

Trigger Warning: Self-harm (hair pulling)

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"You really think this trip is a good idea?"

Our two week break was coming up soon, midterms coming and passing without a chance for us to breathe. My last exam was tomorrow, this one being the most significant since it was for my major class. I had spent the entire day today studying my ass off for it, Dean helping me go over the information with his meticulous flashcards before I had gone over the review package my prof had given the entire class.

Vanessa had called us today asking us about going on a trip with the rest of the group, her parents owning a family cabin near a resort. She had told us that usually her and her family would go there for a week or two every year, however due to everyone's busy schedules they didn't have time to make it so they offered it to us.

I laid flat on Dean's bed with my head lolled over to the side, tired, watching him pick out his sleeping clothes so we could watch a movie together. He knew how stressed I was, especially since he had done all of his exams and knew that if I wasn't distracted, I would most likely stay up all night tossing and turning.

Ever since our small argument, the topic of therapy was never brought up again. I was glad our small strain was done with, missing him more than ever. The first thing I had done the next day was come home and hug him, and we stayed cuddling that entire night until I fell asleep.

"It could be fun," He shrugged. "And it would get your mind off of things."

I frowned to myself, moving my head so I was staring at the ceiling. He did have a point and I had never gone on vacation before, maybe it would be fun.

"What would we do?"

"Relax, go swimming, maybe cook together. I think the resort has spas and stuff but I'm not exactly sure. I can ask V tomorrow if you want."

"Have you been there before?"

"No, but ever since I've known Vanessa she has gone every year for as long as she can remember. Some type of family tradition I believe. Her parents are big on that."

"Family trips to the resort?"

"Traditions," He said, amused. "They have at least ten of them. Each one weirder than the last."

I smiled at that, thinking of her and her family close enough to stick with them consistently. "I think that's nice. Adorable, actually."

"You're adorable. Their traditions? Not so much."

I sat up on my forearms, grinning wide at Dean. "You think I'm adorable?"

He walks over to me, clothes in hand as he presses a quick kiss to my lips. "The cutest." He murmurs against my mouth, pulling back and heading over to his bathroom.

I sigh in content, laying back down as a blush rises on my cheeks. The little things, I think, are starting to matter the most to me now. As my relationship grows closer with Dean, I'm starting to understand why he wanted to take us slow. So we could learn each other, like each other for more than just our looks and bodies.

A short while later he emerged, tossing his clothes in the hamper before walking over to me. I remained staring at the ceiling as I felt him near, climbing on the bed and laying next to me. He does that a lot too, just sit or lay beside me. Some of our best conversations happen like that, from discussing something small as a television show or going in depth about a new romance book I made him read. His bookshelf was expanding exponentially, more and more being added to his collection.

"What are you thinking about, pretty girl?"

I shook my head, closing my eyes.

"I'm just tired."

I felt him roll over on his side to look at me better. My eyes remained closed though, trying to gain the courage to talk about this.

"Dean?" I called out, voice small.

"Yes, Sophia?" His hand was on my stomach now, the heat and weight of it grounding me as I placed my hand closest to him on top, keeping it there to secure me.

"I'm really sorry for the way I've been acting these past few weeks. It wasn't fair to you, especially since you kept wanting us to take things slow. You set that boundary and I didn't respect it."

He was quiet for a few moments before turning his hand around on my stomach, interlacing our fingers together.

"Thank you for apologising. Is everything alright? You haven't been acting your usual self these past few days."

My breath catches in my throat at the mention of my demeanour, not thinking he would catch on. I opened my eyes, sending him a grim smile. "I'm fine." I murmured.

We didn't say anything after that, a slow silence filling the air and I tried to focus on the way Dean breathed. It was calming, relaxing, and I found myself wanting to curl up into his arms to seek comfort. My mind was racing, going back to two weeks ago as I had received the news with Alex. I didn't cry, I still haven't. I just stayed silent the entire time, only responding with nods as the Dr. told me that because she wasn't a hundred percent sure if I was infertile, she would have to do another test which was a wand that went inside of me in order to confirm what she saw on the screen.

I didn't talk on the ride back home either, staying with Alex that night because I didn't have the strength to tell Dean. I squeezed his hand, my heart in my throat as I tried to swallow past the growing knot. I didn't know how to tell him at first, and as the days rolled together I found it harder and harder to even admit to myself that it was true.

"Sophia?"

"Hmm?"

"You're crying," He said quietly.

"No, I'm not."

"Baby..."

"I'm not."

Denial. My favourite thing to do. My tears rolled off of my cheeks in rapid waves, splattering against the sheets below and the fact that Dean had voiced them out loud made them fall faster, my brain finally processing them as true.

My heart ached and my head hurt. I felt like gasping for air. I felt like screaming in agony or crying in desperation. I wanted to flee and hide. I felt like wanting to break and hit and tear and rip and ruin. My shoulders shook as I tried to muffle the sounds of my sobs, moving away from Dean to sit up, my arms wrapped around my stomach in attempts to subside the burning I was feeling in my chest.

