31 - Final

"How many times do you think someone will walk in here and demand a discount?" I ask Ravi, my boss, who's busy cleaning glasses for customers. It's a busy day today at the diner and I'm on my break, currently eating one of the dishes the cooks have prepared.

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"How many old people have you seen walk through the door?" He says in response, not looking up at me. Ravi's at the sink, giving the sta a lending hand as another worker replaces him at the bar. My legs swing as I eat another bunch of fries, sitting up at the counter watching him clean.

"How's Meera?" I divert, taking the glass of water he hands me.

He shoots me an amused glance, also picking up the meal the cooks made us and digging in. "Just dainty. You know, it seems like it was only a week ago she was born. Now I'm stuck being the cash box as she buys clothes and makeup."

"She's a teenager. Let her explore her identity, old man."

"Old?" He seems ba led, choking on his food and taking my o ered glass before being able to talk back. "You know, you aren't so young yourself, honey."

"I'm twenty-one. You were born when cell phones weren't a thing."

"I'm thirty-seven, not seventy." He pauses, looking at me. "Do I really look that old?"

I laugh, shaking my head. "No, don't worry. I'm just joking. Though, you really need to start looking for a partner. Someone to share the stressors with when I'm not around."

"Oh, Sophia. You really do have my best interest at heart, don't you? You better finish up fast, your lunch break is about to end."

I pout, stopping my legs from swinging. "Don't I get an extra ten minutes? I thought I was your favourite?"

He waves me o with a hand, leaning o of the counter and picking up his food to get ready to head to his o ice. "I say that to everyone I hire."

I can only hu once he disappears behind his door, finishing my meal with a smile before depositing the plate in the sink. Washing my hands and the dish, I put on my apron and walk back out to the front, calling my thanks to Mike and Devi, the two cooks who're on the lunch shi for today.

Since today is one of our busier days, I'm paired with three other waitresses and two other sta members who work the cashier and bar. While I'm not the best of friends with any one here besides Ravi and our cooks, I do have the occasional polite conversation. Though, usually the days are too busy to have any room to talk in and by the time we're done our shi s, we're too exhausted to conjure up words.

Tugging my ponytail tighter, I slip out my notepad and walk up to a new couple who need to be served, asking them their order with a fake smile on my face before dropping it o in the designated area.

I circle through this routine my entire shi —sitting people down, taking their order, before dropping it o . With a few minutes le to my shi , I see Sarah, my coworker who's supposed to replace me for the rest of the day and finish up things before heading to the back to change out of my work clothes and it's then where I receive a phone call.

"Hello?" I ask, wedging the device in between my neck and shoulder as I fold my apron and stu it into my purse.

"Sophia, hey! Do you wanna hang out today and study? I have a lot of homework to get done."

I brush back my hair, leaving it down this time so my head can get a break. "Sure, what time? I'm just getting o work."

"Would a half hour do? At the cafe near your house?"

Slipping my purse over my shoulder, I agree to Alex's plans for later and start waving my goodbyes, pressing the button for my car to unlock it. I pause, feeling weird.

"Hey Alex...can you stay on call with me?" I take a step away from my car, phone pressed to my ear as I look around. The parking lot is filled with empty cars yet I can feel someone's eyes on me. Watching, waiting almost.

"Yeah, sure...is everything alright?"

I don't respond, crouching to look under my car and seeing no one there. Relief fills my chest but I still remain cautious, looking in the backseat of my car and also seeing no one present.

"I'm...fine." My body turns, back pressed against my vehicle as I spend another minute looking around. When I can't seem to find anyone there, I finally unlock my car, immediately getting in and locking the door just in case. "Sorry," I'm breathless, heart pounding. "I just thought...nevermind. I'll meet you at the cafe, okay? See you."

"Alright...bye, Sophia."

She hangs up the phone and I place it in my cup holder, hands on the steering wheel as I start up my car and take one final glance around before pulling out and driving home.

"I feel like I might die if I do another question." Alex groans, head resting on her forearm. We're sitting near the back of the cafe, laptops, textbooks, and notebooks out trying to complete the last of our homework. Alex has ordered at least three large iced co ees in the past hour while I'm stuck on my first, still feeling a little weird a er what happened earlier.

