.”

Jack wrote out his measurements too, selecting a hardness of a different colour.
“Now. It’s up to you if want to wear helmets or not. You don’t need them, it’s the same with, or without. But some people feel extra safe with them. Even though it wouldn’t make the slightest bit of difference if anything were to happen. But it won’t. Like I said, no accidents in fifteen years since we opened.”

You looked at Spencer to see if he’d choose one. He was smart, he’d know whether they’d make any difference. He didn’t take one, so neither did you.

“Awesome. Okay, so the dude on the bridge is ready to go and then it’s your turns. Shall we go out, you’ll be able to see the bounce better.”

You looked at Spencer apprehensively. Yes this had been something you’d wanted to do, but you’d been fifteen when you wanted to do it. At 29 and actually here, you were feeling a whole lot different about it.

He held his hand out to you and you took it, following him and Jack out. Jack led you up a small path to the end of the bridge. Looking down, you could see the water below as well as a small boat, manned by two people. There was a viewing platform down below where the girl who’d previously jumped was now sat, along with around eight other people.

“Have they all had a go too?” You asked.

“Nope, only three of them. Lots of people come out to watch. It’s a big thing. When you’ve stopped bouncing, Sal and James down there will come out and collect you. They’ll do it as quickly as they can so you’re not suspended upside down for too long. There’s a cafe down there too, quite often people need a sugary drink or something to eat afterwards. Jumping can take its toll on your body. Okay watch. The boy’s about to go.”

You looked over to where the man was stood on the edge of the platform, gripping the two railings on either side. The jump master was stood a few steps back from him and the crowd below were shouting encouragement. After a minute, he leaned forward and fell, letting out at loud yell as he dropped.

You could see the full extent of the drop here, his head stopping a few metres above the water when he stopped recoiling. Once he’d stopped bouncing, the two people in the boat started out to fetch him.

“I’m gonna go trade with Olly okay and then me and Andy, he’s the other guy on the bridge, will set your ropes up. We try to be with each jumper from the start so it makes it easier. Take a few minutes and then cross the bridge and we’ll hardness you up. Spencer, you need to stay behind the gate okay. We only have one jumper at a time on the bridge.”

Jack gave you a grin and then set off, taking his papers and harnesses with him, one of the other men high fiving him, before making his way across the bridge, grinning as he passed you.

“Kinda ironic don’t you think?” You said to Spencer.

“That I’m trying to stop you jumping off a bridge by getting you to actually jump off one? Definitely. You ready?”

“I think so.”

“Okay. I’ll see you at the bottom.”

You turned suddenly, embracing him in a hug and kissing his cheek.
“See you at the bottom Spencer Reid.”

You pulled away and started making your way across to Jack, looking down at the water below and the group of people watching. Some of them waved and you waved back shyly.

“We’re all set up and ready for you Seph. Let get the ankle harness on you.”

He knelt in front of you, slipping your ankles into the bindings one by and securing them, before attaching the harness to the bungee cord. A few more checks and adjustments later and he stood.

“Okay, you’ll be able to walk so I’m gonna slowly follow you out on to the platform. Hold onto the railings. I’ll be holding your shoulders whilst Andy makes the final adjustments. When I let go of you, you’re good to jump. Take as much time as you want. When you jump, spread your arms wide like a Swan dive and lean forward. It’s better than just stepping off the edge. You’ll feel around five seconds of free fall before the bungee catches and then a sharp yank on the recoil. Try to keep your neck as still as possible okay. When you’ve stopped, Sal and Jim will get you. And then you can watch your boyfriend have his go.”

You didn’t bother to correct him, you just nodded and you felt Jack give you a gentle push. You started to walk out onto the platform, gripping the railings as you went, your movements restricted by the harness. Jack’s hands remained on your shoulders, as you stood at the edge. Moments later you heard a voice call out “good to go” and Jack’s hands released you.

“Swan dive, remember Seph. It’s your show now, whenever you’re ready.” He stepped back.

You looked down at the water below, remembering the last time you were in this position. You were much, much higher this time. You saw the people below looking up, encouragement coming from them. They didn’t know you, but their voices were friendly, telling you that you could do this.

You glanced left, searching for Spencer at the end of the bridge. He was stood watching intently, a smile on his face. He gave you a thumbs up.

Okay. Seph, you can do this.

It seemed a lot scarier knowing you were going to catch though than when you weren’t.

You inched forward and leaned over the edge.

And then you let go, throwing your arms out wide.

The surge you felt as you free fell was like nothing you’d felt before, the air pushing against your body as you rushed towards the water, a tiny voice inside asking ‘what if’. And then the sudden pull and the bounce.

And then you were grinning and laughing, seeing the people on the ground clapping and trying to catch sight of Spencer as the world rushed past.

You’d done it.

And it had felt awesome.

You recoiled a few times, each time rebounding less and less until you could see a boat approaching you on the water.

“Hi! Congratulations, you did it!” A cheerful brunette greeted you as she steadied the boat, her
companion gripping your waist and tugging on the rope so that you were moved into a seated position on the floor of the vessel.

A few moments later and the cord was free and snaking it’s way back to the top.

“How do you feel.”

“Lightheaded, but amazing!” You managed to breathe out, searching for Spencer as the boat made its way back to the shore.

“First time?”

You nodded.

“His first time too?”

“Yep.”

“Haha, brilliant.”

You’d been so intent on watching Spencer walking across the the bridge, that you hadn’t felt Jim removing the harness from your ankles. When you got back to the boat dock, he climbed out and led you over to a bench, dropping the harness into a wire crate.

“You’ve got a great spot here. Sit and watch and we’ll go fetch him for you when he’s done.”

“Thank you.”

You looked up, squinting slightly in the low autumn sun and seeing that Spencer was now on the platform, Jacks hands on his shoulders.

You were too far away to see the look on his face, to see whether he was shaking or not. Almost as soon as Jack stepped back, he released the railings and jumped.

And you watched as your new friend, the person who’d become so important to in the space of just over a week, fell.

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter 19

s Spencer climbed out of the little boat, his legs shook slightly, he couldn’t believe he’d done it.

Nor could he believe how exhilarating it had felt, leaping from that height. Feeling the rush of the air through his hair, the feeling of weightlessness in the five seconds of freefall before his ankles were caught and he’d bounced. He took risks in his professional life but never in his personal one. Not that bungee jumping was a huge risk, but still.

Seph ran towards him grinning like an idiot and jumped, throwing her arms around his neck and her legs around his waist squealing “We did it! We did it!”

In his surprise he stumbled backwards, his ass hitting the wooden deck hard as Seph fell on top of him, a confused look upon her face as she found herself on the ground.

They both turned to the small group of people who were watching them, now clapping at their little show.

Persephone starting laughing first, rolling off Spencers hips and standing up holding her hand out to him.

He took it and hauled himself upright, brushing his jeans off.

“Sorry sorry sorry! I was just a bit over excited there… We did it!”

“We definitely did. I can’t believe we both did it. None of my work colleagues would ever believe me.”

“Nor would any of my family. Alex would have probably laughed at me too and demanded to see proof.” Her eyes flickered, sadness crossing over them, quickly blinking it away.

“Thank you….. Again. I’m saying that so much to you recently.”

“You’re very welcome. It actually felt really good to do this for myself as well. I rarely take risks.” Spencer told her.

“Surely you risk your life most days?” She wrinkled up her nose.

“For my job yes, but in my personal life. Hardly ever. The pay off has never seemed great enough to make it worth it.”

“Hmmmm.” She looked thoughtful for a second, like she wanted to say something else to him but decided against it.

“What now?”

“Back to the hotel, pack up and get some food. Then to the airport.”

“We don’t have to be at the airport for hours yet… And we have a late check out right? Can we just…. sit here and watch people jump for a bit?”

“Of course. Let’s get a drink first. I feel like I need some glucose inside me.”

And so they sat together for the next two hours, huddled close side by side on a bench watching
as people took their own leaps off the bridge.

Some were adrenaline junkies, flinging themselves off the second the jump master stepped back. Others were more cautious, taking a few moments, some even minutes before they tentatively stepped off.

Each time the boat docked though, bringing them back to shore, the looks on their faces was always sheer joy.

Not necessarily joy because of the sensation that jumping had caused, but the joy at doing something that a lot of them wouldn’t normally do. Maybe some had waited for years to do this, having it on a list similar to Sephs. Each person had look of accomplishment about them, the satisfaction of setting out to do something and actually achieving it.

Spencer wished he’d jumped first so he could have seen that look on Sephs face as she’d climbed out of the boat but he’d wanted to be at the top in case she backed out and decided she couldn’t do it.
Still, hopefully he’d see the look of accomplishment on her thirtieth birthday when she told her family she wasn’t going back to Lux.

And hopefully it wouldn’t be because she was heading off to find another bridge.

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The unlikely pairing returned to the hotel a few hours later and packed their belongings up before heading out for some food and then finally, to the airport for the trip home. Well to their rented apartment.

Spender thought how weird it would feel when he actually had to go back to his own apartment and not have a constant companion by his side.

In the week and a half he’d known Seph, he’d quickly got used to her being there, which was odd because he didn’t make new friends that easily. But Seph had quickly accepted him along with his quirks just as he had accepted her. He wondered that maybe if his plan with Lila didn’t take off, that he’d maybe be able to convince her to move in with him, as friends of course. She’d said that her parents would cut her off financially if she shunned Lux again. He could put her up, probably get her a desk job at HQ until she could get back on her feet. Although, he’d definitely have to invest in a sofa bed. He was NOT sleeping on his couch for that long. But it was something to think about. Another option. One he’d keep to himself for now.

The plane ride home was a lot less painful than the journey out. They settled in first class again for their overnight flight, Persephone asking for a pillow and blanket almost straight away, suddenly looking incredibly drained. She made herself comfortable and closed her eyes, not opening them until the plane started its descent back into DC.

Once her initial elation had worn off this morning, she’d been quiet. Almost too quiet. She was thinking about things, and although Spencer didn’t know what exactly, he got the feeling that it wasn’t happy thoughts she was consorting with in her mind.

When they finally returned to the apartment in the early hours of the morning, he reached out and touched her wrist, stopping her as she started to walk almost straight to her bedroom.

“Are you okay?”

She blinked a few times, before focusing her eyes on his as if he’d woken her up from some dream.
“Erm yeah. Sorry. The excitement of the last few days must have just taken it out of me. You know, I’ve spent the last few months since….. Well the last few months, not really doing much. I just feel incredibly tired that’s all. A good sleep in a proper bed will do me good. We’ll talk later okay. Maybe play some more chess.”

“Okay, as long as you’re okay Persephone.”

“I’m okay. Just incredibly tired. Thank you again.” She hugged him, tighter than she had done up until now and then walked across to her room, not looking back.

He watched her go, accepting her explanation that she was exhausted, but knowing that there was more to it.

The fire in her eyes had gone and she again looked like she had the night he’d found her on the bridge.

Defeated.

And that worried him.
Chapter 20

What had flipped inside of you, you didn’t know. One minute you felt on top of the world and the next you felt like the world was on top of you, crushing you.

In the space of a week and a half, you’d ticked off items that had been on your list for 14 years, established contact with a Hollywood A Lister who was going to promote your brand and made a friend who was proving to be one of the best people you’d ever met.

So what was the problem?

Why wasn’t it enough?

And would anything ever BE enough?

You’d sat watching people jumping, looking so pleased with themselves the way you had been initially. And yet all you could think was, what if your cord had snapped? What if something had gone wrong and you’d died?

You felt exhausted again, emotionally drained and like you wanted to curl up and sleep.

And so you did.

For two days.

You got back to the apartment, made an excuse to Spencer, ignoring the concern on his face and took yourself off to your room. You pulled the drapes shut, stripped down to your underwear and climbed into your bed, curling up under the covers and hiding from the world. Hiding from your responsibilities and hiding from anything that took effort.

Sleep came in dribs and drabs, you feeling confused when you woke up but shaking the feeling off and closing your eyes again.

The only times you moved was to drag yourself into the ensuite to pee and to force your mouth under the faucet to drink.

