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I have a weird obsession with needing validation.

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It doesn't matter who it's from or what it's about, any sort of praise fills up my entire day with joy. It's probably due to the raging neglect I felt as a child, and the constant well of emotions that always erupted from me when I was never told how proud I made someone.

That kind of sounds like I was a spoiled brat, one who had everyone and everything. One who was always taken care of, was surrounded with ever growing love and content.

I guess, in some sort of weird way, I felt like I was spoiled when I had the chance to move away from it all. Not many people had the same luck as I did, and so not many people were spoiled like I was.

Alas, the first week of university was doable. I understood the material and was fortunately making my way around campus to every lecture and tutorial with ease. Though, I was still having trouble sleeping, often staying away 'till three AM before my eyes gave out from the utter exhaustion of the day. What would have made it perfect was if Dean tried to show up to the classes we were in together. But he never did.

I didn't know if he was avoiding me or if seriously could not make it, and something told me the latter was the most likely cause

I wasn't worried. He could take care of himself well enough and I didn't know enough about him to think otherwise, but a small feeling of concern did pass through my head every once in a while whenever I glanced at his empty desk. Dean was in another one of my classes, the criminals' state of mind, and since the tutorial was set up like a classroom, it was fairly easy to see that he didn't show.

Still, I tried to keep a smile on my face and get through the day the best I could without crumpling under pressure. University was hard, especially during the last year, and I was determined to make it through with a degree in hand and a job that would sustain me.

It was when I was walking out of my last lecture did I see him; out in the grassy fields leaning against the same tree. Though, something else caught my attention this time. His hands. Or specifically, what was clutched in them.

A notebook.

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Strange, I thought. He seemed to be glued to his laptop like gum but I might have judged too fast since his notebook was ratty and worn, looking like it was used a hundred times over.

Debating on whether or not I should walk up to him, my mind the minute he caught my gaze and glowered. Even sitting against a tree, he seemed to gleam his negative energy and to be quite honest, it was attractive if not intriguing. He was an asshole, but not an asshole, if that made any sense.

Grinning, I made a steady path up to him before he could get up and move away. Bending down slightly, I rested my hands on my knees and looked down to notice his head already tilted up, watching me with interest.

"Hi, Dean." I said so ly, his glare cutting me short. The shi in the air made me think something had happened to him on his days away, the unsettling feeling of him being hurt or in trouble growing deep within me.

He didn't speak for what felt like years, his fix remained on my face as his eyes filtered over my skin. Heat was pooling in my stomach but I brushed it o. I patted my backpack, continuing on the lovely conversation.

"I brought you notes from Professor Avalon's class. Figured you'd need it since you were away and all."

"I thought I told you to leave me alone." He sighed, closing his eyes for a brief moment.

I fake frowned, indulging in his blatant chatter. "Why? Is my company that bad?"

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I didn't give him a chance to reply as I sat down right in front of him, criss crossing my legs with my hands clasped in my lap.

"How'd your paper go?"

He shrugged.

"I bet you did well on it, I mean I did give you my insight a er all."

Finally, something other than a frown had reached his lips. A smirk replaced the anger and he crossed his arms over his chest, his bare arms in his t-shirt bulging as he leaned slightly forward to gauge at me.

"Is that right?" He mused.

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Nodding, I rolled my eyes. "Of course, and plus, I attract positive energy which means I indirectly gave you an A."

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Laughing so ly, he went back to his notebook, writing down whatever as I flowed in our conversation. It felt nice, talking. Being here and sitting with someone other than myself.

"Do you have any friends?"

"Do you?" He asked back and I winced, not expecting that response.

"Not cool, pretty boy. I only just moved here. And yes, for your information I do have a friend. It's you, remember?"

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"When did I agree to this?"

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"Just now when you pinky promised me." He looked at me like I was insane.

"When did I—" Reaching for his hand, I interlaced our pinkies and then let go. The warmth of his skin remains, sending that flustered feeling up to my cheeks as I suppress a smile.

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"That was unfair." An adorable frown pulled his lips, making me laugh.

"Sorry, I don't make the rules. Guess you really are stuck with me now."

Silence passed before I leaned toward him, tilting my head down to read some words on the paper. I expected him to pull back but instead, he shi ed the notebook so I could read the words more clearly.

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"This is your handwriting?"

An annoyed hu fled his lips. "That's what you noticed?"

I gave him an shameless look, "Sorry, let me look again. Hmm...wait, are you a teacher's assistant?"

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The red pen in his hand underlined and circled words on the notebook, his distinctive handwriting plastering small notes of criticism o to the side of the page. It seemed to be a research paper outline and it looked like it was given to him by a student to look at before they started their final paper.

Eyebrows raised, I read a few of his notes. They were less harsh than I assumed, the fabric of my shirt pulled as I arched my back to finish reading his note.

"What the fuck happened to your back?"

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Pulling away, I shoved my shirt down quickly, smoothing over a fake smile. "Nothing, I just fell while going on a walk the other day. I forgot I'm still new to this place."

