

LELE ITURRIOZ

Quarter-Life Crisis

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Quarter-Life Crisis

First Edition

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WARNING

Rated 'R'.

Warning: this book contains strong language, awesome sex and alcohol (which may be unsuitable for minors) just like, sarcastic humor and life circumstances (which may be unsuitable for some adults... or some shitty actors)

ENJOY!

Chapter 1

ARIA

HOW? THAT WAS THE QUESTION that had been haunting me since this morning. That brain-damaging but straightforward question was the only word that I kept repeating over and over again like a scratched CD.

However, a part of me was relieved, because for the past week the question had been “Why?”

Why on earth did Codi cheat on me and leave me for, well, pretty much all the skanks in LA? Why wasn't I enough? Why did I feel like I was wasting my life and suffering anxiety every time someone said to me, “You're still young”? Why was it so hard to find a job where I didn't feel miserable all the time?

I did absolutely everything possible to secure my future. I went to the right schools, participated in every college newspaper, writing tournament, and spent years in preparation, yet somehow, now, none of that seems like it was enough.

So many of my friends were getting married. Sending those ridiculous black and white ‘save the stupid date’ pictures, having beautiful babies and working in the perfect, claustrophobic offices to pay for their overpriced two-story houses with a freaking garden. To be honest, they all looked like they had it all figured out.

So, why do I feel so lost and had no freaking clue who I am or what to do when I'm already thirty?!

Everyone talks and complains about how hard the midlife crisis is, and I agree! I mean... I will agree if I ever get that far; what nobody talks about is the quarter-life crisis.

Trust me... *it's shit.*

Ever since I was a little girl, I had this fantastic expectation of my life when I turned thirty. I saw myself married to the man of my dreams: A tall, carefree yet successful man with love of nature, books, and, above all, a man who couldn't get enough of me. Together we would have twins, boy and a baby girl; they will have my hair and his gorgeous eyes. We would teach them about love and the arts while living in a beautiful house with a porch where I could sit down in the summers and write, since by then I would have a stable writing job... Obviously.

Yes, I thought I was going to be this sophisticated, amazing woman who had everything figured out, but now that I'd reached the age of thirty, I realized that I was nowhere close to that vision. In fact, I still felt as lost as I was when I turned sixteen... or worse.

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BOOM! It was then that I realized that there is no specific reason as to why things happen to us and that the real question in life is... How?!

How the fuck did I end up so lost?

So there I was: homeless, heartbroken, looking like shit, and crying while walking on a bridge. Classy.

Through the years, I must have seen dozens of movies where characters hit a low point and jump from a bridge to end their pain. I just never knew that I'd end up like them. You know: walking to my own, planned death.

Then, with nothing left to do, I climbed over the railing and stood on the edge, sobbing like a maniac. The thrill of standing on the bridge's railing hit me almost immediately, and it was surprisingly liberating. The warm sun was drying the tears on my face, and the wind was waving my long lavender hair and shaking my body, threatening with the promise of falling. A small current of wind hit my back, making my skin shiver.

That was it... I was letting go of everything! I was free! I was excited!! I was...

"Excuse me, lady! You need to get back here immediately!" a policeman shouted behind me.

...I was fucked.

Turning, I looked at the angry policeman. His slightly chubby face had a mustache and awkward frown. "What are you thinking? This is a family park; you can't just do that." He yelled almost out of breath which made me wonder: How far did he run?

I looked at my surroundings. Kids, families, strangers, and a homeless man eating a hotdog were staring at me as I was crying on the ledge of a stupid, six-foot tall bridge.

The policeman pointed at the ground with his sweaty finger. "Miss, I'm going to ask you one last time to please turn around and come back down." Nerves shot through my entire body as everybody watched me slowly turn back towards the ledge. My legs started shaking.

Oh crap... *not* good.

"Get it over with, precious," the homeless man laughed.

And that was it. My brain slowed down making my leg take a false step, and before I knew it, I slipped. My forehead hit the railing, and I fell into the muddiest looking water I've ever seen in my entire life.

Screams, laughter and the blaring of sirens woke me from my daze. Shame invaded my brain. My body felt like it just got smacked all over a roller coaster and my emotions were drained as if I'd just reached the limit of my ability to process any kind of sensation with the exception of mental numbness.

The paramedics dragged my bloody body to the most uncomfortable stretcher. They strapped me to it as if I were a mentally ill patient and they placed that ridiculous oversized neck brace on me.

After taking their sweet time, the paramedics hoisted me up and put me in the back of the ambulance, just long enough to allow half of the park to post pictures of me on their newsfeed. Ugh... My body was completely drenched.

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Everything hurt. Everything stank.

“Bryan, take us to Silver Lake,” growled the paramedic next to me as he pierced my skin with the IV needle. Once secured, he took another syringe and injected me with a painkiller.

As the discomfort started to fade away, my thoughts became more unstable and... Jesus! I think I'm in love with this painkiller... and that pretty little red light that keeps blinking next to me. Also the name Silver Lake. I wonder what it'd be like to swim in silver. Do I own any silver-proof bikinis for silver lakes? Silver Lake, what a beautiful name for a hospital. It sounds so pretty, so clean... so familiar. Wait- Why does that sound so familiar?

I commanded the remains of the conscious part of my brain to remember why it sounded familiar, but it was so hard to focus with all these magical things surrounding me. Like that cool beeping sound and all those shiny medical things. Was the paramedic next to me always that weird looking or was it just the juice talking?

... Finally, it hit me.

“SHIT! No!” I screamed at the paramedic without being able to formulate a normal sentence. “No Silver Lake. No. Bad.”

“I'm sorry, miss, but you're bleeding a good deal, and that's the closest hospital.”

Reality started to fade as I was fainting again. “I'll wait. No... Silver...” The paramedic patted my arm, and before the darkness swallowed me, I was able to formulate one last thought... Nora was going to fucking kill me.

NORA

Order. Everything was in order. Already dressed in my white coat, I pulled back my curly black hair and made a tight ponytail, giving me the best professional look I could master. Good posture, clean tanned face and- KNOCK, KNOCK... My inspection was interrupted by the bathroom door opening.

“Nora.” Sally, a blonde and bubbly freshman, entered the room. “Dr. Green announced the first shift is about to start,” she let me know with her usual smile.

Dr. Green was the head of cardiology, the chief of the hospital and the one in charge of testing this year's interns.

Exciting, exciting.

“Thanks, Sally, I'll be there in a minute.” As soon as Sally left, my hands continued perfecting the rest of my attire.

