

A unpacking our things and taking a quick walk around the resort, we found a couple of things to do for the next two weeks. One of the things I was most looking for, though, was swimming or going shopping. Since I had been working overtime for most of my shifts, I managed to save a decent amount of money and even had some left over to splurge myself on, which was a rarity in my life.

Growing up, any money I made either went to bills, food, or my dad's everlasting alcohol addiction as he would steal money out of me in order to continue having himself. I've tried my best to keep it away from him, even going as far as not flashing around my physical card, though on the days I needed cash he always seemed to find my stash and use it immediately.

Was I angry at him? Honestly...I couldn't say I was. It wasn't that I wanted him to steal from me, it was the fact that he was addicted that made me feel so sorry for him. Addiction was an illness, a terribly, horrific one that ropes in people by their mind. It makes them feel good when nothing else does, shows them an artificial light they can reach for when they are surrounded by darkness. I was more upset that I couldn't do much more to help. When I wasn't at school, I was working two jobs and barely got home in time to eat, much less sleep. This caused my grades to be mediocre though I was grateful to get into university where I was focusing on subjects that I am good at.

He was my father by birth but not my papa and even though I spent countless days knee deep in grief and guilt where I figured if I was just a better daughter, if I could just get through high school and gain more money maybe he would love me enough to realise that his family is right here, in front of him. And as time passed a year I was kicked out to fend entirely for myself, I lost the resolve to bury myself in it any further and moved on.

Though, from time to time I do still think about what could have been if my mother hadn't died and my father was still his normal, loving self.

"Sophia?" I heard someone call out, making me snap out of my thoughts, dazed and confused as I tried to find the voice responsible.

"What?" I said back, noticing everyone staring at me making me flush red, slouching in my seat and turning my head so I could bury my face in the side of Dean's body. His arm came around to rub my back, a small laugh falling out of him. "Stop staring at me!" My voice came out muffled.

"Sophia, we were wondering what you'd like to do today."

I pulled back, hair messy and face red as I looked at Alex with a pointed look. "Why don't you pick? I'm indecisive and I'll drive you crazy!"

She sighed, sharing a look with Ayesha before explaining to me that we were all voting on different things, the ones with the most of course being the winner. Brandon and Zayn were nowhere to be found and Alyan and Vanessa were silent, sitting on opposite sides of the room with their gaze set on a blank spot on the floor.

"Fine okay um..." I looked at Dean, narrowing my eyes in his direction. "Dean, look me in my eyes."

"This isn't really the time for a couple moment, Soph."

I scooped, rolling my eyes as I pulled away and crossed my arms over his chest to mimic his regular stance. That only made him smile wider, waiting for my crazy thoughts to spring about.

"I'm trying to mind read what you voted on so I can pick the same."

"Oh, yes." He nodded, pulling back his smile to feign seriousness in order to entertain me. "That makes perfect sense. I can understand why you would do that rather than ask me what I voted on."

Oh...yeah. I suppose I could do that as well. Our little moment I guess we did end up having one anyway! was cut short by the sco of Alex, making me look over to see her pretending to gag.

I frowned, pointing my finger in her direction. "You're just angry because the last person you tried to ask out rejected you."

That made her gape, looking at me like I betrayed her in ten different ways. "Sophia?"

"Aw, Alex what happened?" Ayesha asked from beside her, looking like she was just as upset for her as Alex was.

She only sighed, shaking her head dejectedly. "It turned out astronomy girl was not out of this world."

That pulled a laugh out of me as I walked over to her and held her close, placing a kiss at the top of her head.

"If you wanna make me feel better, Sophia, choose going to the spa."

"Alright," I nodded, looking at Ayesha. She had her phone out now, her face visibly upset as she texted someone back in furious ways. When she was done, she flipped her phone over and looked up at me, forcing a smile.

"Yes, okay. Spa it is!"

"Aw man!" Someone said from the door, and turning around I noticed it was Zayn...holding logs?

"Zayn, why do you have an abundance of wood?" Dean asked, standing up.

He set it down beside a grouchy Brandon, confusion filtering his gaze. "Are we...not building a campfire?"