Your dreams were filled with memories of Alex, fun times you had at boarding school and nights out in your twenties, interspersed with flashes of her funeral, recollections of the moment you received the phone call from her older brother telling you she’d been killed and the utter numbness that had followed.

Memories of her funeral, seeing a box containing your best friends body being lowered into the ground and wanting to throw yourself in there afterwards. The only person that had made any effort to understand you, gone. The only person you felt comfortable telling your thoughts and fears to, no longer in this world.

You could hear Spencer knocking at your bedroom door at regular intervals, choosing to ignore him, ignoring the only person you had in your life right now that was actually there for you.

You needed to snap out of this, but you couldn’t. You hated the feelings of dread and despair, the feelings of being lost and alone. Wishing you understood why you felt this way, why you weren’t satisfied with living in this world.

Maybe some people just weren’t meant to enjoy life? Maybe no matter what you did, you were
always going to wallow?

Deep down you knew that you needed professional help this time. You may have been able to cope with your depression before when you were younger, but Alex dying was too much for you to cope with by yourself.

But that meant reaching out and admitting to someone else that you weren’t okay. And too many people already knew that. You didn’t want people’s pity, their questioning eyes trying to figure out how someone with everything you had, was so unhappy, so ungrateful.

Which was why you’d chosen to end things instead of dealing with the questions.

You remembered the day you’d made the decision. It had been a normal day, well what had become your normal.

Get up, go to the bathroom. Head to the kitchen to force some kind of food into your body to stop the rumbling. Food was just a necessity, something you didn’t want but that your body needed. Stare at the TV, stare at your cell, stare at your sketchbook. Stare at the list of things you’d promised your best friend you’d achieve. Things you were never going to make happen.

You’d picked up your pencils and had started drawing, a dress. A gown to be exact, a beautiful one, fit for a princess. When you leaned back and looked at it, you knew you had designed your funeral outfit.

When you went into your supply closet and started pulling out fabrics and cutting them up to a fix to your dress makers doll, you realised how ready you were to wear this dress.

And how it didn’t scare you, knowing that. It seemed like the perfect way out. An end to the constant feeling of your heart breaking for no apparent reason. An end to the feelings that no matter what you did, you wouldn’t be happy.

So you decided. That after thirty years on this planet, you would no longer cease to exist, no longer be a part of it. You would join Alex, you would die.

The calm that had descended over you almost as soon as you’d made that decision had been glorious. Knowing that you were going to kill yourself almost gave you a new lust for life. Carrying out everyday tasks had you thinking “I only have to do this for another seven weeks” and it made you smile, knowing you had a secret that no one else had.

When your parents had contacted you about your birthday party, you’d made the decision you would do it that night. And instead of being your funeral dress, the outfit you’d set about creating became your death dress instead. You would wear it the party and then find a place later that night, to end it.

The New York Lux was twenty stories high, comprising of the business headquarters as well as the hotel. So you’d decided how fitting it would be to throw yourself off the roof of one of the places were trying to escape. Maybe your family would then understand how much pressure they’d put on you in your adult years and how damaging their lack of faith in you had been.

Sitting up in your bed you looked around the room, wishing the dress you’d made wasn’t all the way in New York city. You really wanted to wear it now.

You rose from the bed in your underwear and walked to your ensuite, standing in front of the mirror, not fully seeing yourself in its reflection.

Spying your razor on the side of the bath, you reached for it, staring at the shiny sharp blade,
tilting it under the harsh bathroom lighting and sliding your finger across it, feeling the blade bite but not break your skin.

You could end this now. Snap the safety casing and drag it across your veins.

It would be so easy.

But yet….

It was so hard.

Why was it so hard?

It was what you wanted, wasn’t it?

You put your razor blade down and picked up a water glass from the shelf next to the mirror, tossing it at the wall in frustration and seeing it shattering into a million pieces.

It was then that you slumped to the floor and started to sob.

You couldn’t do it.

You really WERE too much of a coward to live, but too much of coward to actually kill yourself.

You heard your bedroom door opening, you hadn’t locked it and Spencer had been decent enough to respect your privacy these last two days, surprising you after his initial reluctance to leave you alone at all.

He hurried into the bathroom, stopping when he saw you slumped in your underwear, glass covering the floor on the other side of the room.

Looking up at him through teary eyes, you finally said the words that you should have said long ago.

“I need help, I can’t do this anymore. I’m done being not okay.”

He picked his way carefully across the room and tugged the towel of the railing, sitting down next to you and wrapping it around you.

“I’m here, Seph. Talk to me.”

“Spencer. I don’t wanna die. But I don’t want to live like this anymore, with these constant thoughts and feelings, the hatred and the feelings of constant failure. It’s not right. I think…. I think I need to talk to a doctor.”
“I think… I think I need to talk to a doctor.” The moment those words had left your mouth, Spencer jumped into action.

“A doctor. Okay. I can arrange that. Are you sure?”

“I’m sure. I don’t want to be medicated or anything unless I need to be, but I can’t handle feel so happy one moment and like I’m getting somewhere and then so sad the next. It was different before, when I had Alex to pull me out of my head. But now I don’t have her and I can’t do it myself. I can’t get myself out of my funk and back to normal because being this way has become my normal.”

“You don’t have to do this alone you know Seph. I’m here for you.” He stroked your arm tentatively.

“I know you are. And I’m so fucking glad I met you Spencer Reid. I truly hope you’ll be a part of my life now for always. But I can’t dump all my problems on you. I can’t expect you to solve all of them for me. Hell, I don’t think anyone can solve them. But talking to you has helped so much. I just….. I don’t know. I feel so lost and I’ve felt lost since I was a teenager. The feeling hides away for a while but it always comes back. Always. Maybe a doctor can help me find a way to keep it away for good.”

“Maybe you’re right. But I do mean what I said. I’m here for you. For as long as you need me. And I hope you’ll always be in my life too. I like you Seph, you don’t judge me in the way that other people do.”

You smiled at each other before he pulled himself up of the floor, holding his hands out to you and tugging you up with him.

“Stay here and don’t move. I’m gonna get a dust pan and brush and clean the glass up so it’s safe for you to walk around. Then, you’re gonna have a bath or shower whichever, and I’m gonna make some calls. I can probably get you an emergency appointment with a therapist I used to see.”

“Oh. Thank you. Again. For everything. I genuinely do not know what I’d do without you right now.”

You did. You’d be dead if he wasn’t here right now.

“It’s okay. Stop thanking me. I think you’re doing the right thing by talking to someone if it means anything. A professional will be able to help more than me.”

He cleaned up the mess and then left you to have a bath, you washing two days worth of self loathing away from your skin, before getting dressed and making yourself presentable.

When you returned to the living area, Spencer was on his computer, a website pulled up.

“I thought I’d show you this before we leave. Something positive.” He turned the screen towards you and you saw the TDDQ logo you’d designed, plastered across the heading of the page.

“Penelope and Helen have been working extra hard since our meeting with Lila. It’s all set and ready to launch, just in time for the awards in two days. Garcia says you owe her at least another bag and a dress.”
“That woman can have anything she wants. Hell, I’ll name a design after her. This is amazing.”

It really was. Impeccably designed and easily navigatable, it’s was cute yet professional looking, your clothes displayed beautifully on models you hadn’t seen before.

“Where did these photos come from?”

“Lila called. She wanted to do something else to help out, so she contacted an agency in New York and we sent Helen and a photographer over with the designs that were left in New York.”

“You did all this in two days?” You were shocked.

“Four days. You’ve been in there for four days Persephone.”

Shiiit.

Really? You were sure it had been two.

“It’s no wonder I’m starving then.”

“Yes. Food. I’ve got you an appointment at 4pm. Dr White is staying later especially for you. Let’s go and get some food and then I’ll take you, okay.”

“Okay… Wait. Four days? That means the awards show is in two days time. And my birthday is in three. Spencer we need to get to New York.”

“You’re exactly right. We do. Which is why we have tickets for the Amtrak tomorrow at 4pm. We should get into NYC for around 8pm.”

You’d flown to DC to get here, it was quicker. But you guessed train was okay too.

“So we need to ship up and ship out tomorrow then. I’ll start packing later. Are we ready? I’m hungry.”

You stood up from your seat and watched Spencer close down the laptop before joining you.

“Let’s go.”

…..

Seph had been in with Dr White for approaching three hours when the door opened and she exited. It was lucky that Reid had had the foresight to bring his laptop along the the office with him, hooking up to the WiFi and passing the time reading online. It wasn’t his first choice of apparatus to read with, he’d always prefer actual physical books first and foremost, but it would do.

The last four days he’d been worried and at a loss of what to do.

He knew he needed to leave her alone for a while, something in Sephs body language had told him that if he pushed himself on her, she’d break down completely. But as one day rolled into three, he’d started getting concerned.

He turned to the only other person who Seph had been honest about her predicament with and called his supervisor.

Hotch had listened to his ramblings, telling him to give her time and to check up on her discreetly. If a week passed and she still didn’t resurface, then maybe it would be time to stage some sort of
intervention.

So he’d given her time and space, busying himself with video calls between himself, Helen and Garcia, speaking to Lila through text messages and helping to set this business up to be something that couldn’t fail.

Helen had scoped out a workspace not far from Sephs apartment, all she needed was Sephs signature on the rental agreement. She’d also assembled the seamstresses and designers ready to start to work the moment the orders started coming in. And Lila had assured him the orders would come. Especially for the Alexandra Dawning line. She’d shown her dresses to a couple of her cast mates, the women ooohing and aahing and wanting to have their own dresses designed by this new exclusive designer that they’d never heard of before. Lila was certain Seph would be able to charge a lot more than what she’d charged her.

They’d decided that the website would have a limited run on a small selection of designs from The Damned Dead Queen line initially, to give the seamstresses and the business time to get used to the designs and for the brand reputation to grow. This had been Sephs idea originally anyway and Spencer hoped she wouldn’t mind that he and Helen were essentially putting all this into play without her. He looked forward to actually meeting her friend, Helen had been friendly and enthusiastic over video chats, expressing much love for Seph.

By the time the fourth day had rolled around and Persephone still hadn’t left her room, Spencer had decided that if she didn’t show her face today, he was going in.

Although he kinda had been in to see her anyway. Listening outside her door until her was certain she was sleeping and then creeping inside. Not in a weird way, just to make sure she had DONE anything. He heard her moving about at various points during the day and night, her toilet flushing and her tap running. He knew she could get access to water, but unless she’d been sneaking out when he was asleep, and he was fairly certain she wasn’t, then she’d be going days without food.

When he’d heard the glass smash earlier today, he ran. Barging into her bathroom he’d seen her collapsed on her bathroom floor in her underwear sobbing. She looked pale, her hair lank and a slight odour of someone who hadn’t washed in a few days coming from her. To sum it up easily, she looked like crap.

When he’d clocked the broken glass and the razor blade that was close to her hand, he immediately started scanning her body for cuts. But there were none.

And when she’d finally spoke, telling him that she didn’t want to die and she needed help, his heart had lifted. She was a pitiful sight, still beautiful in her distressed state, but pitiful. But admitting she wanted help and that she thought she needed to see someone was a step he hadn’t expected her to take. He’d been hopeful that they could do this by themselves but when she’d retreated to her room for four days it had became clear that he wasn’t cut out for this. But now she herself had recognised that she needed help. And that was good.

It seems such a cliché to say that the first step to recovery is admitting you need help. But it truly is.

And she’d admitted and asked for it.

When she left Dr White’s room, she looked lighter. She’d been crying, for a long time by the streaks on her face. But she carried herself with a different air. One of someone who’d had some weight lifted off her in some way or another.

“Are you ready to go? I’m sorry I took so long.” She played with a strand of her auburn hair.
“It’s fine. And yes, let’s go. Do you want to grab some more food on the way?”

Seph had nodded and they took a slow, quiet walk back through the city, grabbing a take out pizza on their way to add to the huge meal they’d eaten before her appointment. Getting back to the apartment, they switched the heating lamps back on and took their food outside.

“How are you feeling now?” He asked carefully.