I grabbed my chart and walked down the stairs trying my best to evade the neurology section. I felt embarrassed and a little childish for walking around the entire hospital in order to hide from my lifelong crush and torture, Dr. Hudson Coleman, the youngest head of the neurology wing and the most handsome man alive that just so happened to be my big brother's best friend.

Yes, I was a walking cliché.

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It was a ridiculous move on my part, but I knew I couldn't afford to get nervous before my shift.

When I finally arrived, Dr. Green was checking the temperature on a sleeping thirteen-year-old patient.

"The patient presents a fever over 101°F, confusion, headache, difficulty breathing, and he hasn't urinated in the last 12 hours. Who can give me the diagnostic?"

"Aseptic meningitis," one of the guys whispered.

"No," responded Dr. Green harshly. "Make it simple. Basic."

"Bronchopneumonia," said one of the guys in the back and my mind went blank.

Seriously? Bronchopneumonia is a basic sickness? Dear Lord, Dr. Green's going to go bananas.

And yes, just like I predicted, Dr. Green's expression turned sour. His lips twitched, and I began to fear for the guy who said that.

"No! No!" Dr. Green hissed, causing the entire class to panic. "Can't you check your damn charts? What do you think is their purpose?!"

Ok, this is your chance, Nora. Man up and be the "confident... bitch" that Luanna told you to be. Oh, Lord... Please help me be a confident bitch... And... I'm sorry for cursing.

Shaking my nerves away, I raised my hand. "Dehydration."

"Lame." One of the girls in the back snorted, making an obnoxious mocking sound and the rest of the class giggled.

...Great.

"Dehydration?" Dr. Green's face expression turned serious. "Explain."

"W...well..." *Don't stutter Nora, please don't stutter.* "Those symptoms do apply to all the mentioned diseases but the patient's neck is not stiff, so it can't be Aseptic meningitis. Also, there is no lung shadowing on the X-rays, so there's no Bronchopneumonia."

It was then when Dr. Green gave a nod to someone behind me. Curious about who was there, I turned around and immediately regretted it with all my heart. Yes, there he was, standing two feet away from me. The man that haunted my dreams, whenever I had time to actually sleep, Dr. Hudson "Gorgeous" Coleman.

His piercing green eyes were staring at me with amusement.

My goodness, gracious!

Unlike Dr. Green or every single doctor here, Hudson was everything you would never expect to see in a hospital... With his 6'5 height, massive muscles, three armbands tattooed on his left forearm that I get to see every time he dressed casual, and his dark brown hair tied in what Luanna calls a 'man-bun', Hudson didn't fit in the "doctor" type. More like the Spartan warrior type. Or at least that's that I always thought after staring at his manly physique.

"Would you care to explain why do you think it's dehydration?" asked Dr. Green, pulling me out of my embarrassing stalker daydream.

"When... when you grabbed the patient's hand to check the pulse of his skin stuck together for a second. I recommend giving him three packs of serum, and he will be perfect by tonight," I replied as fast as I could.

Impressed, Dr. Green started clapping with an expression that looked like he was...

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smiling? Yes... he was in fact smiling. Wow. Everyone in the room, and probably the entire hospital, froze.

Without another word, Dr. Green left the room, and the class murmured between them while walking to the dining area.

Phew... I made it.

Happy with the result, I turned around and faced Hudson who was still staring at me. Surprised, I yelped and jumped backwards to prevent colliding with him.

So close.

Hudson laughed, creating dimples on his cheeks. "Relax, Nora! The test is over, and you did great."

"Thank you very much, Dr. Coleman." I blushed like a teenager.

"You know *you* can call me Hudson." He moved forward, closing the distance between us.

Oh my, oh my!

"Yes, but all the interns call you Dr. Coleman."

Hudson smirked and moved closer, "True, but I've never seen any of the other interns running around in diapers."

The embarrassment of that particular childhood memory and his sweet cologne made my head float, and my entire body became rigid. I started backing up in order to get the space I needed to clear my head... and my hormones. But it wasn't until I saw his shocked face that I felt a small table being knocked down by my back. I gasped in horror over the mess I made. Immediately I got on my knees and began to pick up all the utensils that fell from their containers.

Hudson leaned down to help me. "Are you OK?"

"Yes, Dr. Coleman. I'm perfectly fine." Having him, this close to me was starting to blur my vision and thoughts. Without paying attention, I went for one instrument Hudson already had and accidentally grabbed his big hand.

Oh, Dear Jesus!

I puffed and let go faster than an electric impulse going through the synapses... "I'm so sorry!"

"It's fine."

"I didn't even see your hand!"

"Nora." He kept repeating my name with his hoarse voice, trying to regain my attention, but I was way too nervous to deal with it.

"I mean I *did* see it, it's not like it's hard to miss, because it's like *there*, but I, the touching it part was just-"

"NORA!" he interrupted my incoherent babbling and placed his hand on my cheek. "I said it's fine." Our eyes locked and his hand stayed on my cheek.

And right there, I felt like the air was sucked out of the room. I was afraid to make the slightest move for fear of breaking off whatever was happening now. Slowly, Hudson slid his hand to the back of my neck creating goosebumps on its way. My heart pounded like crazy as his stare traveled towards my lips.

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BEEP BEEP!!! His beeper went off before he could reach it. "I have to get this." He moved his hand away and took out the diabolical device.

Lord...I hate my PG13 life.

Just when he checked his beeper, one of the nurses came inside the room. "Dr. Coleman, you're needed at the ER. Patient with head trauma."

Hudson took the opportunity and gave the utensils to the nurse. "Thanks, Mina." He looked at me. "Miss Rodriguez, I'll need your assistance so please follow me."

Nodding, I gave an embarrassed look to the nurse and trailed after Hudson to the ER section.

Once outside I sped up my pace to be next to him. "I'm sorry Dr. Coleman, but I'm an intern, and we're not allowed to treat intense head traumas yet."

Hudson flashed me a mischievous grin. "I know."

Holy Heavens... what was with that smile?

Near the ER, there was a woman's voice screaming the strangest things over and over again. "Silver Lake, no! Bad! Very bad," the woman cried.

Hudson laughed at the screams but faked a cough to cover it when another doctor noticed.

For my part, as we got closer to the hysterical woman, a weird feeling started to build. It was like I knew that scream, or was it the voice that sounded familiar?

As soon as we entered the room, everything made sense... that long wavy lavender hair, pale skin covered with blood, a petite body trying to shake away the nurses that were holding her down and those piercing green eyes that stared at me with the same shock that I'm sure mirrored my own.