At that Brandon rubbed a hand over his face, sighing out loud as Vanessa stood up, looking more to them making Alyan look up, a longing in his eyes as he realised that he must have been the one for her sappy mood.

"Zayn..." Vanessa said, trying to hold in her laughter. "We're in a cabin, not a tent. We have a fireplace here and central heating."

"I told him we didn't need any fucking logs!"

"Hey!" Zayn said, turning to look at him with a frown. "You're my best friend! You're supposed to have my back in these things, even if I'm wrong."

"Even if carrying these logs made me get splinters?"

He nodded, serious. "Even if you got stabbed twelve times."

Brandon shook his head at that, stepping away with his arms raised in surrender. "I love the fuck out of you, Zayn. But in no way am I getting stabbed twelve times because you decided trekking in the woods at night to find slenderman was going to make us rich."

"I thought you'd take a bullet for me?"

"The fuck do I look like? Bruno Mars?"

"That was a grenade." Zayn corrected, and a phone rang out making me take my eyes off of their banter and towards Ayesha who had her phone flipped back around, looking distressed as she stood up and walked away, answering the call.

"Gee Mama?" She said, her voice getting distant the more she walked away from the group to go to her room. "Ab kya hai?" My urdu may have been a little rusty, partly because I rarely spoke it at home or my mom died but it was easy enough to translate: yes mama? What is it now?

I felt Dean come up behind me, playing with the ends of my hair as he followed my line of sight to a disappearing Ayesha walking up the stairs, the sound of her closing her door with a little more force extenuating her frustrations with her mother.

"Hey," I said so ly, glancing at him. "Do you know what's going on with Ayesha?"

He shook his head, now looking worried seeing my concern to which I quickly tried to diminish, not wanting him to assume something that may have been a small feud with her mom.

"It's probably nothing..." I tried to reassure, though I wasn't that convinced because of the way she spoke with her mom. Almost as if she was bracing herself to be content with whatever her mom was telling her.

While my mom wasn't one to stay accustomed to religion, she cherished culture heavily and I knew how toxic that could get at times especially when it could be filled with old fashion misogynistic ways such as the "no talking about periods in front of men" rule.

"Anyway," Zayn's loud voice cut across the room. "Why are we going to the spa on the first day? Shouldn't that be an end of the week activity?"

"There's free snacks." Vanessa said, making Zayn stop and nod, dropping his log of wood.

"Alright, I'm in."

Before he could make it far, however, Vanessa grabbed his shirt and yanked him back, gesturing down to the logs of wood making him let out a pout and begrudgingly drag it back out with Brandon, who once again cursed him for his ludicrous plans.

With that, I turned back around to the rest of the group while Vanessa clapped her hands with an excited look on her face as she started to go to her room to get ready.

"Ah, the spa! I'm so excited, I really need a massage after this week. My boss has been a pain in my ass."

"Where do you work, Vanessa?" Alex asked, walking up the stairs from behind her. Me and Dean were close behind, Alyan still on the couch perhaps not wanting to destroy Vanessa's good mood.

"Oh! I'm a journalist for the Toronto Star! Though, at this point, I can't even be considered one if my boss is only handing me boring topics!"

"You should really file a complaint, V." Dean said from beside me.

She waved him off, shaking her head. "No, it's alright. I've been applying for jobs to other news anchors anyway. Actually, I had an interview with CTV last week."

I smiled, happy for her. "How do you think you did?" We had reached the top of the stairs now, facing each other before we went to our respective rooms.

She looked nervous now, her smile shy as she toed the floor with her sock covered feet. With a shrug, she looked away. "They might have called me back today in order to come in for a follow up."

Alex and I jumped, a squeal leaving our lips as her smile turned full blown. We congratulated her on the job, telling her how we knew she would definitely get it before footsteps sounded behind us and we saw Zayn and Brandon coming up the stairs.

"Hey guys what are we doing on the—" His voice was cut short when we heard the slight sound of Ayesha talking, voice raised yet still muffled due to her being locked away in her room.

"Mama, please! You said I still had time. I don't understand why I have to do this when Adam is older. Shouldn't he go first?"