“Not better as such, but less not okay. We talked. A lot. I couldn’t even tell you what about for the most part. But Dr White has referred me to a therapist on New York and wants me to see her straight away when I’m back. She does….. ” Seph looked down, almost seeming ashamed. “She thinks that I’d benefit from antidepressants, as well as ongoing therapy. But she doesn’t want to start me off herself. She says I need to get settled at home first and get my own Doctor, as the dosages will probably need adjusting. I never wanted to have to rely on meds.” She flushed red, and fiddled with her hair again.

“Seph, it’s nothing to be ashamed or embarrassed about. Being on antidepressants doesn’t make you less of a person. And they help stabilise your moods. Millions of people all over the world take them. It not a bad thing.”

“I know, I know. I just thought I could get on track without them. But I can’t, so I’ll try them. She thinks I need to sack off the idea of completing my list too, at least in the time frame I’ve given myself. We’d never do it now anyway.” She bit into a slice of pizza, chewing it thoughtfully.

“True. But I do still want to walk the Inca trail with you. And I do want you to take me to London. We can still do those things. And I’m sure you’ll achieve the other things too.”

“Spencer? What happens to us. When I go home. You’ve been my rock these past two weeks. But you have to go back to work and we live four hours away from each other.”

Us. Spencer knew she meant “us” as in their friendship, but it still sounded strange. What did happen?

“Erm… Well we keep in touch. The same way Lila and I do I guess. Email, phone, and then we make plans to meet up when we can. This may sound strange but you’re one of the first real friends outside of work people I’ve had.”

“I am?”

Reid grabbed another slice, nodding at her.

“Yes. I don’t make friends that easily. But it’s been oddly easy with you, even given the circumstances.” He bit into his food, seeing her purse her lips.

“If we’re friends… Will you tell me about her? You still haven’t.”

Maeve. She hadn’t forgot what Hotch had said then.

“Yes. I’ll tell you tomorrow. I promise.”

“Okay. Thank you.”

“So what do you wanna do for the rest of the evening?” He asked her. He’d pack tomorrow quickly. It wouldn’t take him long. He only intended on going to New York for a few days anyway so he’d take most of his things home before they headed to the station.
“Chess? I still haven’t beaten you.”

“Chess it is.”
They played chess against each until around 10:30pm, Seph still not beating him but definitely coming close. She kept him on his toes, something he wasn’t used to when playing against most people.

They retired to their bedrooms, Persephone wrapping her arms around Spencers torso in a long hug and burying her face in his chest before she let him go, whispering her thanks to him yet again.

Sleep came quickly to him, Spencer less concerned about Seph now that she had opened up to a professional, the sleepless nights from the last four days catching up with him.

When he awoke in the morning it was still early and when he peeked out of his bedroom curtains, he could see that it was still dark, but being November, the sun would start rising soon.

Remembering an item from her list, he had an idea and he crept into her bedroom.

“Persephone….Seph.” He nudged her gently, her soft snores making him chuckle.

“Huh? What?” she sat up sleepily.

“Come outside. And bring your bed cover with you.”

Surprisingly, she didn’t argue. She just slipped out of bed, stumbling slightly and starting to pull her thick cover off the bed, Reid grabbing it and helping her.

She followed him outside, dropping down into one of the chairs they’d been sat in the night before. Spencer sat next to her closely, and wrapped the cover around the both of them, his breath visible in the cold November air.

“Why am I awake and why am I outside, freezing my bloody tits off?” She sounded so English then, that Spencer had to stifle a laugh. He just inched his chair closer and searched for her hand under the cover.

“I know we’re forgetting the list but you said you wanted to watch the sun set and sun rise from the same remote spot, having spent the whole night with someone special. I know it’s not the same, but we’ve watched the sun go down from here the first night, we might not have paid much attention to it because I was teaching you chess, but it still happened. It’s not remote and I know I’m not anyone special, but can it count?”

She took in his words, looking over the balcony and seeing the sky slowly starting to change colour.

Turning to him, she squeezed his hand and said softly. “Of course it can count. And Spencer….. You are someone special. I don’t think you’ll ever quite realise how special you are to me now. I may have known you for only two weeks, but you’ll always, ALWAYS, hold a special piece of my heart for everything you’ve done for me.”

She smiled and then leant her head, resting it on his arm and turning her face back towards the sky. Reid glanced down at her periodically, checking she hadn’t fallen asleep and replaying her words in his head.

He realised that she’d always hold a special piece of his heart too. The girl he tried to save from
“Seph, you wanted to know about Maeve. And why Hotch thought that me doing this for you was about her. He was right, when it boils down to it. I couldn’t save her, so I wanted to be able to save you.”

She raised her head and turned to look at him, brushing her hair out of her eyes and waiting.

And so he told her. Everything.

How he’d contacted Maeve to help with his headaches and how they’d struck up a long distance friendship which slowly evolved into a relationship despite them never meeting.

He told her about how Maeve had told him she loved him and that he hadn’t responded, because he didn’t know how to.

He told her about the first time they’d met and how the first time they locked eyes it wasn’t from across a fancy restaurant, but in a deserted room, both restrained and at the mercy of a psychopath. A psychopath who he’d tried to reason with, who he’d tried to lie to. But it hadn’t worked. It had back fired and ended in bloodshed.

He’d been broken, for months afterward. The first person he’d actually had feelings for, feelings that were being returned, gone. They’d never kissed, never even touched. He hadn’t been able to save the one person he’d wanted to save more than anyone.

“So when I saw you that night, hanging off the side of that bridge, that’s why I couldn’t walk away. I had to try and save you, because I couldn’t save her.”

“But you didn’t know me Spencer. And I wasn’t being murdered. I was doing it to myself.”

“Which made it worse. You were choosing to end your life. A life that is clearly far from being finished Seph. You have miles to go in your life. Can you see that now?”

He prayed for her to tell him she could see that now.

“The woods are lovely, dark and deep. But I have promises to keep, and miles to go before I sleep.” She said softly quoting Front, not looking at him at first, and then bringing her eyes to his.

“I can’t promise that I won’t ever think about killing myself again Spencer. But I can promise that I’ll try harder, not to let things become too much for me. Dr White said that it’s likely that even with medication, I’ll still have down days. It’s just the way my mind is built. But if I surround myself with the right people, the right support network, then I can make it easier on myself. I’ll try.”

“Thats all I can ask. And I’ll be part of your support network. We may be miles apart and I may not be able to respond straight away, but I’ll always ALWAYS help when I can.”

“Thank you. And thank you for telling me about her. I’m sorry that you lost her, but you know that there’s a good chance that no matter what you did, you probably wouldn’t have been able to change the outcome right?”

“I know. Hotch has told me that, Blake has told me, my therapist has told me.”

“But you have changed my outcome. Just knowing that a stranger can care so much, enough to do what you’ve done for me. That means everything.”
“Good.”

“Good…..So, sun’s up. Shall we get breakfast and get this apartment packed up again?”

“We shall.”

“And then go and face my parents tomorrow, just in time for the awards show.”

“Do they know you’re coming back today?”

“They do. But I’ve told them I can’t see them until tomorrow. For brunch. And then I need to see Helen, and thank her for everything. And hopefully she’ll be able to hand in her notice at Lux too.”

“Lets get a move on then. I think Penelope would like to see you again before we leave.”

“Of course. She gets a big BIG hug too. For all her help.”

They both stood, ready to face the day together.
“This is where you live?” Spencer looked up at the building, seeing the impeccably dressed doorman holding the door open for you as he recognised you.

“Yep. It was my twenty fifth birthday present from by parents. I’m not quite the penthouse apartment though, there’s one above me that’s bigger.”

Today had been long. After packing up and cleaning the rental apartment, you took the leftover food items you hadn’t touched to a local shelter that Spencer knew of, went back to his apartment to drop the majority of his clothes off and to get new ones, and then had made your way to the BAU.

The team were out on a case, although as Penelope was the technical analyst, she was left at head quarters, tapping away at her computer when Spencer and you had joined her.

Her face had lit up when she’d seen you both and she’d jumped out of her chair to hug you.

You talked with her for a few minutes, thanking her for all her help and promising her that you’d make her something special as a reward.

Your meeting with her had been cut short when the team had called in needing assistance. As a civilian with no connection to the case you’d had to leave the office immediately, Spencer following you out a few moments later.

“You ready?” He asked.

“Of course.”

The train journey had been longer than it should have been. Technically difficulties at one of the stations meant for an hours delay, so by the time you’d got into the city and caught a cab back to your apartment, it was ten pm.

“They bought you an apartment? Wow.”

“Lifestyles of the rich and the famous, eh.” You shrugged and made your way into the building, the doorman Thomas, holding open the door for you.

“Ms Persephone, I haven’t seen you here for a few weeks.”

“No Thomas, I’ve been out of town for a while.”

“Ms Helen and Mr Edward were here though, Mr Edward moving out?” You liked Thomas, he was kind and interesting, but you really just wanted to get upstairs.

“Yes. Hopefully he’s already moved out. Thomas, I’d love to stay at talk but we’ve been travelling all afternoon and I’d really like to relax. I’ll come talk to you tomorrow.”

“You know Ms Persephone, don’t you worry about me. Let me help you into the elevator with your bags first.”

You relented, allowing the older to man to help move your suitcases into the lift that would take you to your apartment. Hopefully it wouldn’t be in too much of a state. You remembered not leaving it particularly tidy, and no doubt Edward wouldn’t have tidied up after himself.
You rode up with Spencer, and then led him to the door. There was only yours and three other apartments on this floor.

Unlocking the door, you could smell the soothing scent of lavender and when you pushed the door open, you could see that the apartment had been tidied. You spied a folded piece of card on the table beside the door, Helens neat cursive writing.

“Seph, I came by earlier to make sure everything was okay. There’s some basic groceries in the kitchen and I cleaned out your fridge. There was a small eco system starting to form in the salad crisper.

The sheets in both bedrooms are fresh too, I wasn’t a hundred percent sure on yours and Spencers sleeping arrangements (can’t wait to meet him by the way) so I remade both beds.

Edwards stuff appears to have all gone, although word around the office is that he’s still planning on going to your birthday party. What the fuck is up with that?

Can we meet tomorrow at say 5pm? There’s something I want to show you, and then I figured we could maybe watch the awards show together? I’ve missed you.

Oh, your spare bedroom has become a bit of a dumping ground. I had to order in a large amount of fabrics and materials in preparation (don’t ask where the money came from) so I’ve stashed it in there.

Love ya tons.

Hels’

You dragged your suitcase into the living area, Spencer following you.

“This room is bigger than my whole apartment.” He commented.

You got that a lot. It was a little big. And it cost a fortune to heat in the winter, something you’d have to reconsider this year. Your parents paid the utility bills currently, but if they were cutting you off, that would have to stop. Perhaps you could sell it and downsize somewhat. You didn’t need three bedrooms and all this space. You wondered whether they’d argue with you over that. Technically it was your apartment, it had been a present to you. But they had paid for it.

Hmmm.

You gave Spencer a quick tour, showing him the guest bedroom that he’d be sleeping in and where the bathroom and kitchen was. You poked your head into the spare bedroom, seeing that it was indeed full of rolls of materials and dress makers dolls of various sizes. You’d quiz Helen on this tomorrow. That had to have cost her a pretty penny.

When you checked the kitchen, you saw that she had indeed restocked your fridge freezer with fresh milk and bagels, a fresh pizza sitting in the fridge with a post it note saying “dinner?” on it in Helens scrawl.

As you toured the apartment you noticed Edwards things had indeed gone, his clothes no longer in the wardrobes, the drawers on what was his side of the bed empty, his golf clubs no longer cluttering up the hallway closet.

You felt a surprising twinge of sadness, you had been with him for a number of years and lived with after all. And he had been there for you when Alex had died, in his own way. You couldn’t blame him really for turning to someone else, you hadn’t let him near you since the accident, and
you’d completely shut him out emotionally. You’d speak with him properly at some stage, assure him that ultimately, there were no hard feelings.