"Aria?" I growled at her.

Aria pushed the nurse that kept trying to hold her down. "Fuck you! I told you, no Silver Lake!" she pointed at me. "See! I told you BAD!" Then, as if nothing had happened, she smiled at me. "Hi, babe! How was your test?"

"I passed," I answered, still shocked to see her bleeding in the ER. "What are you doing here, Aria?" I grabbed her chart to check her injury report.

"Hudson!" she screamed at him after he entered the room laughing.

"Looking good today, Aria," he teased her.

Feeling the stress building up, I turned to face the nurse. "What happened to her?"

The nurse grabbed the paramedic's chart and read it. "She climbed a bridge, tried to jump-"

"WHAT!" I interrupted panicking as my heart-rate level raised. "What on God's name were you doing trying to jump from a bridge? Are you insane?! You could have died!"

"It was like five feet tall, Nora. Not even a squirrel can die from that freaking height."

"Then what happened to your forehead?" I asked now, replacing fear with anger. The nurse read the rest of the report.

"She failed to jump, tried to get down, slipped, hit her head on the rail and fell into the pond."

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“Lagoon” Aria corrected while an amused Hudson continued with his tests. “I’m pretty sure it was a dangerous lagoon.”

Irritated, the nurse showed Aria the report pointing out the paragraph with her bitten nail. “In here it says a *pond*.” I took the chart from the nurse as she left the room.

“Bitch,” Aria whispered after her.

“Well Aria, since clearly, you’re still your usual charming self, everything seems to be in order.” Hudson wrote a prescription and ripped the paper, handing it to me. “Just take her home and follow the instructions. I’ll tell Dr. Green I gave you the afternoon off as well as tomorrow so you can take care of her.”

“You rock, Hudson!” Aria cheered, as enthusiastic as ever.

He smiled and, with a small pat on my arm, left the room. *Oh Lord*, my arm was burning now.

“You’re drooling,” Aria joked after making sure Hudson was out of hearing reach.

“And you’re an irresponsible human being.” I stopped grabbing my arm and checked her bandages. “Does Luanna know?”

“No. My stupid phone drowned.”

“Call her,” I ordered, taking out my grey and outdated cellphone.

“Hell no! I’m not telling her I took a dive in a shitty lagoon!” she refused.

But there was no way I was letting something like that go, so I stared at her and continued to hold my phone out.

“Fine!” Aria snatched it from my hand. “But with one condition: Get me more of that precious painkiller.”

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LUANNA

Fifty-seven, fifty-eight, fifty-nine. RING!! I sighed as my counting was interrupted by *The Exorcist* the ringtone coming out of my cell.

I knew that ringtone better than anything. It was Nora. Probably in a freak out about something unholy that just happened. So, for a split second, I considered my two options.

One: pick up the phone and hear a lecture about what I did last night.

Two: keep watching that delicious piece of meat doing inverted push-ups.

Decisions, decisions...

"What number is he on now?" I demanded, apparently choosing the model over Nora's call.

"Thirty-five," my co-worker Brenda answered.

"Better than yesterday's model," I told her after checking the chart. We both nodded with appreciation and respect.

"This is seriously unnecessary... why are you making them do push-ups and crunches?" Asked the moronic intern whose name I couldn't remember.

"Because it helps to make their muscles look more toned for the photo-shoot. But mainly because we want to," I pointed at the back of the cafeteria. "Now go do intern stuff."

She gave me a beautiful *I wish you would die* stare and left to do some ass-kissing or whatever other interns did around here. Sadly, by the time she went my sight, the blue-eyed model was finally called to the shooting and had to end his fantastic workout.

Time to throw the bait.

Rapidly, I ran my fingers through my long blonde hair to give it some volume, I bit my already full lip, shook my perfect boobs in place, and walked over to the model.

"Nice job you did there. Here, have this," I said, and hile giving him a towel to dry his sweet, sweat covered body, I gently slid my fingers from his waist to his rock solid abs. His muscles contracted, and by the way, he looked at my face and body, I knew I had a date for tonight.

Content with my catch, I left the model and went to my workspace. Sadly, just when I was happy in my bubble of bliss and the promise of wild sex, I heard the most annoying sound in the entire universe. The voice of Frederico.

"Lua! How nice to see you flirt with the staff," said the obnoxious creature he is.

I faced him smiling. "He's a client. *You* are the staff."

If thoughts could kill, Frederico D. Santos would've died a long time ago. That sad thirty-year-old pessimistic, Brazilian moron was my floor supervisor and assistant/major ass-kisser of Dominique, the owner of this fashion runway.

I remember how excited I was when I heard I was going to work with a Brazilian. Those sexy bodies, that stamina, and that charming aura they all have. All except this asshole.

Shaking his weirdly long, brown hair, Frederico walked closer to me. "I heard you were forty-five minutes late... again."

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"It's called going to the Gym. You should give it a try." I winked.

"I would give it a try, but there is something called 'work,' and that usually keeps grown-up professionals like myself busy enough to skip it."

Bored by Frederico's speech, I glanced at the model's direction, and he gave me a cheerful nod. Damn, he was steamy.

Furious by my lack of care, Frederico clapped his hands in front of my face. "I bet if you worked the same amount as you spend at the gym or 'toying' around, the summer proposals would be done by now."

"They're done. I finished them five days ago."

He froze like a deer in headlights. "I never saw them on my desk."

"That's because I never put them there. I sent them personally to Milan, and Dominique checked them. They were approved, and I'm two pages from finishing the ones for next month's showcase."

"But that is-"

"Your job?" I interrupted. "I know," I said giving him my most devilish smile.

His face turned red with hate and other things I happened to find amusing, but just before he could start any drama, we were interrupted by my favorite coworker as she arrived carrying two cups of coffee.

"Here Lua. Two sugars, soy milk and a cinnamon stick." Evolet, an adorable redhead with yellow/brown sunflower eyes and freckles all over her face, handed me my delicious coffee.

"Thank you, Evolet!" I hugged my warm, non-fat gift.

"What the hell is this?" Frederico asked with an overly dramatic gasp.

"A salad," answered Evolet as she waved goodbye with a smile full of sarcasm.

"I know it's a coffee, what I meant was that Evolet is the head of the design team! Why is she bringing you coffee?" he demanded.

"She's my friend," I took a sip of my coffee. "I and she makes a killer cup. I don't see the problem."

"You're an assistant! *You* should be the one making her coffee!" he bawled like a five year-old girl. "I swear to God that if it wasn't for your father's mon-"

That was *it*. "Careful there, Frederico. Because unlike you, I didn't need my family to secure this job."