We turned to each other, eyes slightly widened as we froze to our spot. She sounded desperate, frustrated and sad. All I wanted to do was put my arms around her in comfort, tell her everything was going to be okay.

From the corner of my eye I could see Zayn straighten, his joking personality wiping clean as his mouth sat in a serious line.

"I don't wanna fight with you. I know I said you can look for me but baraye meharbani ye nah kar na abi. I don't understand why you're pushing this...Mama you know that's all culture don't intertwine Islam with it." She hushed a breath and I break the silence, clearing my throat.

"We should get ready," I whispered. "I don't think we should be—" Now I was cut off when Ayesha opened her door, her eyes down as she texted something on her phone and then halted when she noticed us, looking up. Faint tracks of tears were on her face, her lashes wet and eyes red as she pulled another smile on to mask what we just heard.

"Oh, hey guys! Are you getting ready for the spa?"

Vanessa nodded, stepping forward to place a hand on her shoulder as a look of understanding passed between them. Ayesha cleared her throat, moving away from her hold as she tried to avoid direct eye contact with anyone.

"I think I might hold on to that activity until later. I kind of have to...um—yeah. Bye guys have fun!"

She couldn't get away quicker, gently moving past us and trekking down the stairs most likely to head down. We watched in silence, collectively understanding some context of the call. While I couldn't say from first hand experiences about culture later on as a girl, I knew how hard it was especially for someone like Ayesha who had moved out without marriage and had gotten a job.

Vanessa tried to ease us back into our rooms, looking less than stellar now that her friend was visibly upset and so was Zayn, surprisingly. He seemed to be walking to his room with his shoulders slumped as he kept gazing down to where Ayesha ran to.

Alex and Dean shut our door I walked over to the closet, silently pulling things out.

"I'm worried about her," Dean admitted from behind, and I turned to see him sitting on the edge of our bed with his head down. I walked over, sitting beside him and taking his hand in mine just the way he often does to me, rubbing my thumb along the back of it.

"Why? Do you know if something is wrong? Wait—don't tell me if it's something personal. I don't want to intrude."

He shook his head, still not looking at me. "No...it was just something she had said to me the other week. She said she'd said something living in her house, it's why she moved out in the first place." Ah, so that's what he means.

"Sometimes, it's hard for other people to understand the life of a child of an immigrant. Especially a first generation one."

"What do you mean?"

I sighed, leaning back so I was laying on the bed and he followed, seeing that it was time for another one of our talks.

"Our upbringing is vastly different from yours, which you probably already know. Because our parents were born in Pakistan, their morals and beliefs are constantly intertwined with culture and religion. It isn't their fault, of course. They were raised a different way than we were, especially since we were born in Canada. They're just teaching us what their parents taught them. This is a western country where everyone is diverse and different in all aspects, and because everyone is different we are more open minded and prone to accepting those differences."

"That must be hard." He murmured from beside me and I nodded, agreeing.

"It is and it isn't. It's also difficult for us because we have to accept that their mindset can't change and adapt like ours. Ayesha loves her mom, Dean, it's obvious. I think she's just frustrated because even as she moves away, in culture your parents are everything. Which sometimes means they can tend to overstep on boundaries and such." I rolled my body to face him and he did the same, staring at each other as I ordered him a small smile of reassurance.

"She'll be okay..." I said so ly, a hand on his arm. "And if she isn't, she has a group of wonderful, loving people to support her."

He reciprocated my expression, moving forward to kiss me and I melted into him, so...Before things could get too heated, I pulled away and walked back over to the closet, taking out a dress that I could change to later on. It was one I had gotten a shopping trip with Vanessa and Ayesha, a pretty cotton sundress that was pale pink and ended mid thigh. I set it aside to wear for dinner later, taking out some more clothes and hugging them to my chest as I walked over to the bathroom.

"Hm," Dean said from the bed. "And here I thought you'd be dying to give me a show."

I held the door, rolling my eyes at him. "Yeah, sure. I bet you'd enjoy that, pretty boy. By the way, are you going to come to the spa with us or just hang around? You seem tired lately." For the past couple of days a few of my meltdowns, I noticed dark circles under Dean's eye. I know he's been falling asleep later than me, I just don't know how late.