"You're almost done, honey." I reassure, because Alex has proclaimed the same thing almost every half hour. We've been here almost three hours, Alex stuck on her psych while I'm finishing up an english essay required the next day.

She only groans further, li ing her face o of her arm and taking another large sip of her co ee. I push mine towards her when she's done, o ering my le overs to which she happily takes.

We continue on for another ten minutes when she shuts her book closed, sliding it away from herself and shaking her head. "I'm done," She starts packing up. "I can't think anymore or I might cry."

"Isn't crying a good thing?"

"You keep your therapy shit away from me," She points a finger in my direction. "I don't wanna hear it."

Despite almost finishing my essay I shut the lid of my laptop as well, also feeling tired. I can easily do the rest before class tomorrow, just needing to write a conclusion and complete my cited sources at the end.

"Alright," I lean back, stretching my arms over my head with a small yawn. "What do you propose we do with this free time?"

"Talk, of course. So, you and Dean...what's going on there?" She smiles gleefully and I smile back, thinking of him.

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"Nothing new, to be honest. We're still learning each other and taking things slow."

"No sex yet?"

I shake my head and she nods, crossing her arms on the table and leaning over.

"How do you feel about it?"

This time, I shoot her a pointed look, slanting my head just slightly with narrowed eyes. "I thought you said no therapy talk? And I'm fine with it, honestly. I feel like the small things matter more to me now than the action of having sex. It's not just physical with him and he's showing me that."

"I'm really happy for you, Sophia." Alex says so ly, reaching over to place a gentle hand on mine. She squeezes and I already know what the next question will be.

"Does he know yet? About your hospital visit?"

It's then where I swallow thickly, shi ing in my chair feeling uncomfortable. Not with her asking but with the aspect of having to tell Dean something that breaks my heart. I don't say anything, however I shake my head slowly, feeling guilty.

"Hey, it's okay. There's nothing wrong with needing time to process things. I'm here, alright? Whenever you need me...I'm here for you always."

I can only send back a wobbly smile, and so sensing I want to change the subject, she does.

"You know, I finally texted astronomy girl."

I instantly perk up, excited. "You did? What is she like?"

"They," She corrects. "And they are...so nice, Sophia. Oh my god, I think I'm fucking falling for them."

"Please tell me all about them I need to know."

Alex looks giddy as she describes their first interaction during class, finally gaining the courage to ask them for their number and they

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have been texting interchangeably ever since. I almost squeal, feeling so excited for her when our conversation is cut short by my phone going o .

Sending her an apologetic expression, I pick it up seeing there was no caller ID.

"Hello?" I ask, confused.

"Hi, is this Miss Sophia Adam?"

"This is she...who is this?"

"I'm O icer Naomi. I was one of the o icers who did your medical exam alongside O icer Layla."

"Oh..." I said, breathless as Alex pulled up a chair next to me and sat down, taking my hand in hers and rubbing circles on the back of it in order to soothe me down. "I remember." My tone is almost a whisper, terrified of what she could be telling me about.

"I'm calling to tell you that it went through. You o icially have a restraining order against Devon Peterson."

"What?" I blink, not knowing if I heard her correctly.

"It went through, Sophia. This means that he will not be allowed to come within a distance of 500 metres of you at home or at work. If he does, he will be detained, possibly charged, and held until a bail hearing commences. He can't—"

I drop the phone in my lap, in utter shock and disbelief. It went through. Something good in my life finally happened and it's legal. Written on paper. Concrete and not something he can easily erase with loads of money.

Alex easily takes my phone and talks to the police, saying their goodbyes before turning to look at me for an explanation. I, however, am not looking back at her, my eyes trained on my lap as I process this wonderful, happy news.

"What's going on, Sophia? Is everything okay?" She asks tentatively, not wanting to pry.

"It went through." Is all I can say, as tears sting my eyes and I cover my face with my hands. "It went through." Those are the only words I can seem to say, and Alex—beautiful, smart Alex gets it immediately as a squeal leaves her lips and she wraps her arms around mine. I'm full on sobbing now as she rocks me back and forth in her hold, we must look like lunatics in this cafe but I don't care because it. Went. Through.