Annoyed, the asshole gave me Dominique's fashion bible and pointed to some clothes in the next room. "That's the new season's collection. I need you to arrange the clothes just like in this bible."

"But that's for Friday."

He smiled, his crooked teeth showing. "And since you're so fast at working I assume it won't be a problem."

It will be... It would take me ages. Yet I'd rather be dead than to share that information, so I snatched the bible from his gross hands and walked to the samples room.

Every single article of clothing in that room was beautiful. I left the book on the table and walked to the dresses while gently passing my hands over the fabric.

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There was something about feeling the smooth well-cut fabric of a gorgeous dress that just seduced me and gave me peace. Peace to reflect on what I was going to do to not screw up this opportunity, peace to rearrange my priorities, peace to- inopportune intense noise came from my bag. Peace that just got interrupted by my phone.

I took my phone and saw the caller ID. Charles.

Damn it!

My finger lingered close to the ignore button, but this was a call that, it didn't matter if I was dying, it would be worse if I didn't pick up. "Hi, Charles."

"Hello, Luanna. How many times do I have to ask you to stop calling me Charles? I'm not your gardener nor your friend, I'm your father."

"What can I do for you, Father?" I replied, still touching the fabric to find inner-peace or inner-strength or whatever mantra I needed to get through this conversation.

"I was calling to confirm the hour of your arrival for tomorrow's dinner."

Shit! I completely forgot that was tomorrow. I hated those dinners and every time my parents had them I tried my best to get out of them.

"I'm so sorry, Father, but tomorrow is not good for me. You see, I need to finish a catalog before my boss returns, so I'm afraid I won't be able to make it."

"Then finish it today. We will be expecting you at seven pm sharp," hissed Charles, entirely ignoring every word I just said. As always.

"Fine. I'll see you there at seven."

Without even saying goodbye, Charles hung up.

Alone and stressed out of mi mind, I looked at all the lovely clothes and smile. "I guess we will be spending the night together... again."

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Chapter 2

ARIA

POUNING PAIN, DIZZINESS, and an enormous headache were all I could process when I woke up. Everything was blurry. I was ready to kill anyone in exchange for more of those painkiller magic shots when I heard the loudest music coming through the door. *Damn you, Luanna.*

I looked at my surroundings to find some clothes. The room was so organized that it made me want to move everything out of its proper place and that only meant one thing. I was in Nora's room.

Why am I in Nora's room? Where is she?

A foggy memory of Nora telling me she would sleep on the spare room's couch flashed through my still aching brain. *Right...*

I stood up and saw the trash bag full of clothes that I had in my car before my daredevil stunt. I opened the bag, and the only thing wearable was a green lace, ruffle shirt and a fluffy sweater.

So be it.

As I came out from Nora's room, I saw Lua dancing on her tight yoga pants and long muscle shirt, cooking oatmeal with fruit while shaking her booty to "Whip It" by Devo. I've always said that if Brigitte Bardot and Jim Morrison had a baby, it would definitely be Luanna. "Lua! What the hell? It's 8 am!!"

Her baby blues, covered with the perfect amount of eyeshadow, stared at me playfully. "Oh, good morning to you too, bitch-who-doesn't-even-live-here."

"Point taken." I yawned.

"How's your head?"

"Head's fine... dignity, not so sure."

"Yeah, Nora told me." she laughed way too loud. "Dying in a pond? Very 'Titanic' of you."

"Well, thank you." I bowed while Lua clapped at me like a loyal fan.

"Ari..." Lua's smile turned sour. "...How are you?" she asked and I knew exactly what she meant. For the last few months, my relationship with Codi was the definition of hell. Whenever he was drunk or high on coke, he turned verbally abusive and, well, he was primarily an asshole.

He used to switch the "I love you so much" for "You're not that pretty", the "I admire your independence" to "You can't live without me." and the "I only want you." to "How cool

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would it be if I go fuck the waitress in the bathroom?” only to forget everything he said to me the next time he sobered up... no wonder why my friends were expecting me to snap.

Which I guess I did... kinda.

“Honestly, I’m fine.” I took my sweater off, and Lua pointed at my shirt with a horrifying gasp.

“No, no! What the hell are you wearing?” she shrieked.

Confused at the profound change of subject, I glanced at my outfit. “You don’t like it?”

She took a plate and put some of the fruit on it. “Oh, my God, Ari. Nobody in this world should like it,” she gagged while giving me the plate.

“Oh, come on. It’s not that bad.” I ran my hands over the shirt, bringing back old memories. “Codi gave it to me before the breakup.”

Lua studied my shirt with disgust. “Better reason to burn that hideous thing.”

I knew Lua had a point, but by some weird “nature thing” humans were designed to be really stupid with emotional decisions, and I just couldn’t let go. No matter how much of a dick he was, how annoying his constant babbling of himself and his “acting career” were, how brutally aggressive his behavior turned every time he was hammered or how mediocre he was in bed, my head just couldn’t let go.

As if she was reading my mind, Lua threw a grape at my face. “Stop thinking about him. He is, was, and always will be a DICK. And you, my friend, deserve better. You deserve,” Lua waved her hands with excitement, “a different and bigger dick. If you know what I mean,” she winked.

I choked with a grape and started coughing when a door opened, and Nora finally came out of the spare room. Her face was puffy from sleeping and her usually perfect hair was a mess. Nora was definitely not, a morning person.

I filled a cup of coffee and handed it to her. “Thanks, Aria.” She lifted her hand to take it, but before she could grab it, Lua threw another grape, this time directed at her sleeping face.

“Morning, sleepyhead.”

Apparently, Nora was extremely used to this aggression because she caught it with her mouth like a freaking pro.

“Morning.” She yawned and grabbed the coffee as if it were the Holy Grail itself. “What’s the topic?”

Lua clapped excited. “Dicks.”

“Oh, I see,” Nora took a sip. “The usual.”

“Well, not all of us are saving ourselves for marriage, and, unlike *you*, we don’t get to see and touch them every day.”

“That’s so wrong, Luanna. They’re my patients.”

“I know. And you should be more thankful for your job.” Lua giggled and opened a cabinet next to Nora. She took out some spices and left the door open. “Especially with Dr. Hudson! Do you also get to see his dick?”

Nora got super nervous. She stood up in a panic and crashed against the cabinet door that Lua left open, and of course, by some fucked up reason, Nora’s coffee flew away from her

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hands and landed on my crappy shirt.

