

20 - There [Dean's POV]

There wasn't much in life I wanted. I liked the simplicity, the routine, the thought of knowing what was next always. I guess it was one of the reasons why I was so good at school, the curriculum was always the same therefore I could easily read textbooks and learn subjects without fault.

Though growing up, I realised that I needed to learn the obstacles in life. When you're younger, finishing high school guarantees that you are graduating. A birthday meant you were getting older, a test meant you were getting a grade. However, now, that was all different. A degree did not mean you were getting a job, your choice in career didn't mean your parents would approve.

Which is probably one of the many reasons I decided not to live with them in the first place. I always found it weird when the first thing people would do after getting into university or college was move out. It's almost as if people view age as a means of different stages of how independent you are, how when you are 18 your brain unlocks new levels that determine that yes, you are now an adult who can drive and drink and fuck other adults who are most likely way older than you however because the law views you as an adult, it is alright.

I'm probably being too cynical, too analytical. If Alyan were here he would tell me to rest my head, to not think so much. I guess that was one of the reasons why I remained friends with him as well.

At a young age, my parents always viewed my intelligence as my worth. A good grade meant they loved me and a bad grade meant they didn't. I was quiet, antisocial, I didn't interact much because of those ideologies and so when Alyan first met me and decided to stick around, I finally thought "wow...my parents are fucked up".

He didn't like me because I was smart, he liked me because I had on a t-shirt from a show he liked. He was my first friend, one who liked me despite my need to be quiet and understood when I wanted to be alone. Which is the whole reason I moved out in the first place. I liked privacy but you cannot have it if you lived with parents such as mine.

They are in every aspect of your life, in ways where they almost take over and rule who you are and what you become. And they were fucked up.

I guess, what I'm trying to say is I never really cared for a life full of entertainment and friends. Not at first, that is. Not until Alyan's outgoing personality brought me a new family, one filled with so many uniquely different people, that I thought; this isn't so bad. A life with love wasn't so awful and I couldn't understand why I decided to try and go without it.

Even more so now, with Sophia laying calmly in my arms after a meltdown, one which exhausted her to the point that she could barely move to get back on the bed, did I realise that I had gained the privilege not many others had. Love may have been simple but it wasn't common for everyone.

My head turned to the clock, one which identified the time as two-thirty in the morning which was rare for me since I fell asleep quite early. But tonight...tonight I couldn't bring myself to do that. Tonight I wanted to keep Sophia in my arms and watch her sleep, watch the one thing that finally brought her peace most nights when the day kept knocking her down constantly with challenges.

And the more I gazed down upon her, the faint tracks of tears on her beautiful face with her eyes puffy and mouth set in a content line, the more my heart throbbed painfully in my chest. I wasn't one to get emotional, one to go out and maintain a new friendship when I had already been comfortable with so many, yet for her I wanted to do all that and more.

My hand came up to brush away some hair so I could look at her more clearly. She looked so innocent at this moment that you wouldn't think she had gone through what she did for so long. I blinked back some moisture from my eyes, a small notion to remind myself to breathe despite how painful it was and thought about the events from earlier. She kept repeating a sentence that, if it wasn't for her current state, would have brought me to my knees.

It's not fair.

Over and over and over, like she couldn't quite grasp onto the thought of it and so she kept having to remind herself about her situation. That she finally understood that what happened to her wasn't fair. It wasn't a consequence of karma but of her being placed in a situation that she did not deserve.

And God, did it fucking wreck me to hear it escape from her hysterically as she clutched onto my shirt like a lifeline. And the events before had me almost as weak, watching her not realise she was crying and then deny until she broke.

If my parents were here, which they never will be, they would have seen crying as weak. Simply chalked it up to someone who couldn't get their bearings together and wasn't mature for the real world. However crying is just an emotion, one among many used for release. It isn't any better or worse than screaming or laughing. And ultimately, I was grateful that Sophia was crying.

Not because I liked seeing her cry because that would be fucked up and weird, but because she trusts me enough to unravel in front of me. Trusts me enough to be vulnerable and messy because she knows I will always be there to hold her up like she holds me.

I don't say this much, don't ever really talk about my feelings because I like keeping thoughts and emotions to myself however I am so, so very fucking grateful that Sophia decided to enter my life and stay in it despite me being an asshole and first and pushing her away.

Because without her, I would still be living my boring life, one where I wasn't one to reach out to my friends. One where I would, admittedly, be brooding my ass off trying to get my degree and attain a job that wouldn't bring me much joy in life. She keeps me calm, makes me smile and think and laugh as her questions gain more obscurity by day because her thoughts are so full that she needs to be able to tell someone otherwise she'll be stuck in her head.