It went through.

"Oh my god," Is all we're saying to each other. The three worded phrase repeated over and over as we stand and jump and hug and squeal and look insane but that's alright because I feel free. I feel happy and free and so fucking glad because his weight is o my chest and for the first time in forever, I feel like I can actually breathe.

It takes a few minutes for us to calm down, both of us wiping away tears from our eyes as we rush to pack up and leave.

"We're celebrating," She says without a doubt, tears shining brightfully in her eyes.

"It's almost dinner time."

"Fuck dinner. We're buying a large chocolate cake and a couple of candles and celebrating because you deserve it and you're my best friend and I fucking love you, girl." Alex's voice breaks on a sob, pausing our walk to the car as she turns to me and crushes me in a hug. "I fucking love you." She repeats in a whisper and I break as well, crying again as I hug her back just as tight.

"I'm so proud of you, Sophia. So fucking proud."

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"I love you," I tell her back because I do and I'm proud of myself as well. We let ourselves soak in the moment, pulling away and wiping at our eyes again before cramping into her car. She had picked me up from my house earlier, so my own vehicle was safely parked at home.

Alex puts on a song, one that's something old of Taylor Swi s and we're shouting and screaming the lyrics with the windows down and eyes wet as she drives to our local grocery store so we can pick up a cake.

Once we do we drive back to my place because I wanna tell Dean. I needto tell him, need him to hold me and kiss me and tell me that everything is finally okay now. That I can finally fucking breathe and live my life like intented a er moving away from Devon all those months ago.

I fumble to unlock my front door, it opening on it's own accord as Dean stands on the other side, confused as I crash into his body. He places a protective hand on my head, helping me stand upright as he watches me with a grin too big and eyes too wet.

"Sophia?" He says in surprise, seeing me stumble.

"And Alex, teachers pet. Now move over so we can celebrate."

"Are you guys drunk?" He asks, stepping aside so we can both enter. I only laugh at that as Alex respons, giving him a glance over her shoulder as she marches to the kitchen.

"No, we're high o of happiness. You should try it sometime."

Dean away from her and at me with a small frown. "I am happy..."

"No you aren't." Alex says from the kitchen. "But you will be once you learn why we're celebrating. Go on, Sophia. Tell him."

"What is it, baby? You guys pass an important test or something?"

"No..." I shake my head, dropping my backpack on the floor and crashing into him. He lets out an oof but hugs me back, kissing the top of my head. "It went through." I mu le in his chest, jumping in glee.

"What?"

"The restraining order," I correct, peeling my face away from his warm chest so I can look at him with blurry eyes. "It went through, pretty boy."

I can see his face transform, the confusion turning into understanding turning into a smile, one so big I almost start crying all over again.

"No..." He whispers, still in shock.

"Yes." I nod back, hugging him tighter.

He crashes me to his chest, pressing a million kisses on my head before pulling away so he can hold my face, kissing me so feverishly I want to fall and drown in him. We're broken apart by Alex, who hands me a slice of cake and I eat it with so much joy that my tears are probably another layer.

We're a mess of tears and laughter and music as Dean watches Alex and me pop open a cheap bottle of champagne we had bought from the grocery store and drink to our hearts content. He isn't his usual broody anti-social self this time, rather he's cooking dinner for us all and smiling without falter. It's a beautiful sight to see and once he's done the food and we've eaten and Alex has said her goodbyes, we're cuddling on the couch, arms wrapped around each other in comfort and silence.

"I am so happy for you, Sophia." He whispers when the day starts falling into night and I'm wrapped in layers of blankets and his embrace. His hand is soothing as it runs up and down my back as I sit sideways on his lap, side pressed up against his chest as we take in the days events. "I'm so grateful that you exist."

He says this and I know exactly what he means because it is our way of professing our love when we aren't ready to say the actual words yet.

I can only cup his jaw, run my thumb up and down his cheek as I take in his beautiful, pretty face and say the words back that make my heart full. I only need this moment to understand what feeling loved and cherished and cared for feels like.

I only need this. Us

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