“So what’s the plan for tomorrow?” Spencer asked, looking around and taking in the art work on your walls. Other items you could sell if it came down to it, you thought.

“Well Dr White got me an appointment at 9am with a therapist here in Manhatten, just to start the process off. Then meet with my parents at 12pm. It was meant to be brunch but it’ll be lunch now. Meet Helen at five, she’s texting me an address. And then she’s coming back here and we’ll watch the awards show together.”

“Am I coming with you to lunch?”

Oh! You hadn’t actually checked and asked if he would. You couldn’t imaging doing it without him by your side. Although you knew you were going to have to get used to it. Three weeks with him as your almost constant companion, you really didn’t want him to leave.

“So you mind? I know it might seem weird, and it could get messy depending on how they take the news.”

“I don’t mind. Do you really think they’ll take it that badly?”

“Yes.”

“Okay. At the end of the day Seph, you’re an adult. They can’t force you to work for them and if they cut you off, so be it. You’ll make your own money. If this business doesn’t take off, then we’ll work something out. If it comes to it, you can sleep on my couch for however long it takes to get back on your feet.”

You crossed the space to him and hugged him.

“Thanks Spencer. But I’m not thinking of failure now. This is a good brand, and my designs are good. With Lila Archer backing it and all of the work you, Penelope and Helen have done, I’m feeling positive. I’ll make this work. Even if I have to move back to London and sell them on Camden Market, whilst living out of a hostel, I WILL have my own fashion line. I don’t need my parents money. Well…. I’ll learn to live without it somehow. I can do this.”

“Yes, you can.” Spencer pulled you close for another hug, pride in his voice and you felt his lips press against the top of your head.

You could do this.

And you would.

…
“You alright?” Spencer asked.

You were stood outside of the Lux building, looking up at the many storeys, at how tall it was.

You were feeling emotional and nervy, the calm you’d felt after leaving Dr Draper’s office disappearing as soon as the Lux sign came into sight. The sign that you’d designed, the only thing that you’d put into that business that you felt any pride over.

Dr Draper had been easy to talk to. You’d been over the same ground that you’d already discussed with Dr White, surprised at how easy you were finding it to talk about your problems with these complete strangers. You hadn’t cried as much this time so your make up had only taken a few moments to fix.

She’d explained how it sounded like you’d suffered from mild depression your whole life but you’d been using Alex as your coping mechanism in the past. Your best friend being your rock, your support. With her gone, that’s what had triggered your spiral into further depression, a black hole you couldn’t get out of. You needed a strong support network, but you also needed to learn to help yourself, rather than relying on others to do it for you. She was also getting you started on a mild dose of amitriptaline. You’d picked them up from the pharmacy but you were going to start those after your birthday, wanting to be able to enjoy a drink at least, certain you’d need it.

Now you were stood staring up at one of your biggest perceived problems. The family business, the obligation, the fear of having your family disown you.

Time to get this over with.

“No. I’m not alright. But I’m more alright with this than I was three weeks ago. So let’s do this.”

You reached out for his hand, needing to feel him close to you as you walked into the building.

The receptionist waved at you and you waved back, heading straight for the coded door to the side of the reception desk. Punching in your security code that all employees had, you heard the click and pushed the door open. You entered the main service corridor, heading straight for the elevator.

Your Mum had messaged you to say that they were in their private quarters rather than the office. The top two floors of the hotel were used for the business head quarters, and a portion of the very top floor was your parents home.

Searching in your bag, you pulled out your key chain, finding the fob that gave you restricted access to that floor and inserted it into the slot on the side of the key pad. You shot up the fourteen floors, taking deep breaths to try and calm the butterflies that were playing chase in your tummy. When the elevator came to a stop, you felt sick.

The doors slid open and you exited, pulling Spencer along with you and finding another door to the right of the lift and using your key fob to gain access again.

Opening this door led you into a hallway, the decor totally different from the rest of the building. You made your way along the hallway, stopping at the final door and raising your fist to knock, hesitating slightly.
“You’ve got this Seph. Remember, no matter what happens I’m here for you.”

You knocked three times and waited, releasing Spencers hand from yours and wiping your now sweaty palms on your coat.

The door swung open revealing Rhea Bella-Morte, your mother.

“Sephie!” She cried, enveloping you into a hug.

You managed to catch a glimpse of Spencers face and saw an amused smile at your parents pet name for you. Sephie.. Ugh.

“Hi Mum, how are you?” You untangled yourself from her grasp.

“All the better for finally seeing you again darling daughter. I haven’t seen you in almost four weeks, we’ve not gone that long apart since you were at school.”

She was right, when you’d worked for the company you’d seen her almost everyday and even after you’d left you’d still made the effort to see them at least once a week.

“Who’s this?” She turned to your companion giving him a quick once over. You’d told her you’d be bringing a friend, although you’d neglected to mention it was a male friend.

“This is Spencer, Mum. He’s a friend.”

Spencer held his hand out to the older woman. “It’s a pleasure to meet you Mrs Bella-Morte.”

She took his hand gracefully, she was a sucker for guys with manners.

“Rhea, please. There’s not many friends of Persephones that I haven’t met, Spencer. So do tell me how you know my daughter.”

Erm. That was a story you hadn’t quite locked down with him.

“Where’s Dad? Should we go through to him and save repeating myself.” You jumped in.

“Yes yes. He’s probably managed to demolish half of the sandwiches Andrea ordered in for lunch already. He missed breakfast this morning.”

Rhea led the way through into a large sitting room, a table made up by one of the huge windows that looked out onto the bustling streets of Manhatten below. James Bella-Morte was indeed tucking into the sandwiches already, looking up and smiling at you when you entered the room. He stood, holding out his arms and you crossed the room to hug him.

You introduced Spencer to your Father and then you all sat down. You could see a mildly confused look on your friends face and you knew what he was thinking. From how you described your parents, he was not expecting them to be the friendly and welcoming creatures that they were being. He was right to be confused, you had perhaps made them out to be horrid ogres who didn’t deserve their daughter. And that wasn’t true at all. You loved your parents, they were warm and kind and easy to get along with. And you’d had everything you’d ever want from them.

Except their blessing to leave the company. That was one thing they didn’t seem to understand.

Your Dad started to pass around platefuls of sandwiches, obviously eager to tuck in and you made small talk with them, explaining that you’d met Spencer in a book store in DC and that you and
him had become fast friends.

“Just friends, Persephone? It looks pretty bad that you went to DC to surprise your fiancé and you return with another man. Edward never actually told us what happened between you and him, just that you’d broken it off and demanded he move out of your apartment.” Your mother poured tea for herself and your father, decanting coffee into cups for you and Spencer at your request.

It interested you that Edward hadn’t actually told anyone the reason you’d kicked him out. You wondered exactly what story he was peddling.

“I met Spencer after I’d broke things off with Edward, Mum. After I walked in on him screwing his secretary."

“Oh.”

“I’ll kill that little shit.” Your Dad muttered, through a mouthful of bread. For a high flying business man, sometimes your father had terrible table manners.

“Daddy no, it’s fine. I wasn’t happy with him anyway. Leave him be.” You told him, placing your hand on his forearm and calming him.

“You weren’t happy with Edward, are you happy with Spencer then?” Your mother questioned.

Spencer choked on a piece of food, quickly washing it down with water. You chuckled at his reaction.

“We and Spencer are just friends Mother, don’t worry. He’s been helping me out.”

“Yes, you mentioned that. What exactly with?”

Well this was a lot earlier in to the visit than you expected. You’d hoped to at least get lunch down and out of the way before the drama ensued.

You glanced at Spencer out of the corner of your eye, feeling him squeeze your leg under the table cloth.

Okay, deep breath Seph.

“With my business.”

Your parents both put their food down, half eaten sandwiches now on their plates. You had their full attention.

“Your fashion line? I thought you’d have given up on that by now. Didn’t your funding fall through?” Rhea commented, not quite making eye contact with you.

“It did. But I have a new plan.”

“One that’s going to pay off by tomorrow, your deadline? You remember the deal Seph, establish the business by the time your thirty or come back to Lux. We won’t fund your lifestyle any longer whilst you’re unemployed. You were to make something of yourself, or come back.” It was James’ turn to speak.

“I won’t meet my deadline no.” You told them, taking a deep breath before continuing.

“But I’m not coming back to Lux either.”
“But I’m not coming back to Lux either.”

Your parents looked at each other, communicating with their eyes. Finally, it was your mother who addressed you.

“Then you’ll no longer benefit from your trust fund. We meant what we said Seph.”

Spencer squeezed your knee again, willing you to continue despite the tears you could feel building.

You looked at your parents, their stoney faces set.

“Thats fine. I’ll cope without it one way or another. I’m going to do this.” Your voice shook slightly.

“How exactly? You didn’t follow this through when you left university and wanted to do it the first time. The threat of being left without our money had you reporting for work almost immediately. And this time, it seemed like you were making progress. Until you threw that progress away by not going to those meetings and staying in bed for however many months it was.” James fixed you with a cool stare, sipping his tea.

“I didn’t throw anything away. My best friend died and I was going through some things. Things I’m still going through.”

You could believe how cold and callous your father sounded.

“The world doesn’t stop turning because someone dies Persephone. Life goes on. And if you want to make something out of yourself then you have to push through tragedies. You didn’t see Alexandras father losing his business did you?”

“No but that was because he had people to carry on for him.”

“So did you. Do you know Helen actually handed in her notice to help you out before. She came begging for her job back though after you refused to answer her calls for four weeks.”

She had?

You didn’t know that.

“You had someone willing to help you, someone that was wiling to give up their job because they believed in you. We would have helped you.” He told you.

“No you wouldn’t. You refused when I asked for an extension.”

“Only because you left it until five weeks before the deadline after doing nothing for months. I sound harsh Sephie, but if you want to succeed in business, you have to be able to push through when bad things happen and not hide away from the world like you did. We loved Alex too you know. But if everyone who had loved her, gave up, there’d be a lot of companies going into administration about now. You aren’t cut out for working for yourself.”

You closed your eyes, blinking back tears.
“Yes. I. Am.” You choked out through gritted teeth.

“You’re really not.” Your mother told you, her voice pitiful.

“YES I AM.” You shouted, Spencer jumping slightly.

“I AM cut out for this. And I WILL do this. I don’t need your help, your money. Not anymore. I have a good brand and good friends that want to help me and want me to succeed. I may have hidden away, you’re right. Because I was down. I was depressed that my best friend, the person that always encouraged me when you two wouldn’t, had died. It’s natural. But I’m working on that now, I’ve been to see a therapist. And I’m working on my business. In fact, thanks to Spencer here, I have a Hollywood actress wearing my clothes to a red carpet event this evening. I don’t need your trust fund and I don’t need Lux. If this fails, I’ll…. I’ll get a job cleaning toilets to fund my life. I’ll sell everything I own and set up a market stall selling my designs there. I’m good at this and I WILL make a career out of this.”

You pushed your chair back ready to walk out when you saw your parents raise their hands and begin to applaud you.

What?

What the fuck?

They grinned at each other as you and Spencer both stared in confusion.

“Sit back down Sephie.” James told you.

Still in shock by their actions, you did.

“THAT is what I wanted to hear from. That’s what I wanted to hear when you were twenty two years old. That you didn’t need our money and that you would do it by yourself, like your great grandfather did. His parents told him that he wouldn’t be successful and he proved them so very wrong.”

“But…. You….. You told me I’d fail?”

“Only to make you want it more Persephone. Business is ruthless, you had to learn that. But each time you’ve faced hurdles, you’ve backed down and taken the easy option out. You’ve hidden away. You can’t do that in the real world. If you came back to Lux it would have proven that you didn’t really want it, or that you weren’t cut out for it. I know we sounded uncaring and harsh but it was only to make you see how much you wanted it. That fire, that passion you just showed. That’s true Bella-Morte fuel. True passion. You showed that you believe in yourself. That’s what will make you successful. Self belief.”

So all these years, all the guilt trips…. This had been about tough love?

Did they not fucking realise how damaging this had been to you? How much this issue had haunted you.

What the hell!

