

4 - Book

"Sophia?"

I looked up, blinking out of my trance as I pasted a somewhat convincing smile on my face.

"Hey, what's up? Is the pizza done?" I clicked my phone and shoved it deep into my pocket, pulling up my legs so I could wrap my arms around them in a somewhat way to comfort myself. My stomach wrapped in knots, the urge to puke up everything I ate raging over my system ten folds.

"Almost..." He tilted his head, eyes narrowing. "You okay?"

"Yeah, of course! Why wouldn't I be?"

My mind traced back to the photo, the way it was taken made my stomach lurch again. The camera wasn't taken from far away, it was taken from across the street. Someone had been following us and I wasn't aware. Someone was following me and I wasn't cautious.

I thought I had more time.

"Can I use your bathroom, please?" I stood up suddenly, bile rising up my throat. Dean nodded, gesturing to me to follow him.

Stopping in front of a door, he opened it revealing a simple grey themed bathroom. I thanked him and shut the door behind me, locking it as I immediately fell to my knees.

The small breakfast that contained an apple retched out of me, my nose and throat burning due to the acid. I felt gross and sickly, my shaky hand pressing on my stomach to force myself to settle.

Resting my forehead against my arm, I breathed steadily in hopes of combating the second wave of gagging I may have to do.

Tears threatened to leave my eyes but I forced them back, blinking heavily as I flushed the toilet. Walking over to the sink, I thoroughly rinsed my mouth before splashing my face with cold water. Droplets dripped on my face as I stared at myself, weak and exhausted at the presence of still not escaping what I thought I did. I breathed in heavily, forcing air down my throat not wanting to panic in my only friend's bathroom.

Once I was cleaned up, I stepped outside and back to the living room.

The smell of pizza was everywhere, my throat hurting all over again as I walked over to where Dean was standing in the kitchen.

"Could I get some water, please?" I cleared my throat, hearing how hoarse it was. "You forgot to give it to me earlier," I clarified so I wouldn't look suspicious.

Dean frowned down at me, his eyes wandering down my body and face like he was going to get answers that way.

When he couldn't, he nodded and filled a glass with cold water, handing it to me with a glimpse of concern. I was still probably sickly pale, however I could easily come up with being nervous.

"Thank you," I murmured, sipping it. Once I downed the glass, I smiled up at him hoping he would forget my earlier reaction.

"Well, are we gonna eat or what?"

"Go sit, I'll bring it out."

I complied, walking back out to the coffee table. Instead of sitting on the couch, I slid so I sat criss-crossed on the floor, my clasped hands on the table.

"What are you doing on the floor, troublemaker?"

I turned towards the voice, confused.

"Sitting on the floor?"

He sighed, his mouth lighting in a shadow of a smile with the tray still in his arms. Walking towards me, he placed a wire rack on the coffee table and then the hot pan on top. I noticed Dean had cut the pizza in even slices making it easier to grab.

Sliding a plate towards me, he put his hands on his hips.

The sight of oven mitts on his hands in that position made a giggle escape my lips. His lips twitched, pulling his mitts on and placing them on the counter as my laughs subsided.

Leering down at me, he looked like a dad about to give their kid a lecture.

Peering back up innocently, I waited for what he so desperately wanted to say.

"Why are you on the floor, Sophia? Having another floor party?"

I groaned, splaying my hands over my face. "I can't believe you remembered that."

"I remember a lot of things," He smirked. "You were nearly blacked out drunk that day."

"I didn't think you'd notice," I said weakly.

"I also notice a lot of things."

"Smartass," I sigh, listening to the conversation. "Don't you eat on the floor?"

"No...?"

I forgot that I was raised differently than him, so my normals weren't his. Immediately standing up, I let out an embarrassed laugh.

"Yeah, I knew that. I was just seeing if you knew that." I pointed at him, getting comfortable back on the couch. Dean didn't bother to ask for an explanation, dialling down his lights so the television light took up most of the darkness.

"One episode," He warned me. "And then your law homework, alright?"

I gave him an impudent look, shrugging my shoulders so I wasn't technically agreeing. Seeing as though this was the best answer he was going to get out of me, he pressed play on the show.

The title screen How to Get Away With Murder illuminated across his living room and I got myself excited for the show so I wouldn't be thinking about the text.

Soon enough, Dean was studied while I had taken small nibbles, my stomach not quite settled yet. We were on the third episode of the show.

"This is the last one, Sophia." Dean said for the third time.

"Yeah, yeah. Play it already!" I waved him off, leaning my head against the sofa.

"I know what you're trying to do," He sighed, entertained.

"Yeah? And what's that?" I played along feigning ignorance, already knowing what he meant.

"Sophia."

"What?" I said innocently, moving my body closer to his. I could hear him hitch his breath. "I'm not doing anything."

"We're doing your homework tomorrow, okay? You're not getting out of it this time."

"Fine, whatever." I mumbled, but a smile played on my lips. "You're so bossy, Dean. Ever heard of fun?"

"This isn't even me being bossy, Sophia. You're the one who's stubborn."

"Stubborn?" I let out a noise of disapproval.

The clock struck twelve and Dean stood up, turning off the television as he stretched out the kinks from sitting too long.

Yawning, he turned towards me.

Before he could say anything, I quickly spoke, thinking about the picture again.

"Is it okay if I stay here? If not, that's totally okay. I'll walk home." I helped Dean gather our dirty dishes and cups, not wanting him to see the brewing desperation plastered on my face.

"I'm not letting you walk at twelve AM in the night," He said, incredulously. "You can stay in the guest bedroom."

Relief filled my expression as I thanked him repeatedly.