“Ahhh! It's hot!” I yelled, ripping the shirt off.

Lua burst into laughter. “Oh, Nora! You were right all along. There is a God!” she looked at me with tears in her eyes. “Now go destroy that shirt.”

“No, no.” Nora turned red, her hands shaking. “I'm so sorry, Aria! Are you ok? Was it too hot? Here, I'll go get you one of my shirts.” She huffed and ran towards her room.

“Nora! She's fine.” Lua could barely breathe from the laughter. “Besides it wasn't your fault, it was divine intervention trying to get rid of that horrendous thing.”

“So you call divine intervention you leaving a cabinet door open?” I asked.

“Like Nora says, God works in mysterious ways” she replied with a wicked grin.

Soon, Nora came back with a cute white blouse. “It's laundry day, so I only have this one left. I'm so, sorry.”

“Thanks, Nors.” After cleaning myself with a dampened cloth, I put the blouse on. *Awesome!* It fit perfectly.

“Oh, crap! I forgot,” yelled Lua and ran to her room. Nora and I exchanged confused looks, but Lua was back in a heartbeat. “Here, Nora told me your phone died, so I got you this one. It already has your old number.” I took the overly sparkling pink phone and, since I had no words to express my gratitude, I just hugged my bubbly blonde best friend.

Then Nora grabbed my hands. “Also, Lua and I talked last night.”

“You know, when you were unconscious from falling off the tiniest bridge ever made,” Lua interrupted.

Nora elbowed her and continued with her speech. “*and*, we decided that we really don't use the spare room that much so if you want to move in with us, you're free to do so.”

Touched, teary and still in pain from the massive hit on my head, I looked at the two best humans in the entire fucking world and nodded. “Thank you.”

* * *

After breakfast was over, I grabbed an energy drink and left to get the rest of my stuff from my old apartment. Being there gave me the same strange sensation I'd felt for the last couple of months like I didn't belong in my own home. The apartment was the first and last place I shared with Codi. At first, like everything in this life, was love and happiness. We decorated our home together, made lists and plans for the future, imagined how many beautiful things we'd live in that place... and out of nowhere, it turned into a fucking nightmare. In the end, every time I helped him with his work he yelled at me for nagging him, every time I hugged him he called me clingy, constantly asking me to leave him alone. Always making sure I knew I was at fault.

I took some of the already packed bags and placed them on the dining table. My hand slid down the wood, and I couldn't help remembering how Codi used to come home early just to have dinner with me. Making food for him and seeing him enjoying it felt as good as a well-written paragraph; and now everything, including this apartment, was over.

Tired of dealing with all this emotional crap, I dropped all my stuff in the trunk of my car

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and decided to begin my search for a new job. I started the car, and as soon as I pulled out of the garage, my phone rang with that tiresome ringtone every new phone comes with.

Was that an alarm? Or a text? What the fuck did that sound mean? What if that was the freaking ringtone for incoming calls? What if it was an emergency?!

The moment that thought entered my brain, I was hit by a wave of anxiety. I slowed down, and with one hand I started to juggle between the steering wheel and my energy drink while the other hand searched like a possessed snake for my stupid phone. As I was wrestling with my bag, I forgot one basic rule of driving... looking at the road.

My search was interrupted when my car hit something, or more like someone.

HOLY FUCK!!

His face was blank, his hands were still on top of the hood, and his eyes were staring at me. Nerves took over me and, like always, my stupid brain failed to react appropriately, so instead of hitting the break, my foot pressed the gas one more time making the guy roll across the hood and crash against my windshield.

Due to the impact and the fact that my entire body was shaking, my hand dropped the energy drink and soaked Nora's shirt.

Seriously?! Two freaking shirts in one day?

In one motion, the guy's body rolled from the hood of my car to the street.

Oh crap... did I just kill someone? Am I a murderer? A jobless murderer?

Trembling like crazy, I turned off the engine and snatched my phone to call 911. "Hello?" I screamed at the phone, but 911 put me on hold.

"Our operators are busy with another call, please wait in line until one is available, thank you." A ridiculous tone played on the phone.

Screw this! I stepped out of the car to check the damage. "Sir?" I called, yet no one answered. How could he? I mean, he was freaking unconscious.

Watching my step, I walked closer to check if the man had a pulse.

Look at me...feeling a pulse. Who would've thought that all those tedious group studies with Nora would pay off? I left my phone next to his head, put my fingers on his neck and... *FUCK YEAH*, he was alive!

"Sir? Are you ok? Can you hear me?" Nothing. I scanned all over his body to check for blood but he was clean, so I started to gently feel his legs to see if there were any fractures.

This is so nerve-wracking.

I couldn't believe Nora did that all the time. The legs seemed fine, so I checked his arms as well and- Wow, his arms were strong! Also, with that crooked posture, it was pretty hard to tell, but I guessed he was probably 6ft something, maybe around 30 years old and... *why the hell am I thinking of that at a time like this?*

The guy moved and grunted.

"Sir... Guy? Can you stand up?"

As he opened his eyes, his face started to relax and somehow I had the feeling I'd seen this man before. I knew those intense chocolate eyes, that shaggy brown hair, and that pair of lush lips; I just couldn't remember where.

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"I... I can't," he said with a little trouble.

"You can't move?!" Fear began to hit me.

He shook his head. "I... CANT... BREATH."

Oh shit! I was crushing him with my body without even realizing it. Embarrassed I moved away as fast as I could. *Damn it, Aria! Say you're sorry, say he seems nice, say you didn't see him, say-*

"You're heavy," he grunted with a thick Irish accent while patting his stomach.

Say what?! "Excuse me?! I was just trying to help you," I said with the calmest tone I could find. Well, maybe not so calm.

"You could've just called my name, you know," he grunted as he sat, shaking the dirt from his shirt with his hands. "But since we're already here, just know that I don't do dedications, I don't do voicemails, and I definitely don't do selfies."

"What... the hell are you talking about?"

"You're one of my fans, right?" he asked as he shook his hair in what I assumed was a lame attempt of a "sexy" move that so happened to work... a little.

I gave him my best mocking laugh. "As if?"

The hot asshole looked at his expensive watch. "Look, I don't have any pens or paper to sign, so how about if I just snog you and we call it quits."

WHAT!?

Ok. I knew I heard him loud and clear, but for some reason, my brain was having trouble figuring out what the hell this guy was talking about.

Confusing my lack of understanding with being undecided, Mr. Chocolate eyes stood up and gazed at me with a sexy smirk. "Or do you want more than a kiss?"