You’d nearly killed yourself over this.

But… How could they have known really? You put up such a front around everyone else. You’d never told them how they were making you feel. If you had, would they have continued with their tirade of guilt trips and threats to cut you off.
You looked between them, their faces beaming with pride because you’d stood up for yourself.

No, you realised. They wouldn’t have. Because they DID love you. They just didn’t know what was happening inside your head. All of the many many things that had been whirling in your brain, you allowing each tiny thought and feeling to eat away at you.

This wasn’t their fault. It was just their way.

“Excuse me. I erm… Need to go to the bathroom.”

You pushed away from the table and ran off to the nearest bathroom, barely shutting the door before someone knocked on it.

You hauled it open, knowing it would be Spencer. It was, and you fell into his embrace, emotions taking over.

You didn’t cry, just rested your face on his chest as he stroked your back whilst you collected yourself.

After a few minutes you pulled away, looking at him.

“They aren’t disappointed in me?”

“Apparently not. They just seem to fans of the tough love way of teaching.”

“I nearly…. ” You couldn’t say those words.

“Yes, but not just because of this Seph. You told me it was a number of issues that had caused you to feel that way. Yes, they didn’t help. But they didn’t know how it was affecting you did they?” He soothed.

“No. And if I tell them, it will break them.”

Knowing that their actions, however helpful they thought they’d been, had added to their only daughters near suicide attempt would tear them apart.

“Yes it will. So come back to the table and tell them about your plans. Tell them about Lila and show them the website that Helen and Penelope have created. Show them how much you’re fighting for this and tell them your business plans.”

You nodded and let him lead you back to the table, your parents looking at you concerned.

Sitting back down, you plastered a grin onto your face.

“Do you want to see my website? Spencer and his friend set it up for me ready for later.” You asked them, shyly.

“Yes, we do. And erm… Should we be expecting Helens resignation again anytime soon.” Your father asked you, standing up to get his tablet computer from the coffee table. He was never too far away from it nowadays.

“I hope so Daddy. I hope so.”

He handed you the tablet, bending down and planting a kiss on the top of your head.

“Good. Because I won’t accept a retraction this time. Not without a full explanation from you,
okay.”

“Okay.”
“Hels?”

Spencer heard Seph call out to the tall blonde girl who was talking on her phone, her back turned to them.

The girl ended her call and spun around, making the high pitched squealing noise that girls have a tenancy to make, when she saw her friend. Her and Seph ran towards each other and embraced, both grinning wildly at each other.

“I’ve missed you so much Seph! And I’m so sorry to hear about that fucktard Edward. You derserve tons better than that bag of dicks.” Spotting Spencer, she released Seph and approached him, recognising him from their Skype chats.

“Hello new friend! I feel like we should hug, can we hug?”

Spencer normally wasn’t that comfortable hugging strangers but he felt like he knew Helen from their chats and he greeted her with a quick hug. She was an extremely attractive girl, taller than the average girl, she clocked in at around 5ft 9, towering above Seph who was tiny in the flat shoes she was wearing today. She was supermodel slim, with long blonde hair and had a face that definitely could launch a thousand ships, just like the Greek Helen of Troy had.

“It’s nice to finally meet you, Helen.” Spencer told her warmly.

“Ditto. I did wonder about the mysterious strange who came into my friend life and suddenly got her back on track. I’m sooo excited about tonight, I can’t believe that Lila Archer is going to be wearing your designs. I love her! And she’s so sweet to have wanted to help out with TDDQ.”

“She’s great Helen. And with her help, this has to work right?” Seph asked her.

“Definitely. The fashion pages love her style anyway. They’re always featuring her. Shall we go up?”

Seph looked around the lobby of the building Helen had told her to meet in. Spencer knew why they were here but she didn’t.

“Yes, let’s. I’m curious…”

Helen led them over to the cargo elevator in the corner of the lobby and selected the floor they needed.

Spencer could sense Sephs curiosity rolling off her, wondering why they were here.

They’d spent a few more hours with her parents after she’d dropped her bombshell that she wasn’t going to back to Lux, and her parents had dropped their equally explosive bombshell and had explained to her that they’d only been so harsh on her to encourage her.

Spencer personally thought that given her mental state, it had been a terrible technique. She’d needed actual encouragement from them, not faux guilt trips and threats of having her trust fund stopped. But, they didn’t know how she was truly feeling inside, they obviously just saw the girl who wanted something, but didn’t seem to be trying hard enough to get it. He could see why they’d done what they’d did, they wanted her to do this for herself the way the founders of Lux had, and as harsh as her father had been for berating her for giving up when Alex had died, he had
been right. A successful business doesn’t stop functioning because of personal tragedy and Seph had needed to realise that.

Still, he was incredibly proud of her for standing up to them and the beams on their faces had told him that they were too. They’d spent the afternoon talking, Rhea and James Bella-Morte asking about her plans and them talking with Spencer about his job. Whenever they asked how the two had met, Persephone had brushed over it, simply explaining that they had met in DC. Spencer could see Rhea looking at them and wondering what their true deal was and he wondered whether Seph would actually open up and come clean to her parents about the extent of her issues. As much as it would hurt them, it would benefit her to have them knowing what she’d been going through and having them support her. But, that was Seph’s choice to tell them or not. He could see that inherently, they were good people who clearly did care for their daughter a lot. As did Helen. Seph really didn’t seem to realise how many people she had that loved and cared for her.

They reached the floor they needed and Helen pushed the elevator cage open and led them out down a corridor and in through another set of double doors, which she had the keys for.

They walked into a large open plan office, huge windows and wooden floors made the space airy and light and with a some decoration and furniture, Spencer could picture the two girls surrounded by fabrics and dress makers dolls.

“I thought we could put up some partitioning walls over here and create an area for your VIP clients for Alexandra Dawning and we could separate off the kitchenette too. We don’t want coffee and food smells permeating your clothes. There’s a bathroom as well over in the corner and I’ve seen some really great furniture we can buy. It’s not too expensive either. Oh and my roommates boyfriend’s sister, does some really awesome abstract artwork in her spare time. We could get her to make some huge canvasses for the walls to brighten it up.” The girl talked excitedly, moving from one area of the room to the next, dragging Seph with her as she filled her in on her vision for the space. Seph just listened, her mouth ajar as she took in her friends words.

“Helen.”

“And over here is where we could have the machines. There’s a service entrance as was with parking round the back. So we can pick up a cheap transit van for our materials and things.”

“HELEN!” Seph managed to interrupt her, her friend looking at her in surprise.

“Where are we? What is this place?” she asked her.

“Erm…. Headquarters for The Damned Dead Queen designs. If you like it of course. They’ll hold the space for us for two more weeks, I put down a deposit. That way we can judge how quickly the designs sell and if we need it or not. But given how many sales there were the last time Lila Archer promoted a new brand, I’m thinking we’ll sell out of the stock you’ve already got in no time. We can have this place fitted out within a week. I checked the original business plan you had and the part on the office ideas that we came up with, and we can still get most of the items really easily. And I still have money left over from the sale of my car. Oh! And the seamstresses all have their own machines that they’d bring. All but two of them could start straight away.”

“Headquarters… Offices… Helen, you sold your car?” Seph was dumbfounded.

“Well yeah. And my resignation is all written out and ready to hand in. You still want me to be your assistant don’t you?” The girl looked fearful suddenly, that she’d misread things.

“You did all of this for me?”
“Yes. I believe in you Seph. You’re such an inspiration to me, starting your own business and everything and I want to be a part of it. You still want me don’t you?”

Seph walked across to her friend, her eyes filled with tears and she took her hands.

“I don’t want you to be my assistant Helen. I want you to be my business partner. An equal share of TDDQ. You’ve believed in this from the start. I can’t believe you’ve sold your car. You loved that thing.”

Helen grinned and shrugged. “Meh, I live in NYC. Who needs a Mercedes here anyway. And really…. You really want me as your partner. You’re the one with the brilliant mind and eye for designs. They’re your clothes.”

“But it’s your ideas and your enthusiasm that are making things take shape. I couldn’t do this without you Helen.” Seph looked over at Spencer and motioned for him to join then.

She took his hand as well.

“I couldn’t do this without any of you. Penelope and Lila included in that even though they’re not here.”

She sniffed back tears, ones Reid hoped were of happiness and not anything else.

“So do you like it? Is it okay. If not… We can find another place. This is just close to both of our buildings and my Mom knows the owner. She finalised his divorce for him so she’s negotiated a good rate for the first six months.” Helens Mom was a divorce lawyer, a very well paid one, hence how Helen could afford a Mercedes. It had been a present from her Mom a few years back.

“I love it. And I love you, both of you, for everything you’ve done for me.” Seph pulled them in for a group hug, and Spencer caught sight of his watch.

“Ladies… I hate to ruin a moment but coverage of the red carpet starts in thirty minutes.”

They broke apart, smiling at each other.

“Let’s go!”
Chapter 27

“I still can’t believe how amazing she looked. And she won as well. My dress was up on that stage!” You were literally bouncing in your seat, giddy with joy.

And a bottle of wine. But mostly joy.

You, Helen and Spencer had gone back to your apartment to watch the awards show, ordering take out and eating it on your couch in front of your huge flat screen TV.

Lila had worn your red evening dress, looking absolutely stunning and had worked the red carpet like a pro. When she’d been asked who she was wearing, she’d gone through great lengths to explain to the interviewers that it was a new brand and to give both names, stating that she’d be wearing designs from both brands this evening. The interviewers had commented on the design, complementing and fussing over it and you’d sat with the biggest grin on your face, Helens hand in yours.

When Lila had won her category and had strutted across the stage, you’d both squealed loudly. Not only were you pleased for Lila but a win generally meant more screen time and more interviews, meaning more opportunity for your dress to be mentioned.

You were happy. So happy.

And a little buzzed because of the wine, between the three of you, you sank four bottles during two hour ceremony and the hours red carpet coverage.

Spencer had told you that Penny had set the website to go live after your birthday. People could visit it, but they wouldn’t be able to place orders for another two days time. That way it would give plenty of time for the general public to read the fashion pages of the tabloids and online blogs.

The ceremony was just ending and it was approaching eleven pm. Helen stood up, stretching and pulling her shoes on.

“You going?” You asked her, pouting.

“I am indeed. I still have to go in to work tomorrow. Although I’m on a half day to give me plenty of time to get ready for your party. Which reminds me…. Present!”

She dug onto her large shoulder bag and pulled out two wrapped boxes and placing them both on the table. “You can’t open them until tomorrow alright.”

“Okay, thank you Hels.” You grinned at her.

“You’re very much welcome. Text me tomorrow, I’ll be abusing my Internet privileges at work to check the fashion blogs. Maybe your Daddy will catch me and fire me!”

You giggled at her, standing up and hugging her goodbye.

“Don’t worry, they’re expecting your resignation soon anyway. And they won’t accept a retraction this time.”

“Well they’re not bloody getting one either! This time next year Seph, trust me, we’ll be a success. Just wait.”
You hugged her again, promising to text her tomorrow and she said her goodbyes to Spencer before you followed her to your door and let her out.

Out of earshot of Spencer she turned to you.

“What’s the deal with you two anyway? He’s hot. And he’s putting a lot of effort into this for you. I don’t buy that you two are old friends, you’re comfortable with each other but not in that way. He’s new. Are you two…..”

You rolled your eyes at her, the gesture making you feel slightly dizzy.

“No we’re not. And you’re right, he is hot. And you’re also right that he is a new friend. It’s a long and complicated story and I promise to tell you one day.”

“So you’re not…. Cos I totally would. I mean, if you’re not gonna. Can I?”

You hit her playfully. “You can’t have him Hels. I don’t want you eating him up and spitting him out. I know what you’re like, you’ll break him.”

“I’d certainly try….. You sure that’s not the only reason you don’t want me to have him…..”

You knew exactly what she was getting at.

“Go home Helen! I’ll see you tomorrow. And thank you, again. For everything.”

She grinned at you and skipped out of the door which you locked behind her.

You strolled back into the sitting room and headed over to your liquor cabinet.

“Another drink?” You called out.