Those three words had me single-handedly grateful for every situation I have ever been in, and made me realise that my mere hardships couldn't compare to hers. I wasn't diminishing my struggles but I was finally understanding just how lucky I was to grow up in a home with two parents, to study without the fear of having to feed myself, to love without the thought of it being taken away.

I held her closer with that thought. Love; a word that should scare me but didn't because I was taught from my new found family that it was okay to feel and have. And as I pressed a kiss to Sophia's hair, I thought to myself; this is something I will give you. For as long as you want to keep me, love is something I will surround you with.

I noticed early on when Sophia first started living with me that she had a hard time falling asleep. On rare days where I would stay up to finish some work, I would hear her grow restless in her room next door, her frustrations audible until she kicked off her sheets and quietly walked to the living room where she'd stay seated by my bookshelf and read to her heart's content. It's one of the many reasons why I suggested we have movie nights and days where I would read to her. I could tell my presence calmed her significantly, and so I used it in order to help her.

It's also why I wasn't alarmed by her constant need to have sex. Sex was her only means of action, it was the only thing that she believed told her that she was loved and cherished. It was also one thing that exhausted her enough to forget about her troubles, the only act that brought her pleasure amongst the hurt and pain. It's why I was now taking my time to build up to it, unlike I had done before. She was relearning life again, understanding that it was okay to set boundaries and take things at her own pace and I didn't want to cloud that with sex.

I wanted her to understand that love is more than the act of sharing your body with someone else; it was the everlasting idea that you were with the person you were with because you loved them wholeheartedly, flaws and all. Love didn't expunge troubles, it was something that made those struggles bearable.

I thought back to a conversation we had, one among many as I laid beside her on the living room carpet and stared up at the ceiling as she talked about sex.

"It isn't that I'm addicted to it..." She said beside me, her voice so soft as she grabbed the necklace around her neck, the one I had given her, and clutched it like it would bring her comfort. "It's that it's the one thing that has ever made me feel good."

"Physically?" I asked, because I wanted to know more about her brain.

"Mentally. Nothing has ever felt so good to me back then than those few seconds of pleasure. Not because it was there but because it was mine. It was something that told me that I was wanted, a guarantee that as long as I had it, I would always be."

I had sat up at that point, looking down at her as my hand brushed her hair away from her face and I leaned down, kissing her so gently that she had to hold onto me for support despite laying down.

"You mean so much to me," I whispered once I pulled back, caressing the softness of her cheek.

It was at that moment where she had sat up as well, wrapping her arms around me and holding me against her as if she wanted to burn this memory in her mind, tucking it away for the future to bring out on those days where her mind had given her too much grief and sorrow. And I had followed, burning this moment in my heart because I wanted to keep it safe.

"Dean," She said, her mouth so close to my ear that even though she was whispering so low, I could hear her crisply. I loved when she said my name, wanted to hear her say it a thousand more until the end of my times. I wanted it engraved in my head, wanted it to echo on the days when it got too silent.

"Sophia," I said back, knowing like me, she liked the sound of her name on my tongue as well. We were so similar in some ways, and so different in others, and as I breathed in her pretty vanilla scent I waited to hear the same phrase we always said to each other at times like this.

"I really fucking like you."

I smiled, pressing her face to my neck as I kissed her cheek, doing the same.

"I really fucking like you too."

I shook my head, noticing a few tears had travelled down my face. My chest, the one that was so constricted before, was now blooming happy with that memory and I hastily wiped away my face, turning to look down at the sleeping girl in my arms.

Her chest rose with steady, even breaths and she was so at peace that when the clock struck seven am and I knew everyone would be awake, I had reached over to my phone and dialled a number, holding it to my ear as I pressed another kiss to Sophia's nose.

"Dean?" Said Vanessa, sounding happy as ever as the small conversations in the background let me know she was currently at work. "What's going on? Is everything alright?"

"Yeah," I said softly, smiling as my eyes remained on Sophia. "I just wanted to let you know that we'll be going with you and the others on the trip."

"What?" She asked, clearly shocked. "A-are you sure? We'll be gone for two weeks, Dean. And you'll be completely surrounded by everyone with no breaks. I don't want you to feel overwhelmed--"

"I won't." I assured, understanding her concern. I wasn't one who asked anyone to hang out, not even Alyan because one, I just didn't know how and two, my social battery was very limited. And I was grateful that the group was never bothered about this, simply making plans and dragging me along because they knew, internally, I wanted it as well.

"Okay..." She said, her concern transforming into excitement and I could picture her jumping up and down like the sunshine incarcerated she was. "I'm so happy you and Sophia are coming, Dean. It will be so much fun, I promise. They'll be spas and shopping and swimming and oh! We can cook together and play board games and--"

As I listened to Vanessa ramble on about the vacation, all I could think about was how I was going to make it the most calming, happy two weeks Sophia would ever have.

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