I tucked away that information, telling myself to ask about it later as I watched his demeanour. He just shook his head, telling me he was a bit tired due to the ride and was going to stay behind. With that, I closed the bathroom door and changed, tying my hair into a ponytail and walking out over to Dean who had also changed into more comfortable loungewear. He was sitting up against the headboard, book in hand with his glasses on, making me grin wide. I loved seeing him with his glasses.

Crawling up the bed, I leaned over to give him a goodbye kiss but not until I quietly spoke in his ear.

"You failed to entertain me."

He smirked, lifting up his glasses so they were on top of his head and putting his book down before grabbing my neck gently and pulling me toward him in a deep and heated kiss. I stumbled, holding onto his shoulders letting out a soft gasp. What was probably only minutes seemed like hours as we pulled away, catching our breaths.

I loved kissing Dean. It was probably one of the most perfect, purest things I have ever done. I could almost drown kissing him and I'd be content, wanting him to be the only oxygen I breathe.

"Maybe when you're good," he murmured between short kisses. "We can talk about entertaining each other."

"In what way?" I ask innocently, hand grazing down his chest and under his shirt. He nips my bottom lip for that, using his free hand to keep my hand there so I don't move it further. It only makes me want to lean into him more, a small moan leaving his throat as my right hand holds his neck like he holds mine. Both of us preceding an action, so small yet it tells us what we already know: that we really fucking like each other.

"Sleep," I say, breathless. I say it in a way that tries to convince him to stop kissing me when I want to do anything but.

"Spa," he only says back, moving both hands over to my wrists and pulling me flush against him. I'm almost seated in his lap, my legs on either side of his thigh reminding me furiously of my stance just a few weeks earlier.

But that just makes me think of sex and sex makes me think of Dean wanting us to wait and as much as I hate it, as much as it tears me inside, I pull away at last with both hands pressed to his chest to create some distance between us.

I'm still looking at his lips, red and tender. The way his chest rises and falls heavily. His hands are big and warm on my hips, not quite wanting to let go yet and I order my explanation.

"Wait," I finally yanked my gaze to his own, seeing his mouth close as he took in my words. "I wanna wait...for you. And for me." I say so ly, my riddid state relaxing as I realise what I just said.

I'm shocked, I'm surprised, but most of all I'm proud and I can tell Dean is too when his smiles so tenderly that it pricks tears in my eyes, gently gathering me to his chest as he presses a kiss to the top of my head.

"Of course, sweetheart." He says in the softest way, and now I want to do nothing more than lay down and wrap myself around him.

"Whatever you're most comfortable with."

I sigh into him, touching my lips to feel them pu y and most likely red as he pulls me up and brushes back my hair. He searches my eyes for something before talking, holding my chin between his thumb and pointer finger.

"I want you to go to the spa, okay? Want you to feel relaxed this entire trip?"

"Alright," I agree, with a nod to his head. I then reach for his glasses, folding it and putting it on the side table before doing the same with his book. "I want you to sleep, then. No more reading..." I crame my head, squinting my eyes at the title. "Crime and Punishment"

Goodness Dean, read a raunchy romance from time to time.

He squints his eyes, confused. "Like 50 Shades of Grey?"

"God, no." I laugh, pushing off of him and standing up. "You are not reading glorified abuse. I want something cute and fluffy with some raunch. Raunchiness? Whatever. Something of Talia Hibbert or Emily Henry, you've read Beach Readright as well read Book Lovers"

"You just told me to sleep." He points at me and I sigh.

"You know..." I start, collecting my phone and some earphones in case I'm allowed to listen to some of my music in the spa. I got Spotify recently, of course on a student plan and have been making the girls send me song recommendations so I can figure out what I most like.

"For someone as smart as you, you'd think he'd understand that I obviously mean read later and not now."

"That was just mean, Soph."

I grin, opening the door and looking at him over my shoulder. "Sorry, pretty boy. Now sleep and you better be well rested before I come back or I'll handcu you to the bed."