Hoping he'd leave it alone, I grabbed the book fully out of his hands and busied myself with it. I could feel his heated gaze on me and I flipped aimlessly through the pages.

"You didn't answer my question," I reminded him.

"And you didn't answer mine."

Surprised, I tried to hide my reaction. "I did so. Now tell me, are you a teacher's assistant because I don't think I'd be allowed to look at this if you were."

Hesitating whether or not he should let our previous conversation go, he answered. "I'm not. Well, I declined the position to be. I do, however, give help every once in a while if people require it. And I have the key to a classroom in case I have a lot of workload to sort through."

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I hummed, impressed, as I handed the notebook back. My phone beeped, making me jolt, my breathing getting heavy as I proceeded to slowly pull it out trying to keep my expression neutral.

Relief ran through my head as I saw that it was just a random coupon notification, informing me that milk was half o today. Brushing it o, I continued my torment.

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"So let me get this straight; you're a smart asshole who's a genius?"

"I'm pretty sure genius and smart are the same thing."

I raised an eyebrow. "Just pretty sure? Hm, maybe you aren't as smart as I thought."

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Scooting to lay down on the grass, I rolled my head so I could watch him work. His eyes were back to the notebook, brows furrowed as he analyzed the page before writing down his thoughts.

"You know, you didn't answer my question about fears yesterday." I brought up, remembering his abrupt absence. I still had questions about that, but didn't want to pry since we went that deep in our level of friendship yet.

He paused, his head li ing up and focusing on me.

"Maybe we should play twenty questions a er all, Sophia. I have a few questions of my own that I want answered."

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"Why?" I whispered. "I'm not that interesting, I can assure you."

Fear crept up my skin as I tried to play unbothered, knowing what he was leading on. However, I wasn't one to back away from a challenge. In fact, I realized I could also ask questions about him in this game.

"If you won't leave me alone, I might as well get to know you, Sophia."

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Fair, I nodded along, keeping up my facade. A shudder le my body at the sound of my name on his tongue. Images floated in my head of him. Him with his lips on mine, whispering my name over and over again like a praise on my skin. I shook my head, unglazing my eyes and shi ed to sit back up, leaning my body weight on my forearms. I needed to stop daydreaming and keep focus.

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"Maybe we should," I agreed.

He placed the notebook and pen beside him, stretching out his legs as his calculated gaze challenged me. Like he wanted me to be intimidated by his mere appearance.

"Why do you feel safer in a pitch black room now?"

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I wasn't expecting that as his first question and that must've shown on my face too, given his inquiry look. Composing myself, I answered honestly.

"It's ironic, isn't it?" I asked, flicking some hair out of my face. "The very thing I used to be scared of now held me when there was no one else to hold. It kept my secrets, it helped me breathe. It kept me sane, it gave me freedom. Darkness was always a constant in my life when everyone else seemed to be changing. Or leaving. In a sense, it now held who I was."

"Which is?"

Shaking my head, I grinned. "Nope, It's my turn, pretty boy. Where were you all week?"

"Why," that cocky smile was back. "Did you miss me?"

"Not in the slightest."

"Liar."

"Though," I disregarded him, "I bet you missed me seeing since I am your only friend and all. Now answer my question and stop avoiding it."

Sighing, he pressed his head back against the bark.

"I had something important to take care of."

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"Your dick?"

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He groaned, "God, you're infuriating."

"Hmm," I hummed. "Perhaps you should be more carefree, Dean. You do know that grumpiness kills."

He rolled his eyes, moving forward making me shi around him.

"Why were you alone at the party?"

"Because I moved here alone." I answered in a smart-ass way.

He was closer now and I could see his thumb playing with the rings on his fingers, twisting and I twisted my hands and twisting. "Why did you move here?"

"I needed a fresh start. Why are you so rude?"

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"Because I am. Why did you need a fresh start?"

"Because I did. Why are you pushing me away?"

"Why are you trying so hard to pull in?"

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"Why are you not answering my questions?"

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"Why didn't you answer mine?"

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He was inches away from my lips and had somehow pushed me up against the tree instead. I breathed shakily, trying to calm my erratic heart as he watched with a thoughtful expression. He seemed to be analytical, gauging my every reaction and emotion almost as if he could calculate it and come out with an answer to why I was the way I was.

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"What happened to your back, Sophia?" His voice was so spoken and another shudder ran through me hearing my name escape his lips.

"I already told you," I whispered back. "I fell. Why don't you believe me?"

"Because you're a fucking liar."

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As degrading as that was, I clenched my legs together.

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He was closest now, too close. I raised my hands and brought them so ly against his chest, creating space between us so I could breathe again.

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So I could think.

"Who did it?"

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"Speaking of your paper, there's this quote I remember now." I replied, ignoring his question. "It said that we all have darkness in us. We are all more than capable of doing things then we lead on. So I guess going back to my conversation from yesterday, I also mean it in a metaphorical sense too."

"Mean what?"

"We are darkness and we are light. And we are everything and we are nothing."

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