"For someone who wanted me gone a week ago, you sure have warmed up to me." I noted.

"I told you before, I still have some questions I want answered."

His response made me feel a bit queasy, and the way he said it...it was like he already knew what was going on in my life. I took a step back, arms wrapped around myself. If there was one thing I was sure of, it was not wanting to expose Dean to the other part of my life. He was my first friend...the first person I genuinely liked and wanted to keep interacting with. And something about him made me feel like he already had a lot going on already, my trauma shouldn't be another stress in his life.

After handing me a toothbrush and a pair of clean clothes, Dean took a shower while I got ready for bed. After changing into a short that smelled exactly like him, I crawled into the bed, the so mattress feeling like heaven on my back.

My mind raced back to the days where from when I could remember, I was either sleeping on the floor or on a mattress someone had thrown away. They were always hard or lumpy, the springs poking out of the dirty white fabric.

I remember the floor of the trailer always being hard, there was no carpet to cushion my back. Some days, when it got so uncomfortable I'd sleep out on the grass. It was always a challenge to do that though, in the area I lived in you always had to be cautious of your surroundings.

I sighed heavily, closing my eyes but what felt like minutes upon hours went by and I was restless. I had insomnia and no matter how comfortable the bed may be, the only way I would sleep is by utter exhaustion.

I slowly got into a sitting position, holding my head in my hands and I chanted myself to sleep.

Giving up, I remembered Dean's voice from earlier, how he said I could borrow anything I like. I decided reading would be perfect, getting lost in another world was better than thinking of my own at this moment.

I wasn't going to borrow his books to take home, but just read enough so that I could fall asleep. Tip toeing my way over to the door, I quietly opened it, cursing the slight creek it gave out as I opened it fully.

I paused, my ears doing their usual check for footsteps. Once I knew it was safe to keep going, I gripped the hallway walls, walking along the edges so I wouldn't make a sound.

Tips and tricks I learned had come in handy multiple times in my past. Remembering the sound of someone's footsteps, the way they opened a door. Knowing how to walk so the floor wouldn't creak under pressure. Waiting soundlessly for hours just to make my next move.

I wasn't joking when I said a pitch black room held who I was. It was the only time where I could be free.

Finally making it to the living room, I silently crouched in front of the book shelf, taking out my comfort book before straightening up again.

My stomach grumbled with hunger. I was usually fine with just an apple in the morning but since I threw up and had only eaten a few bites of pizza, I figured a glass of water would cure my hunger. It wasn't healthy in the slightest, but my body was so used to the limited nutrients that I had to build back up my intolerance.

Contemplating whether I should do it, I figured it would keep me at bay until the morning so I reluctantly patterned over to the kitchen.

My breath was slightly heavy, I was scared of the glass sound as I set the book down, reaching both hands to lift the glass out of the cabinet.

I cringed at the slight clinking noise, holding my breath for a few seconds before letting go.

After filling it up with water, I let out a breath of relief and pulled myself up on the barstool, taking out my phone and using the flashlight so I could read.

Suddenly, the overhead lights flickered on and I immediately turned in the chair, scared.

I looked like I was caught red handed, guilt pouring down my face as Dean stood there beside the light switch.

Flicking his gaze to the clock shortly, he noticed that it was two in the morning before walking over to me.

"I can't sleep," I replied, guilt heavy in my tone. "I'm sorry I should have asked." I gestured to the book and water.

"There's nothing to be sorry about," He frowned, walking over to the kitchen and opening the fridge before pulling out the le over pizza. Turning on his toaster oven, he popped a few slices inside and let it heat up. He was now on the other side of the island, leaning his forearms down so he was close to me.

"Why can't you sleep?" The genuineness in his voice made me blurt out the truth before I could come up with a lie.

"I get nightmares," I whispered.

I felt ashamed and exposed, I hadn't told anyone about that. There was no one to tell.

Dean didn't press further, nodding his head as he slid the slices onto a plate and made me follow him to the living room. Pointing to the couch, he made me sit down while he went to get something.

He came out of the hallway a few moments later with a blanket, getting settled back on the couch beside me.

Laying it over us, he pushed the plate towards me.

"Eat," He nodded to the slices. And then he held out his hands, making me give up the book.

"I'll read to you."

I gave him a culpable expression, worried about how much sleep he was going to get. "You don't need to do that, Dean," I spoke so lightly.

"I know I don't have to," His expression softened. "I want to," The firmness of his tone made me comply, nodding my head as he pulled the book open and started to read.

Somewhere in the middle of his reading I had finished the pizza and was laying my head on his shoulder, hearing the small rumble of his body as he read out the words to me.

"Thank you," I quietly said.

"Just focus on the words, Sophia." Was his reply, shortly getting back to the novel.

Soon, my eyes were giving out, heaviness pulling them down into a deep slumber. I tried to keep them open for Dean, wanting to continue listening to his gravelly voice reading each word and sentence like a poem.

He looked nice when he was relaxed. More free, less filled with tension. His hair looked so soft, moving in tune as he pronounced each word with equal softness. He was lulling me back to sleep, purposely reading to me in order for my benefit. Not his. The small gesture brought warmth to my soul, his presence giving me peace as my eyes blinked wanting to stay awake. His voice was pretty, much like his face. I felt myself wanting to reach out and touch it, cup his face between my hands and stare until I was lost in him.

I found myself wanting to help him become more relaxed. More comfortable and able to do things without the scowl on his face. Though, with a quick shake of my head I stubbed out my thoughts knowing it wouldn't do me any good getting my hopes up.

My mind was all mashed up now, and before I knew it, I was gone. My eyes pulled me back into the same pitch black room, the one that held me and kept me safe.