I could hear him, his voice sounding like he was buried underwater and my mind didn't want to listen. My heart was too heavy. I felt like I was in pain.

"Oh god," I gasped out, trying to contain my tears. "I'm not crying."

I moved my hands to press against my eyes, taking exaggerated breaths to calm myself down. I was so deep in grief that it was hard to control. I was infertile. It was confirmed. My uterus was so damaged that I could not create another life. Something I so desperately wanted, something I had dreamed of having. I wanted that big fucking happy family, wanted the process of getting that pregnancy test and seeing it positive. I wanted to hold my little person in my arms, wanted to see their first steps and hear their first words.

And God, did it fucking tear me apart that I couldn't have any of that. I never would have any of that and that is what I think hurts the most about this situation. Devon had managed to rip away the one part of my soul I thought he would never have.

Pathetic, pathetic, pathetic.

My hands were gently pulled away from my face and I faced a worried Dean, sitting down on the floor in front of me.

"I'm sorry," I choked out. "I don't even know why I'm crying," I lied.

"Sophia—"

I stood up, removing my hands from his grasp as I tugged hard on my hair. Pain shot through my scalp but I didn't mind it, used to the feeling. My eyes blurred as I walked back and forth, taking exaggerated breaths.

"It's stupid, just let it pass."

It became harder to breathe as I collapsed on my knees, my hands curling into the carpet as I held my breath, hoping it would relax the tremors.

A hand rubbed my back, up and down in tender strokes as a voice whispered in my ear.

"Breathe, my girl."

I shook my head, finally gasping out as I took in handfuls of air.

You stupid, stupid girl.

I flinched away from Dean's touch, curling myself up into a ball full of shame and embarrassment.

"You...you don't need this." My face was pressed into my knees, my arms tightly wrapped around them as they hugged close to my body. "All I do is fall apart and you can't be there to put me back together. You're better than this."

"Sophia—"

"This is a fantasy. I can't love you, I don't even know what that is. I can't...you're better than this, Dean. You're amazing and caring and kind and sweet and you—you remembered that I get cold and you know the right words to say and you're...you're everything I'm not."

I was gathered in his arms, his body holding me tight on the carpeted floor.

"You're everything I need." He whispered to me.

I bit my lip hard, pushing back another sob as I tried to look away again. He gently forced my head back, continuing.

"You're right, I can't put you back together. So fall apart for you." He leaned down, his so lips against my forehead. "Fall apart with me."

Some people would never understand the aspect of holding in your emotions until you physically burst, the perfect comparison being a soda bottle being shaken up multiple times before opening.

I had a bad habit of pushing aside my feelings to deal with them later. That caused random outbursts of tears and aching that I hated to experience, which is the whole reason why I suppressed them in the first place. But in reality, this just caused a world-wide of a constant cycle.

Feel sad, suppress, breakdown, repeat.  
It was never ending.

However, just how much Dean encouraged me to keep going, he also encouraged me to fall apart, making me finally let go of the sob I was holding and breaking down, finally experiencing the gravity of my situation in full.

"It's not fair," I cried, shaking my head erratically. "He took away everything I had, everything I am. Why did he have to take this from me too? It's not fair. It's not fair, it's not fair, it's not fair."

My heart felt like it was going to rip out of my chest. I was hysterically crying, my words coming out incoherent and blubbery as I fought the urge to punch a brick wall or scream as loud as I could. It was a full on mental breakdown, far different than anything I have had before and I knew I was most likely scaring Dean with how badly I was falling apart.

He had no idea and I couldn't tell him. I didn't want him to look at me like I was damaged, didn't want him to realise that Devon's abuse had a permanent effect in my life.

I felt like I was dying, that's how bad the pain was. Like multiple stabs to my chest, one after the other after the next.

I buried my face into his chest, my hands holding on for dear life as my cries slowed down and I realised, for the first time in my life, I truly wanted to die.

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A/N: I really wanted to pause here with the reminder that this book is based on Sophia's journey of becoming healthy again. I really want to emphasize how hard overcoming abuse can be.

It's an incredibly difficult journey filled with highs and lows and the constant voice in your head misguiding you along the way. Sophia is a complex character, and this story is trying to stay true to realism as best as it can. Which means that her journey won't be a steady ride but a constant rollercoaster.

The entire reason I'm saying this is because...I understand your frustrations with her. To you, reading her as a character in a story, you get confused on why she doesn't just go to therapy or tell Dean what happened at the hospital. But you need to understand that Sophia has been neglected her entire life, taking care of herself until she was manipulated into thinking abuse is love.

She is relearning her life again, relearning how to be in friendships and relationships and because sex has always been a means for a action, she uses that knowledge to her advantage thinking its how she will be accepted.

What I'm trying to say is that please just keep an open mind with how she thinks. Abuse in every form is the worst thing to experience and can be so detrimental.

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