Seriously, who the fuck does this guy think he is? Annoyance started building in the pit of my stomach, and the wider his smile got, the angrier I got. "Screw you! You're delusional if you think I would ever want to touch you."

"I'm not, and you're clearly attracted to me."

"Yeah? What gave it away? Was it me running over you? Or my yelling at your stupidity?" I snapped.

"Well, you did feel me up, handsy," he lifted his thick eyebrows with amusement. "You were all touchy feely with my arms and legs."

"I was not!"

"Yes, you were, I was right there all unconscious." Then, he gasped placing his hand against his chest. "You're a bad driver *and* you got some kinky fetishes."

"It's called first aid, you moron! Try to read a book once in a while." The guy kept his stupid smile as he leaned against my car. "What!?" I snapped again.

"Nothing, it's just this meeting is certainly fun. I like feisty women, and green really suits you."

Green? What was he saying? My blouse was white, and my skirt was black, there was nothing green except... my underwear.

His face lit up when he saw me comprehend his meaning. I looked at my blouse, which with all the craziness I completely forgot was drenched, and I saw the wet fabric clinging to my

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skin revealing my lacy olive green bra. *SHIT*. I wanted to die.

The guy bit his lip and started nodding with approval. I took a deep breath and walked to him flirtatiously. “You know what? You’re right. This meeting was unique, but I kinda wish we’d met before.”

The guy leaned towards me and grinned. “Oh, really? Why?”

“So I would’ve hit the accelerator *harder*, you narcissistic asshole!” I growled as I stomped on his foot with everything I got.

I heard the guy make a painful grunt followed by some chuckles as I climbed into my car. Rolling down the window, I stared at him sitting on the ground and smiled. “Have a nice *fucking* day, sir.” I grinned and drove away as fast as I could.

LUANNA

As soon as I arrived at my parents’ house, I felt a sense of loneliness. I still couldn’t understand how this huge place, decorated to the top, full of expensive cars and extravagant architecture, could feel so empty and cold. There were dozens of people working either at the garden or cleaning the outside of the mansion, and yet it felt desolate.

Wanting to avoid my family as much as possible, I climbed to my room by sneaking through a window. *Oh, my beautiful bedroom!*

Everything looked the same as the night I left. Everything except that beautiful Valentino dress lying on my bed.

That was new.

Oh, fashion Gods, what a magnificent dress. I saw it, and I loved it, but there was no way in hell I’d wear it for my mother.

As if it were poisonous to my skin, I grabbed the dress with the tips of my fingers and threw it to the floor. Once my bed was empty, I ran my fingers through my duvet and pillows, and for the first time since I moved out two years ago, I lay on my bed and looked at the pictures pinned to my ceiling. The feeling was bittersweet.

It was as if I never left.

Lying there, I felt like that lonely girl wishing her family was richer with love than with money, and like that insecure teen that was never good enough to make my parents proud. I shook my head, trying to block those feelings and thoughts but they were too strong. I hated myself for letting them affect me even after two years of proving my self-worth.

I wanted to cry, to scream, to be swallowed by this mattress and never feel anything again. I was about to lose it when I saw it. A picture of me with Aria and Nora. Relief and a sense of power grew inside me. Even if I was in the same bed and the same house, I wasn't that person anymore. I had people I loved that loved me back. So screw this family.

“You should try and use the door from time to time, Miss Lua,” said a familiar voice.

I jumped, excited to see my childhood nanny, pretty much the woman who’d raised me.

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“Nana!” I ran to hug her. “I’ve missed you.”

Nana smiled back and kissed my forehead. “It’s been too long, Miss Lua.” She placed her warm hands around my face. “And you look as beautiful as ever,” she patted my head and moved the dress from the floor to my chair. “You should hurry. Your mother wants to have a word with you.”

I looked at the time. It was six pm. “She’s awake? At this hour?” She nodded. “I’d hoped she took her Valium earlier,” I said, praying for it with all my heart.

“Be nice to her,” she tried to glare at me. It didn’t work, she was too good to express anger in any way. “She is your mother after all.”

I stopped at the door and took a last look at her. “A mother is the woman who raises you.” Nana smiled, and I left to confront the beast.

As I walked to the tea room, my nerves started to build up. I fixed my outfit one last time before entering the room. And there she was, my beautiful but jealous and resentful forty-seven-year-old mother, scanning me from head to toe.

“Is that what you’re wearing, darling?”

Here we go. “Hello, mother.” I fake-smiled. “I happen to like what I’m wearing.”

“Of course you do. But, why don’t you try the Valentino I left in your room?”

“Because I’m not going to the Oscars, I’m just having dinner with my so-called parents.” I tried hard not to roll my eyes at her.

Calmed as ever, she took a sip of her tea... which I assume was loaded with alcohol. “So? Are you not allowed to look good at dinner?”

“It’s dinner, mother.”

“It’s a Valentino, darling,” she motioned me to sit in front of her. Every movement she did was beyond elegant, yet her eyes always looked empty. Each time I stared at them, they made me think of a lobotomized mental patient. “Join me, darling,” she pointed at an empty teacup.

“I already had tea.” I lied. I loved that tea, but I was sure the pure honey taste would bring memories I couldn’t handle, especially right now. But my mother stared at me so intensely I had to sit. “Nana said you needed to talk me.”

“You always do what Nana says?”

“Always,” I responded without hesitation.

My mother scoffed. She hated how I prioritized Nana over pretty much everyone in this hell-hole. “I wanted to see what kind of dress I should buy for you for the company’s formal dinner.”

Right... The formal dinner, AKA the annual gathering of soulless men greedy for more. “It doesn’t matter, I’m not even going to attend.”

“Yes, you are.” She placed her cup of tea on the table next to her. I was about to reply when she stopped me by quickly raising her hand. “And it’s not up for discussion.”

As if sent from heaven, two maids walked in to serve fruit and cookies. My hand flew to a platter and snatched a delicious cookie. I wouldn’t usually go for this snack, but in times of war, one always has to have the energy to survive the enemy’s attack.

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“Don't touch that, darling. They're filled with carbs and sugar.”

And the war is on. “Which is why I love them.” I took a huge bite, and my tongue felt numb with all the sugar. *Yuck, too much sugar!*

“And it shows,” she responded as she applied another unnecessary coat of tanning spray.

“Are you serious?” I felt my anger increase. “I'm 127 fucking pounds with less than 15% fat!”

“I was skinnier at your age,” she passed her hands through her hair. “And please darling, ladies don't curse.”

Wow, with this loving family, I swear I don't know how I grew up to be a functional human being instead of a mass murderer.