“Erm…. I kinda feel like we shouldn’t.”

“There’s plenty of things we shouldn’t do which we do.” You poured two tumblers of whiskey and took them over to the couch, sitting back down next to him.

You found yourself studying him as he drank, his dark eyes and plump pink lips. He really was attractive.

And he’d done so much for you over the past few weeks.

You recalled an earlier conversation with him where he’d admitted that he didn’t have girlfriends very often. And then your mind flicked back to your list.

Somehow in your semi drunk state, your brain decided that you should do something for him in return.

“Spencer?”

“Hmm?” He paused mid sip, his tongue flicking out to taste the whiskey on his lips.

“You think I’m attractive, right?”

He coughed, a flush settling over his cheeks. When he realised you were being serious, he nodded.

“Attractive enough to sleep with?” You asked.
“W-what…?”

“Do you find me attractive enough to sleep with?”

“Why are you… Why are you asking me that?” He suddenly looked very uncomfortable, and if you were sober, you’d have changed the subject. But you pushed.

“Because I think you’re very attractive. And although I know we’re officially no longer caring about the list, it would be a shame to completely discount two of those points don’t you think?”

Without waiting for his answer you pulled yourself off the couch, standing in front of him. You gripped the bottom of your day dress, tugging it up and over your head, tossing it to one side.

…. 

‘What the hell?’ Spencer thought to himself, panicking slightly.

“Seph, what are you doing?”

His beautiful friend was standing in front of him, in her undergarments, a strange look in her eyes.

“What does it look like I’m doing?” She turned around slowly, a 360 on the spot.

Spencer caught sight of a tattoo he’d missed before, flowers and small birds down her spine, disappearing into her leggings. He hadn’t paid any attention to her body when he’d found her in her underwear before, but now he couldn’t help but look.

“It looks… L-like you’re taking your clothes off.” He stuttered slightly, wondering if he should put a stop to this.

He should, he definitely should. She’d been drinking and was still somewhat fragile.

“Because I am…..” She slipped her fingers into the waistband of her black leggings, bending over as she dragged them down her legs, stumbling as she stepped out of them.

Spencer leant forward, grabbing her hips to stop from falling flat on her face and she giggled, placing her hands over his and keeping them on her.

“Seph…..”

“Spencer…..” She cocked an eyebrow at him, moving her hands over his and sliding them up her stomach, stopping just shy of the curve of her breasts.

“Why are you doing this?” He asked her, conscious that if he said the wrong thing here, he could hurt her feelings. He was feeling buzzed too, and didn’t want certain feelings to overcome his sense.

“Because it’s nearly midnight. It’s nearly my birthday. I’ll cut down on the twenty four hours part of the point. I just want….. I want to feel desired by someone. I want to cross that off. Help me.”

“You want to have sex with me?”

“Gosh, for a genius you can be pretty dumb. Yes. I want to have sex with you. It’s just sex, it doesn’t mean anything.”

“But… But… ”
“Oh come on!” She scoffed “I may have some self belief issues, but I know that I’m attractive. That’s one of the only things I’ve been sure of my entire life. People tell me often enough. Don’t try and tell me you don’t find me attractive.”

She pulled on his hand again, pushing one higher so it was cupping her breast.

Spencers breath caught, feeling the soft flesh beneath the lace of her bra. He’d be lying if he tried to tell himself that he didn’t think she was attractive. She was beautiful, stunning and looking at her body, fully taking her in, he could feel himself becoming aroused, cursing himself internally.

He didn’t want her like this though. Didn’t want to be just a tick on a list.

He looked up at her, seeing that she suddenly doubted herself, her eyes meeting his.

“Spencer…. Please? It’s just sex…..Tell me you want me.”

Oh god…. He did. But not this way.

But she looked so sad all of a sudden, rejected.

Shit.

If he did this , he felt like he’d be taking advantage of her. He did like Seph, a lot. A hell of a lot in fact, more than he’d let himself admit. This girl was special. But he didn’t want to risk the friendship he’d cultivated with her, the friendship built from his need to save her, which had grown into something more.

If he didn’t do this, then he’d be insulting her, rejecting her and making her feel terrible. She was asking for his help. And he’d promised her from the beginning that he’d help her.

He didn’t know which was worse.

Taking a deep breath, he pulled her towards him, wondering how much he’d hate himself in the morning.
Chapter 28

Pulling Seph onto his lap, he ran his hands up and down her back, feeling the slightly raised texture of her tattoo that trailed down her spine.

She adjusted herself, her knees either side of his thighs and her hand going to his hair.

Her skin was warm and soft to his touch and he let himself enjoy the sensation of feeling a woman’s body against his. An extremely beautiful woman’s body.

Seph lowered her head, grinding against his thighs as she did and earning a groan from him. She started peppering his neck with kisses, her lips like butterflies over his skin. Her hands searched for his shirt, locating the buttons and making quick work of undoing them, placing her hands flat against his bare chest when she was done.

She kissed along his jaw line, her fingertips ghosting up and down his torso and making him shudder. Stopping her mouth just shy of his lips, she pulled back, appraising him with her gaze.

“You do want me, right? You’re going to help me tick that box?” She asked quietly.

“Yes, I want you. And yes, we’ll tick that box, if that’s what you want.” Spencer told her. It was true, he did. He’d probably never tell her how much he actually wanted her, but that doing this just to tick a box, was NOT what he wanted. But he couldn’t tell her no.

Satisfied with his answer, she reached her hands behind her back and unclasped her bra, pulling the straps down her arms and discarding it on the floor.

Spencer’s eyes immediately went to her chest, her full breasts as pale as the rest of her body save for the pink centres, the sensitive flesh there already puckered and hardened. He caught sight of the metal bar that skewered one nipple, small silver balls at either end, and his hand moved to touch it, not being able to help himself.

She giggled at his curiosity and then gasped as his fingertips grazed over the flesh there, wriggling on his lap at his touch.

Fuck…

The noise that had left her throat ignited something inside him and he reached up, pulling her face down to his and crashing his lips to hers, forgetting his reservations.

…

Spencer’s kiss was hard and full of passion, his lips moving quickly against yours. You matched his pace, moving against his lap, feeling him hard beneath you.

You tilted your head and parted your lips, feeling him do the same, slipping your tongue out to meet his. His hands roamed your body, stopping at your breasts and cupping them, massaging them, your nipples hard against his palms.

He’d been reluctant to begin with, you’d been able to tell. You could understand why, he probably thought that this would change things between you and that he’d be taking advantage of you in your less than stable mental state.

He’d relented though, giving into your wants and pulling you onto his lap.
This wouldn’t change things, it was just sex. An early birthday present to yourself and you smiled against his mouth thinking about it like that. You ground against his thigh, harder than before and feeling a low groan vibrating through his lips.

Spencer moved his hands, holding your waist as he shifted your positions, lowering you to the couch and slotting his body in at the side of you, his back to the cushions.

Pulling away from your lips, he looked down at your body, you suddenly feeling slightly exposed and worried that he wouldn’t like you. You had tattoos and a piercing, you didn’t think that he’d be into that, although he hadn’t balked at your stud, instead he’d caressed it gently, his touches sending shivers through you.

His hands ran down your stomach and over your high waisted lace underwear. He seemed nervous himself too, his hand trembling oh so slightly as he grazed the tops of your thighs.

Reaching up, you smoothed his hair that was falling back, so that you could see his eyes, his beautiful hazel eyes that could convey such a wide range of emotions.

“Kiss me again.” You whispered, tugging on his head and pulling him back down to you, your lips capturing his.

This kiss was slower, less full of passion and desire and more, soft and gentle.

“You’re so beautiful, Persephone.” He murmured, pulling his lips away a few millimetres, his breath tickling your skin.

“So are you Spencer Reid.” You whispered back, not feeling at all strange telling a man he was beautiful, he was. Inside and out.

You kissed him again, your hands caressing his cheek, as his own hand dragged over your underwear.

You wanted this so badly, it had been so long since you’d allowed yourself to be touched by another person.

Yet as you moved your lips against his, Spencers teeth grazing against yours in tiny nips that were doing so much to you right now, you realised that this was wrong.

Shit.

But you had to. It could ruin everything.

“Spencer, stop. Please.” You gently pushed his face away from yours, seeing alarm as you stilled his hand with your own.

“Shit, I’m sorry. Oh god, I’m sorry.” He looked like he didn’t know what to do with himself.

He hadn’t done anything wrong, you had.

“Shhh, don’t apologise.” You told him softly, your hand still on his face. “I shouldn’t have started this. It’s my fault.”

“No no no, I shouldn’t have let you. I should have said no. But…. Oh god I’m sorry Seph, I did want to. Even though I knew we shouldn’t, it would have changed everything.”
And that was it. As much as you’d told yourself it was only sex, it would change the whole dynamic of your relationship.

As clichéd as it sounded, you didn’t want to just fuck Spencer Reid. You wanted to love him, to make love with him. But there was no way you were ready for that yet.

“I wanted to as well.” You assured him. “But not like this. I don’t want to do this to tick a box, not anymore. I wanna do it because we both want to, because we want it to mean something.”

“Thats how I feel too.” He spotted his shirt and reached to grab it, laying it over your chest and covering you up. “In three weeks, you’ve become one of my closest friends. I don’t want to throw that away because of one night. But I didn’t want to hurt your feelings. And…..and I do, I do like you Seph. A lot.”

“Good.” You whispered, pulling him close so that you could hug him, his arms wrapping around you, his shirt now acting as a barrier between your skin. “I like you too Spence. Also, a lot. And not just because of everything you’ve done for me.

“You do?” His words came out muffled, his head nuzzled into your neck.

“I do. But now’s definitely not right, and I’m so sorry for making this awkward.”

“Its fine. We’re fine.” He pulled away to look at you. “It’s not everyday I get to have a gorgeous girl, naked in my arms.” He chuckled and you laughed with him, the atmosphere broken.

“Spence…. Maybe in a few months we could revisit this again? You know, if that’s what you want.” Nerves made your voice crack in the middle of your sentence.

“I’d like that. In a few months.”

You both knew that you meant when you’d got back to a much better place and had reorganised your thoughts and feelings. The feelings you had for him wouldn’t change though, you knew that now. In such a small period of time he’d gotten under your skin, become your confidant, your reason . Not your reason for living, but a reason to try and make the best out of yourself. You’d be happy simply having him as a friend for the rest of your life, but now there was that admittance that there was something more between you. And hopefully, you’d be able to explore that something, more.

“Seph.” Spencer broke your train of thought, pointing at the clock on your wall.

“Happy birthday.”
When you woke up the next morning, you were wrapped in Spencers arms being spooned from behind.

You’d retired to bed shortly after your little misadventure on the couch, stopping before you walked through your door and asking him to come with you.

“No more funny business, I promise. I’d just…. really like to wake up next to you whilst I still can. It’s going to be weird not having you with me twenty four hours a day.”

“I know, I’m not quite sure what I’ll do. I’ve gotten used to having you around and having the constant company, which is odd because I’m normally very happy in my own company.”

You’d given each other sad smiles at the realisation that your lives would soon be returning to normal, before climbing into your huge king size bed and settling down for the night.

At some point in your sleep you must have rolled next to other, and now he was comfortably entwined around your body.

You lay there enjoying the feeling of being cuddled for a while before you felt him begin to stir.

When he realised he was spooning you, he went to move but you stilled him.

“No. Spencer, stay. I missed being cuddled like this. It’s nice.”

“It IS nice. I just thought you might find it weird after last night that all.” He whispered sleepily.

“No weirdness at all. If I can have sex with my old best friend to cover a list point and it not be weird, then I can nearly have sex with my new best friend and it definitely not be weird. I’m good, if you’re good with it.”

“I’m good. What’s the plan for today anyway?” He adjusted his arms slightly.

“Erm…. Get up. Get breakfast. Open whatever gifts have turned up. Read the gossip columns…. Then get ready and go to my party.”

The columns, the papers. You leaned out of bed and grabbed your phone, seeing it flashing with notifications.