He gives me that look, one that tells me he wouldn't mind what I just said and I only shrapen my glare, waiting for him to get under the sheets. With a roll of his eyes he does just that, and before I leave he calls out to me.

"Wait." He calls out, and I try to hold back my laughter because of how much he sounds like a little kid. "Come back."

I do as he says, hands on my hips as I peer down to see what he has to say.

"You never kissed me goodbye."

"We were just making out. Like two minutes ago." I point out.

"Yeah but that wasn't a goodbye kiss."

And I thought I was the clingy one. Though, I can't help but smile at how precious he is and grant his request, stroking back his hair as his eyes fall shut. With that, I shut the lights and went to meet the rest of the group downstairs.

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"I feel like a whole new person." Vanessa says from beside me, still in a state of euphoria. It turns out only Alex, Vanessa and I wanted to go to the spa. Ayesha's small mishap with her mother. Alyan stayed behind, most likely because of Vanessa and Brandon didn't want to go because Zayn wasn't going.

It didn't matter much to me, they were fine with doing whatever they wanted because right now all I feel is relaxed and ready to go to dinner. We had done the full treatment, getting facials, massages, even our legs and arms waxed. I had thankfully inherited my mother's genes so my body hair wasn't as dark as my dad's though it wouldn't have. I usually shaved though when I knew I was going to wear the occasional skirt but due to exams I hadn't had the time to do the energy to. Which, in the end, worked out for me because now I got to wax.

"Me too," Alex agreed, walking like she was a baby leaving its first steps. "I never want to leave this place." We were heading back to the cabin an entire three hours later, and my stomach clenched with that feeling to let me know that I was hungry.

"Sophia, how are you feeling? If it's anything but relaxed Dean will probably send you straight back and demand a refund."

"But the resort programs are free...? Doesn't your family pay an annual fee?"

Vanessa shakes her head at me. "You're almost as bad as Dean."

"Hey!" I turn, denying it. "It's not my fault! It's underband context cues. You are right...he told me he wanted me relaxed. Do you think it's because he wants to drive me on the side of the road like a stray cat? He told me he'd do that once around the time I first met him."

Vanessa gave me an amused look, tucking back her hair. "You're joking if you think he wants to leave you. Much less on a random street. I've never seen Dean as touchy as he is with you."

"Really?" I ask, turning towards her. "Because he'd touch me all the time." I winced, backtracking. "I didn't mean...I meant—"

"We understand, Sophia," Alex assured, laughter in her eyes.

"Dean's very cautious of his space." Vanessa elaborated, making me quiet and listen. "Even when we first started to sit with him and Alyan at lunch during high school, he would always be immersed in his book or staring at his lunch tray uncomfortably. He's always been like that though. Sly, more reserved and of course no one took that to once when Alyan told us he acts that way around everyone—even him sometimes."

"He looks so comfortable with you guys, though. Like you're family and he'd do anything for you."

She nodded, a small smile gracing her face as she looked like she was recalling back a memory.

"Time and trust. Ayesha and I would always hang out with them during the eleventh grade, and we would always respect his space. I guess the more he got to know us, the more he warmed up to us. Actually, the first time I ever cried at school was in front of Dean. I was anxious about presenting for our business class the next period and he calmed me down, doing breathing exercises with me until I was feeling better."

My face bloomed, happy. That was Dean. Selfless and kind.

"What I'm trying to say is...I'm really glad you're in his life, Sophia. In our lives. I've never seen him this relaxed and comfortable in a while. Or so concerned about someone else. I mean, of course he cares about us but it's different with you, you know?"

I nod, telling her I understand. My eyes glisten, my heart so full and so utterly content knowing as much as a friend Dean made in my life, I had done the same. As small as it was.

"Yeah," I wiped away a stray tear, nodding again. "I know. I'm glad you guys are in my life too, V. Really fucking grateful."

"Ah fuck. Now I feel like I owe you." Alex complained.

I turn towards her, bringing her into my side as I place a kiss to the top of her head and mumble how much I love her. Vanessa joins in on our group hug, megawatt smiles plastered all over our faces.

I may have never found home with my birth family, but I'm finding it right here. Everyday. With the people I love most in the entire world.

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