I stood up ready to leave the room when my father walked in.

“Luanna, nice to see you here on time.” He glared at my red dress. “Is that what you are wearing to dinner?” he asked with disgust.

What the hell is wrong with my outfit? “Yes. I don't plan on spending hours getting ready just to eat next to you two an—”

“It's not just us,” my father interrupted me. “The Van Worden's are joining us.”

Great.

Just when I thought the evening couldn't get any worse, it did. After all, the incredible Van Worden family made mine look like the Brady Bunch.

NORA

“Alright guys, that's enough for today. I think your suturing has improved a lot,” I told my classmates as they threw away the pieces of chicken they were using as a patient.

“Thanks for helping, Nora. Don't tell Dr. Green but I always understand it better when you explain it,” Sally said as she followed me towards the locker room. “And by the way, I'm sorry about your friend.”

“What friend?” I enquired confused.

Sally made an uncomfortable face. “I overheard Dr. Coleman tell Dr. Green that she fell from a bridge and miraculously survived.”

What! Miraculously survived?! God, I'm going to kill Hudson.

“Yes. She's better now.”

Sally smiled showing her perfectly aligned pearl-white upper teeth. “Good, I'm pleased to hear she made it.”

“Thanks, Sally, I'll make sure she knows it.” Embarrassed, I turned around and took all my stuff to my locker.

“Are you sure you don't want to come out with us tonight,” asked Eddie, a tall blonde intern with bright blue eyes.

“I'm sure. I still have a lot catching up to do,” I moved my hand around pretending to

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organize my belongings inside the locker.

Not getting the hint, Eddie took a step forward and leaned against the locker next to mine. “I can wait for you.”

“Yes, Nora! You should come.” Cheered Sally from the hallway.

“No, no. I can’t.” I smiled, trying my very best to hide my desire to be left alone. “You guys go.” I kept toying with the rest of my belongings as if I was busy and— *AHH!!! Why won't be leave?!*

“Ok.” Eddie gave my shoulder a little bump with his palm and took a step back. “We’ll see you later then,” he waved goodbye and left the room.

Finally, alone, I checked my surroundings. I unbuttoned my lab coat and revealed one of Luanna’s yellow summer dresses. I hated laundry day, and after the coffee incident, I gave Aria my last shirt. It was only fair.

I glanced at the mirror for a second before looking away. My hands grabbed the lower part of the dress and pulled it down, but it was useless.

I swear to God this dress shrinks by the second.

Oh, how I wished there wasn’t a useless rule about having to leave all the lab coats here. Trying to keep calm, I took another look at my reflection. I still couldn’t believe I agreed to wear this thing. Yet it was too little too late.

Lacking any other coverage options, I hung my coat in my locker and closed it.

You can do this, Nora.

I reminded myself that it was nearly two in the morning, so the chances of running into someone in this part of the hospital were slim to none. Feeling a little better, I walked to the hallway as silently as I could.

It was all right, until I started hearing clinking noises a few doors down.

“Hello? Sally? Eddie?”

Nothing...

Intrigued, I followed the noises to a supply room that was dimly lit by the moonlight through the window. The place seemed empty and somehow peaceful.

I was a few steps in when the noise suddenly stopped.

Dear God!

The lack of sound made the room feel creepy. My heart-rate accelerated as I immediately regretted coming inside this place. Quickly, I turned to walk out, but the door was closed.

No, no, no!

My body shivered with fear. I was entirely confident I had left it open. I always did, especially in the hospital, you never knew who needed to rush in or out.

I moved to open the door when a pair of male hands grabbed me by the waist.

“Holy fuck!” I screamed as my body spun around and my fist punched the intruder right on his face.

I expected a grunt. Or at least to be freed, but no. Instead, I heard a burst of laughter. One from a very familiar deep voice.

“Hudson? Is that *you*? What on earth are you doing here?” He didn’t reply, Hudson kept

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laughing his heart out. "What's so funny?!" I hissed at him with a defensive tone unaware that I was still being held by his big hands.

"Twenty-seven years knowing you and this is the first time I've heard you curse," he managed to say between chuckles.

I was about to punch him again when Hudson went utterly silent. Finally, after what it seemed like an eternity, he let me go and stood there motionless, just staring at me. Goosebumps crawled all over my body. I turned around expecting to see someone behind me, but we were alone.

"What are you looking at?"

"You."

Anxiety, doubt and a massive lack of confidence built up inside me. I rubbed my hands on my face to see if I had something on it, but it was clean. I tried to check my hair when Hudson grabbed my hands to stop my obsessive inspection.

"Your face is fine," he let go of me, "and so is the dress." This time, his voice sounded more like a whisper.

"It's... not mine."

"I know." He smiled, and we stood there for a moment just looking at each other.

Nerve-racking!

"What are you doing here, anyway?" I asked, trying not to blush.

"...Nothing," he replied, sounding incredibly guilty. Not believing it for a second, I moved to turn the lights on. "Don't." Hudson stopped me. "Someone will see it."

Why would that be an issue? I took a look at my surroundings. What on earth?...

Right there, in the middle of the room, was a big cart full of medical supplies. "Hudson, what is that?"

"What?" he played dumb. Back when he was a child, he'd always made the same expression whenever my mother caught him eating cookies from the pantry.

"That." I pointed at the cart.

"Supplies," Hudson stated the obvious.

"I know they're supplies, what I meant is; why do you have them in that cart?"

Hudson just grinned. He threw another pack of bandages into the cart and crossed them off a list he had on the table.

Oh my God. "Are you stealing them!?" I gasped.

Hudson covered my mouth with his hand. "Shhh, someone could hear you."

I removed his hand away from my mouth. "Hudson, tell me you're not stealing from the hospital?"

"It's more like... transferring them," he pressed his lips in a line.

"Explain."

"The right wing doesn't have this many supplies and most of this stuff isn't even used over here."

My heartbeat raced. I couldn't believe it. *Hudson spends his nights making sure the ER and the free clinic had enough supplies for everyone.* I couldn't stop smiling No matter how many years I'd known

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him, he still surprised me.

“Give me the list, I’ll help you.”

* * *

Twenty minutes later, we finished crossing all the list. “Anything else you need, *Robin Hood*?” I asked.

“As a matter-of-fact, yes.” He flashed his usual cocky grin. God, how I adored that perfectly shaped smile. “I need some of the catheters from that cabinet,” he pointed to the tall white cabinet behind me.

I opened the doors. “Which ones?”