Texts from Helen. Opening them, you saw she’d posted links. She was obviously hard at work today.

Clicking through them, you couldn’t believe the things you were reading.

All of the fashion blogs had commented on Lilas dresses, photos of her at the after party surfacing as well. The comments were amazing, people wondering who this designer was.

The last text she’d sent had read “I’ve spoken to Garcia. The website has already had traffic. It’s had over nine hundred hits since last night, and the Alexandra Dawning email box already has emails requesting appointments for consultations.”

You couldn’t stop grinning, rolling over to face your bed partner who had a huge smile on his face too.
“This is all because of you.” You told him.

“It’s really not. You’d have got there eventually, if you’d have kept trying.”

You didn’t comment. You both knew he was saying that because he was meant to. You both knew the truth, that it really was because of him. If he hadn’t have found you that night, then none of this would have happened. Because you wouldn’t be around for it to happen to.

But now, you were glad he had found you.

It was a cliché to say you’d been saved by a man. But you had. Not by his love. You weren’t forcing yourself to live for him. He’d shown you though, that the kindness of a stranger could completely change a person’s life.

You thought back to your list, wondering if you’d ever complete it, realising that it didn’t really matter anymore.

You’d made that list when you were fifteen, what did it matter that Alex had completed most of hers. What mattered now was that you were trying. You were going to try to live your life to the fullest and embrace opportunities that came your way. You WERE going to stand up for what you wanted, however afraid you were.

“How shall we get up and find something to eat for breakfast. I need to soak up the remains of the wine from last night.”

“Yes, we shall.”

....

The rest of the morning had been spent trawling through the online tabloids, Seph and Spencer grinning with each complimenting comment.

Packages arrived throughout the morning, Thomas the doorman, ringing up with each delivery and soon Persephone’s living room was filled with bouquets of flowers, gift bags and boxes, cards.

She only opened the ones who she knew who they were from, the rest could wait she’d told him. Helen’s gift had been a wall plaque bearing the company design logo and Seph’s name. She’d also gotten her a desk plaque, one of those triangular prism shaped things that bore her name and title as CEO.

Seph had nearly cried seeing them, still unbelieving at the amount of faith Helen had in her.

There had been an extra emotional moment at lunch time. Rhea and James had arrived, with Alex’s Mom, Dad and brother who had flown into the city especially.

Seph had cried then, when Alex’s Mom had told her how proud Alex would be of her. They’d hugged tightly, both women crying and Rhea Bella-Morte dabbing away tears herself. Even Spencer had to admit that he felt choked up too.

The parents had left a while after, leaving the two to get ready for the party, Seph disappearing into her bedroom and emerging two hours later looking like a goddess.

Her dress was classic grecian style, except that it was black, with fabric that flowed freely around her legs, gathering at her bust. There was gold detailing on the shoulders and at her chest where the was dress was clinched in, emphasising her curves without hugging them. If it were white, Spencer could have imagined her walking down an aisle in it.
When she turned around the dress was low at the back, but the soft fabric split at her shoulders, flowing down almost like a train on a wedding dress. She had gold bracelets on each wrist and when she moved her arms, Spencer could see that the material that streamed from the shoulders, was actually attached. It was like she had wings.

Her hair was half pinned back, a gold head band weaved into her hair like a crown, and her make up was flawless.

“You look breathtaking.” Spencer told her, barely able to believe that this beautiful creature was one of his friends.

“You looked pretty breathtaking yourself Spencer Reid.”

He felt himself blush slightly. He’d dressed for the occasion, bringing with him and wearing the only tux he owned. He felt overdressed right now, but he knew that he’d probably be one of the most underdressed people at the party.

“Did you make that dress?” He asked her.

She hesitated before answering. “Yes. I did. It was the last dress I made, it was the last dress I was going to ever make. I made it specifically for tonight.”

It was the dress she was going to wear to kill herself in, Spencer realised. She didn’t need to say anything more.

“It’s beautiful. Like you are.”

“Thank you. I wasn’t sure whether to wear it, because of what it signified to me. But now, I guess it signifies my decision to carry on. If I’d have had time. I’d have liked to have changed the material of the sleeves, to reds and oranges and purples. Fire colours.”

“Like a phoenix, rising from the ashes.”

She grinned at him, pleased he’d understood.

“Exactly. A phoenix reborn from her ashes. Ready to set the world on fire.”

“Well, perhaps we should start with setting your party on fire.”

“Perhaps we should.”

....

Seph’s party flew by.

For the most part, Reid had felt uncomfortable. Seph and Helen were the only people he really knew. Her parents had gone out of their way to speak with him though, Rhea still looking at him somewhat curiously.

He recognised many of the faces at the party, none of whom he actually knew in person. He knew them from the business pages of newspapers, articles online.

Many of Sephs family were there as well, them hugging and kissing her, wishing her a happy birthday and then looking at Spencer wondering who he was.

Her ex fiance hadn’t made an appearance, although Persephone had said that she’d been in contact with him, agreeing to meet up with him and to put their relationship officially to bed with
After dinner, there’d been speeches, her father informing the room that it was with regrets that his only child would not be following in his footsteps at Lux, the room going quiet at first. Then he’d explained how proud he was that Persephone wouldn’t be following him because she was setting out on her own personal business adventure and that he and the board of Lux wished her every piece of success. His eyes had shone with pride as images of Lila at last night’s awards ceremony in Sephs dresses had been displayed on a projector screen for all to see, the crowd ooohing and ahhhhing, breaking into a round of applause and calling for a speech from the birthday girl herself.

Seph had blushed and looked uncomfortable for a moment, before searching for Helen and dragging her up to the microphone with her. She introduced Helen as her business partner and talked about how she couldn’t wait to see what new opportunities would be waiting for them. Finding Spencers face in the crowd, she smiled directly at him and publicly thanked him for his encouragement and involvement.

Once the speeches were over, James and Rhea had pulled their daughter to one side to present her with their birthday gift. Two envelopes. Seph had beckoned for Reid to join her when she opened them, reading through the pieces of paper she pulled out, a confused look on her face.

She handed the pages to Spencer, him quickly scanning the words.

“I don’t understand.” She looked at her parents.

“I do.” Spencer told her. “It’s unrestricted access to your trust fund. Your parents are transferring the money to you for you to use as you see fit, no conditions attached. It’s yours to do with what you want.”

“Mum, Dad. Is this right?” She asked quietly.

“Yes.” James took his daughters hand. “We can no longer threaten to cut you off. The money is yours. Do with it what you wish.”

“What if I want to give it to charity. I wanted to do this without your money?”

“Then give it to charity. We will not judge you or hold anything against you. As a Bella-Morte, it’s what you’re entitled to. We will no longer hold onto it and ration it out as we had been. Spend it, save it, give it away. We don’t care. We’re proud of you Sephie.” Rhea told her.

Spencer scanned the second document. “They’ve paid the first years rent on the office space Helen found.”

“Thats your official present from us. I know you want to do it alone but it’s your thirtieth. We had to do something big for it. And Helen has been released from her position immediately, although we’ll pay her notice period too.”

Seph hugged her parents tightly, holding on to them for a long time.

When she finally pulled away she was sniffing again, but smiling.

“Okay! Enough tears and crying for today. Spencer Reid, as it’s my birthday, I demand you dance with me.”

He’d wanted to argue, but couldn’t and they spent the next hour dancing together, relatives cutting in every so often to have a dance with the birthday girl.
At around eleven, Seph disappeared with Helen to the ladies, Helen returning alone after ten minutes.

“Where is she?” Reid asked her, concerned.

“Oh she’s just a little overwhelmed. She’s gone up the roof terrace to get some air and to cool down. She said she needed to do something up there too. I asked if she wanted me to come with her but she said she needed to do it alone. I think it’s got to her a little that her best friend isn’t with her on her big day.”

Roof terrace.

The top of the building.

“Helen, I need your security fob to get up there. I need to find her.”
... 

Seeing the worry on Spencers face, Helen quickly searched through her bag and handed him her keys.

“What’s wrong. Do you need me to come with you?”

“No its fine. How do I get up there?” Spencer presumed that not everyone would have access to the roof space.

“It’s employee access only. There’s an elevator at the end of this corridor. Just press the fob into the slot at the side of the keypad and it’ll then let you select the top floor. Turn left when you come out of the elevator and they’ll be a door marked ‘roof terrace, restricted’. Use the fob again and it’ll let you out.”

Reid thanked her and dashed out, following Helens instructions and eventually coming out onto a flat terrace which had tables and chairs bolted down, the glittering lights of the neighbouring buildings surrounding. It was a nice space actually, one for the employees to use on a summers day or if the needed to escape.

He searched around, looking for Seph and dreading what he might find.

Spencer spotted her, leaning against a railing at the edge of the roof. She was on the safe side of the barriers.

Thank god.

“Persephone?” He called out, not wanting to alarm her.

She turned, her hair catching in the wind, the wings of her dress billowing out behind her.

“Hey.” She responded to him, a small smile on her face. There was a black trail down her cheeks and her make up was smudge. She’d been crying.

“Can I…..?” He motioned to her, wanting her permission to come over and join her. He still wasn’t sure what was happening but he didn’t like the fact that she was up here, alone, on the day she said she was going to kill herself.

She nodded and he quickly moved to her side, seeing a piece of folded paper in her hands.

“Are you okay?”

“No. But I’ll be okay.” She told him.

“I was worried when Helen came back alone and said you were up here.”

“I’m sorry. I needed a few minutes alone. I wanted to do something.”

“What?”

She appraised her friend with her eyes before unfolding the piece of paper in her hands. Spencer recognised it as her list.
“I wanted to do this.” She started to rip the paper into tiny shreds. “I don’t need this. I don’t need a list to tell me what I should have completed by this point in my life. I’m going to be happy with the fact that I’m still here, when other people aren’t.”

When all she had left in her hands was a pile of tiny snowflake like paper flakes, she leaned over the barrier and scattered them.

Spencer watched as the fell, some of them catching on a breeze and being carried away, others falling straight down. With this being New York he knew that wherever they fell, they wouldn’t last long before they were consumed by the city.

“I’m proud of you, Persephone. She would be too.” He didn’t need to say her name.

“I know.” She looked sad again but quickly shook it away. “Do I look a mess?”

“Never to me. But you might want to redo your make up before you go back in.”

“I take it I resemble a panda?”

“A beautiful one if that helps.”

“Flattery will get you everywhere, Spencer Reid. Let’s go. It’s getting cold.”

Spencer shrugged off his jacket quickly, pulling out a folded envelope as his own from the inner pocket. He placed the jacket around her shoulders carefully.

“Actually, could we stay for a few minutes. I wanted to give you your birthday present.”

“You got me a present? After everything you’ve already done for me, I can’t accept gifts from you. I should be giving YOU things.”

“You have, kind of. It’s weird but since I’ve met you I’ve felt more alive than I have in a while. It’s not just me that’s been helping you, you’ve been helping me without even realising it. And, technically this gift is for both of us. If you want it to be of course. The names and the dates can be changed.”

He handed her the envelope nervously. Would She like it? Would she even still want to do it, she’d just torn her list up after all.

She opened it, holding carefully onto the paper in the breeze and reading it.

“Peru.”

She read further.

“You’ve booked us on an adventure tour to hike the Inca Trail, for my birthday next year. Spencer……”

She was lost for words, something Spencer had never managed to do to a woman.

“Is it…. okay? You don’t have to take me. You can take Helen, or someone else. You don’t even have to go if you don’t want to anymore. I just…..”

She cut off his rambles, standing on her tip toes and wrapping her arms around his neck, his jacket starting to slip off her shoulders. Spencer caught it before it could fall off completely and embraced her back.
“There’s no one else in the world that I’d rather do this with.” she whispered into his ear.
Epilogue

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Two years later:

“Guys, we need to get going if we want to get to the Sun Gates before sunrise.”

Your group leader rallied the fourteen of you together, and you all began your final hike of the four day trek.

“Are you excited?” Spencer asked as he helped you shrug your back pack back on.

“Very. I’m also extremely excited to be able to have a bath and to sleep in an actual bed tonight.”