“The ones on the top shelf,” he said while making a final count of everything in the cart. I tried to grab them, but I was too short to get them. “It’s fine, I’ll get them.”

“I can get it,” I insisted.

“Nora, seriously, I’ll grab them in a sec,” he curled the corner of his lip. “Besides, you’re too small to reach.”

There it was.

Just by saying that, Hudson made me feel like that baby sister who’s always too little to hang around with her brother and his best friend, too young to be noticed, too small to reach it... to reach him.

Annoyed, I opened the two lower doors and used the shelves as stairs. Halfway up, I heard Hudson screaming. “Nora, no! The cabinet isn’t pinned to the wall!”

I stopped climbing, and I felt how my weight unbalanced the cabinet.

Oh, Lord.

Afraid to trip it over, I threw myself to the floor... it was already too late. As the cabinet started to fall, Hudson pushed me out of the way and pinned me against the wall.

CRASH! The cabinet smashed on the floor making a terribly loud noise. After my ears stopped buzzing, I heard Hudson’s voice.

“Are you ok?” I nodded. “Is your head ok?” I nodded again. “Open your eyes.”

“No.” I was way too nervous to do that.

“Nora, open your eyes.”

“I don’t want to.”

“NORA! Open them now so I can see if you have a concussion,” he demanded, and I knew he was referring to the fact that my head whiplashed against the wall when he saved me.

When I finally opened my eyes, Hudson checked my pupils. “Good, you’re fine.”

“How are you?” I asked concerned.

“Never better,” he passed his hand over my head, curling his thick fingers between the strands of my hair.

“Who’s there?!” a man’s voice came out of the hallway.

Flustered, I looked around in search of a way out of this situation. “What do we do? If he finds us here...”

“He won’t,” Hudson opened a storage room next to the fallen cabinet and pulled me inside.

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The place was so small that in order to fit we had to press our bodies against each other.

“Wait. What!?” I panicked over the nonexistent space between our chests inside that room.

“Shhh,” he covered my mouth. “He’ll hear you.”

Oh sweet, baby Jesus!

I was kissing Hudson’s palm. I mean... I wasn’t technically kissing it... but since kissing refers to the action of pressing your lips against a surface, then yes. I was kissing his gorgeous, firm hand.

I took a deep breath, moved my head away and whispered. “What am I supposed to do then?”

“Enjoy the moment?” he smiled, but I was in no state of mind to enjoy this. I was doing something I shouldn’t, and that always got on my nerves.

“Hudson.” I scolded him, that proximity wasn’t doing any good to my nerves either. “We need to get out of here.”

“They’re still outside,” he retorted as we heard the muffled voices of two men.

“See? This is what happens when I aid a night smuggler.” I joked, and Hudson stared at me, amused. The feeling was so intense I needed to break the eye contact. I quickly averted my gaze and remembered I had no pockets, so I’d placed my cell phone inside my boot.

EUREKA!

I rocked my body trying to reach for it.

“What are you doing?”

“I can use my phone and call the reception to get those men out of here; I’m trying to reach it.” I moved closer to Hudson and wiggled, trying to grab the phone, but it was useless.

“Nora, stop moving.”

“Why? Did I hurt you?”

“You’re grinding on me and every time you move,” Hudson’s smile grew bigger than ever, “your dress lifts higher.”

Panicking, I looked down and saw my cotton underwear completely exposed and the dress almost clinging at my waist. “Oh, dear Lord.” I blushed.

“You’re adorable.”

“I am not!” I hated that word. It made me feel like a four-year-old.

He followed my gaze. “Why are you always so defensive?”

“Why do you always treat me like a baby?”

“Well, you *are* my best friend’s baby sister.”

“And? That doesn’t make me a baby,” I had enough of this subject. “I’m twenty-seven now, I’ve grown up.”

“You think I don’t know that?” he responded while looking into my eyes and I swear the air inside that storage room was consumed instantly.

We stayed like that for a few seconds, and for the first time, I felt like he was looking at the real me, and not the kid I used to be. Our eyes were locked the entire time. My body felt the weight of his, gently pressing me to the wall.

His massive chest covered mine and I could feel his heart beating as fast as mine. Slowly, he

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lowered his head and placed it next to my neck. His warm breath sent me shivering and turned off my brain. I could no longer think. All I could do was feel.

“Sorry, is this too close?” he asked.

It was! It really was.

“No.”

His head moved closer to my neck. “Is this too close?” he taunted me.

“No,” I gasped.

“How about this?” His nose slowly touched my neck, and my skin turned on fire. I tried to answer, but I couldn't speak or move anymore, so I just closed my eyes.

Hudson took my silence as an invitation as he touched my skin with his lips and began softly kissing my neck. I kept my eyes closed, afraid to open them and break the mystical power of the storage room.

“You taste amazing,” his lips and tongue moved all over my neck until they reached my earlobe.

My body was shaking, my head was spinning, I couldn't believe what was happening. My arms moved by themselves and clung onto Hudson. He was tall. So tall I had to stand on my toes, and he'd still needed to bend down to reach me. I wasn't tall. Like most Latinas, I was around 5'5 with a broad chest and what Luanna loved to call ‘a peach bum.’

Hudson licked my neck and bit my earlobe, causing a moan to come out of my mouth and making me want to die of embarrassment.

“I liked that sound,” he whispered in my ear. “Let's hear it again.” And without wasting any time, he ran his tongue over my neck and sucked my skin with his lips.

My body pressed itself closer to him, and my arms tightened around him while his name escaped my lips with a moan. “Hudson.”

No way...

I did an excellent job hiding my love for him for over eighteen years, and now I was moaning his name the same way they do it in the *telenovela* I loved to watch. Shame on me.

Pleased with my reactions, Hudson looked me in the eyes and smirked. I turned my face away, self-conscious.

“Don't,” he pleaded. His eyes jumped from my eyes to my lips and vice versa while his thumb caressed my jaw.

I knew he wanted to kiss me and, for the first time in my life, I felt like I finally reached him. Embracing the moment, I placed my hands on his cheek and closed my eyes again.

After years of wanting this, wanting him, I was about to get it.

“Done! Let's go tell security they'll also need to secure those two cabinets to the wall.” The man's voice yelled outside the storage room and Hudson, and I froze.

The two men left the room and Hudson took a step back. “We need to leave before the security guard comes and finds us,” he pulled down my dress, opened the door and helped me out. “Did you drive here? Or do you need a ride?”

He kept asking questions as we ran away, but I couldn't hear or see anything. How could I? After all, my mind and heart were still trapped in that storage room.