“I echo your sentiment.”

The trip was enjoyable so far, the scenery was breathtaking, quite literally so due to the altitude you were at. The group you were trekking with were good fun, and everyone was making the effort to help each other long. Even the fittest members of the group had struggled at some parts.

Although it was a struggle, it was one that you were going to look back on with fond memories, even though right now it felt like your feet were going to drop off. You had blisters upon blisters and despite the fact that your back packs weren’t as heavy as they could be due to the trip including porters, you still felt as though you’d been lugging rocks around for four days.

Luckily, you’d had the foresight to book into a five star hotel in Cusco for some well needed relaxation at the end of the trip. A full body massage was definitely in order.

Your leader started moving, the rest of the pack following him slowly and as you fell into line, you reflected on the last two years, the journey that had bought you here.

Since Lila Archer had worn your designs, your business had kick-started faster than you or Helen could have imagined. You’d had to delay this trip already as you’d simply been too busy to have any time off last year. You’d been tempted to delay again but Helen had told you no, you needed a holiday.

She’d been right, you’d both worked nonstop although a lot of it didn’t even seem like working. When you were doing something you loved, it made getting up each day to go to work enjoyable.

The client base for The Damned Dead Queen grew and grew as did the list of celebrities who had requested hand made couture designs from the Alexandra Dawning range. You knew you’d made it when you’d taken a call from a certain Stefani Germanotta requesting you design a dress for her performance at the Academy Awards earlier this year.

You’d done it.

Achieved your dream of creating your own design label, your own successful business.

And now you were celebrating by taking the trip of a lifetime with one of your best friends.

You and Spencer were still, just friends. Despite your confessions the night before your birthday two years ago, your relationship hadn’t changed in status. This didn’t bother you as such, you
were too busy to let it be a issue, but sometimes you did wonder.

But it had to be the right time to take the next step, and you both seemed content with where you were right now.

You didn’t get to see Spencer Reid as often as you’d have liked to. Between his job and yours, you had very little free time, although now your army of workers had grown and you were able to delegate more, you and Helen were finding that you were actually getting time to sit down and relax a bit more.

You only managed to see him in person a handle of times each year, but you still spoke to him at least once a day whether by text, call or even Skype.

When you’d postponed last year’s trip you could tell he’d been disappointed, thinking it was perhaps something you’d never end up doing, or that you’d changed your mind about doing it with him. But after a two hour long Skype session, you’d convinced him you definitely DID still want to, whether it took you another five years you and him were going to do this.

There’d been moments between you both when you had met in person. Fleeting glances, lingering looks, hugs that lasted longer than they should have done. And neither of you really dated either. Were you holding on for each other? You didn’t know.

You stumbled slightly on the trail, Spencers hands reaching out from behind to steady you.

“You okay?” He asked as you righted yourself and carried on up the dark trail.

“Yep. This trip is definitely showing me how clumsy I am.”

He laughed as did the woman in front of you. The whole group had been witness to your many stumbles and falls, everyone surprised that you hadn’t managed to break your ankle yet.

You carried on at a steady pace, thinking how proud Alex would be of you for doing this.

How proud she’d be of everything you’d achieved.

Thinking about her still made you sad, that feeling would never go away. But like a lot of the different thoughts and feelings you’d experienced over your life, you were learning to deal with them better.

You were still on antidepressants, and had been since two days after your thirtieth birthday, although it had taken a while for your doctor to get the dosage right. Your therapy sessions had been cut down to once a month now rather than once a week, although a lot of the time it didn’t even feel like therapy, just that you were going to have a chat for an hour.

Bad days still happened. But they were fewer and farther in between the good days. Your moods have levelled out somewhat due to the combination of the therapy and the medication and when you felt the darkness start to overcome you like it had in the past, it no longer consumed you completely. You were going to live with the depression your whole life, there was no magic cure. It didn’t matter how much you achieved or how happy you actually were, it was just the way your brain was wired. But you could cope better, much better.

Eventually you’d come clean to your parents as well, and Helen. Both had been devastated when you’d told them how bad it had been, your parents blaming themselves for being so hard on you. You’d assured the that it wasn’t just them, it had been a number of issues, but it had hurt you profusely to see the pain in their eyes when they realised how much they’d added to your feelings of failure.
Once they’d come to terms with it, both them and Helen become part of your support network. Helen started to be able to sense when you weren’t feeling right and she’d bring you a cup of herbal tea, lock the doors to your office and wrap her arms around you. That girl was a complete angel, both her and Spencer becoming your rocks, people you could lean on no matter what. They didn’t judge you or tell you what you were feeling was right or wrong. They just listened. You were forever thankful for the pair of them, knowing that you wouldn’t be the person you were today without them.

“We’re almost there guys.” Your leader called back from the front of line. “When we get to the Sun Gates, we’ll find a spot to rest and hopefully, if it's not too cloudy we’ll get a perfect view of the sun rising over the mountain.”

The group carried on, finally reaching the stone gates at the top of the mountain and joining the other groups that were already there. The trip was popular, although luckily permit based so only a set amount of people could travel it a day and not ruin it with over crowding.

Your guide gave you some facts and information about the sun gates, details you’d already heard countless times from the walking encyclopedia that was your best friend. When he stopped speaking, the sky was starting to tinge pink and you split up, everyone trying to find the perfect vantage point to see the sun light up the ruins below you.

You and Spencer found a moss covered rock that hadn’t been claimed and sat down shoulder to shoulder, to wait for the breathtaking view that you’d been waiting for, the shadow of the ruins slowly starting to disappear as the sun made its way across the sky.

There was a silence up on the mountain, only the sounds of cameras clicking. It seemed everyone was so taken with wanting to see this moment of beauty, one most people would never experience again, and you heard gasps as the ruins finally made their appearance, the sun rising and lighting them up.

“Wow…. ” You breathed out.

“I know…. Just… Wow.” Spencers gaze was following yours.

“I can’t believe we’re here. After everything, we did it. We’re here.”

“We are. We’re here. Together.” He glanced at you quickly, grinning from ear to ear.

Together.

Yes, you were here together. You were sat with the man who’d saved you two years ago by showing you that a complete stranger could change your life completely.

That stranger who had become such an important part of you, so important that you could never imagine him not being in your life.

You turned to him, squinting in the morning sun and finding his hand, taking it into yours and squeezing it.

“I love you Spencer Reid, you know that right.”

It wasn’t so much of a question as it was a statement. He had to know really.

“I love you too, Persephone Bella-Morte.”
You reached your hand out and brushed away a lock of hair that had fallen over his eyes, wondering if this would be the right moment to change things.

His eyes looked into yours and at the same time, both of you started to close the gap between your lips, knowing that it finally WAS the right time.

Chapter End Notes

So that it! I hope you enjoyed this story. Leave me some love down in the comments bit or tap the kudos button. Please.....

It's a big ask but if you’re enjoying my content and you’re financially able to then you may consider buying me a Ko-Fi as a way of financially supporting my writing. Many thanks to you if you do, it means so much to me that anyone might enjoy my work enough to donate to me

https://ko-fi.com/cherrywhisp
Five years had passed since that night on the bridge. Spencer didn’t give you any indication that he knew what day it was today, but then again you didn’t think he would. He wouldn’t want to remind you of the night he found you trying to jump, not when you’d come so far since then.

You however, to you this day meant something. It was the anniversary of the day that you met a stranger who had spoken to your soul in ways it had not been spoken to before. Had he not found you that night, you wouldn’t be here. Both of you knew that. You didn’t want to be one of those clichéd stories where you were saved from your crippling depression by love and on one hand you weren’t. It had taken a while for love to enter the equation. But now you thought about it, which you had been doing for a while now, you knew that if it hadn’t been for the attention and the effort Spencer had put into you, then you wouldn’t have been saved.

Saved from yourself. Saved from your mind.

As you took to the stage at The Blue Spark you glanced over to Spencer, the smile on his and his colleagues faces filling you with confidence. You’d contacted Ariadne who now owned the bar and asked if she could book you a slot on the open mic night they still ran. One custom made handbag as a thank you later, and you were on stage again, back to the place you’d ticked off one of the items on that stupid list.

Although you could have easily accompanied yourself here, you chose to have a backing track play instead, knowing you needed to move about. After you introduced yourself to a rousing applause from your table, you opened your mouth and began to sing, praying that Spencer would understand.

*Just a day,*  
*Just an ordinary day.*  
*Just trying to get by.*  
*Just a boy,*  
*Just an ordinary boy.*  
*But he was looking to the sky.*  
*And as he asked if I would come along*  
*I started to realize*  
*That everyday he finds*  
*Just what he’s looking for,*  
*Like a shooting star he shines.*

As you sang, you flashed back to that bridge, how annoyed you’d been, how frustrated that your plan had been foiled because of this insistant man. The man who had convinced you to step back over the railing and to go with him. Just for one drink, one coffee.

*He said take my hand,*  
*Live while you can*  
*Don’t you see your dreams lie right in the palm of your hand*  

That one coffee had turned into multiple drinks as he’d listened to you and you’d opened up, for the first time in years. This stranger, this complete stranger who you didn’t really know anything about at the time managing to connect with you. Because part of him was lost too. His sense of purpose had gone of track. Meeting you had helped set it back.

*And as he spoke, he spoke ordinary words*
Although they did not feel
For I felt what I had not felt before
And you’d swear those words could heal.
And as I looked up into those eyes
His vision borrows mine.
And I know he’s no stranger,
For I feel I’ve held him for all of time.

How things had changed since that night. Your life firmly back on track and your business running ridiculously well, after the Inca Trail you’d made the decision to open up an office closer to Spencer. His job was important to him and he couldn’t really change where he was based unless he left the BAU. You however, you were now at the stage where your clients would come to you. You still kept the main office and headquarters in New York, clocking up frequent flyer miles as you commuted back and forth. But now, you and Spencer had an apartment together, a beautiful space you’d picked out together and decorated with all of your favourite things. It was perfect, your safe space for the two of you.

You’d like to say your relationship with him was perfect. It wasn’t though, no relationship ever was. But for you, it was as close to perfect as you wanted it to be. He understood you and your disorder, that you’d be on medication likely for the rest of your life. But he accepted that, of course he did. He was your best friend as well as your lover.

You smiled at looked directly at him as you sang, remembering those three weeks after your first meeting. Him teaching you to play chess, taking you to meet Lila, someone who was still a big part of your business. The bungee jump, your breakdown in the apartment, your party. And everything that had happened since.

Everything that had happened because he had believed in you and had made you believe in yourself.

Just a dream, just an ordinary dream.
As I wake in bed
And the boy, that ordinary boy
Or was it all in my head?
Did he ask if I would come along
It all seemed so real.
But as I looked to the door,
I saw that boy standing there with a deal.

You unhooked your microphone from the stand and carefully climbed off the stage, weaving through the tables until you got to him. His eyes were wide and locked on yours, knowing the song was about him and what he’d done for you that night.

And he said take my hand,
Live while you can,
Don’t you see all your dreams lie right in the palm of your hand
In the palm of your hand,
In the palm of your hand.

Reaching out your hand, he slipped his into yours, grasping it tightly and you finished the song before carefully dropping to your knees.

Just a day, just an ordinary day
Just trying to get by.
Just a boy,
Just an ordinary boy.
But he was looking to the sky.

The crowd erupted into applause but you only had eyes and ears for Spencer. He bent his head down to yours.

“Five years Spencer,” you told him.

“I know Persephone, I know. I’m never going to forget this date, ever. It’s the day I met you.”

You nodded. “The day you asked me to trust you, the day I went with a boy I’d never met before. A boy who made me realise that I could be the person I am today.”

“And you’re such a fantastically amazing person, Seph. I love you so much.”

The applause had died down now, the audience starting to chatter amongst themselves. All except the table of people who’d you invited here tonight. Spencer, his colleagues and friends. Helen, even your mom and dad. They all had their eyes on you, all knowing what you were about to do.

“I love you too. So much. Spencer…”

You took a deep breath, and closed your eyes momentarily before opening them again.

“Spencer Reid, will you marry me?”

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