I hadn't gone to class the next day, and Alex had come by to take care

9 - Permanent

of me. A er my dilemma on the floor, she helped me onto my bed before refilling my water bottle and placing the cream on my side table in case I needed to apply more. "I'll come back as soon as I'm done," She promised, having to go back to her dorm to get her homework. I declined, already feeling guilty about having her help me but she just rolled her eyes, telling me that she was here to stay. A small smile pulls at my mouth when I think about me doing that to Dean.

walk out the door. "I'll be back, Sophia. I'm here and you aren't getting rid of me." "Yet," I sighed, most definitely pulling a Dean in this moment. He would be proud, I assumed, with me finally toning down and becoming a grump like him. I spent the rest of the day sleeping or scrolling through my phone, Alex giving me her Netflix account so I decided to watch a couple of more episodes of How To Get Away With Murder. The thought of it always got me thinking of Dean, and a blush rose on my cheeks as I

"I'm fine," I mumbled, waving her o but she ignored it, turning to

realised I was getting myself in way too deep thinking of possibilities between us. It couldn't happen, I had to tell myself. No matter how much my brain wanted it. Halfway through the episode I was interrupted by a call, it wasn't a contact so I cautiously clicked the green button and placed it by my ear. "Hello?" I asked, kind of scared of who would respond. "Sophia? Hey, are you alright? Do you still feel sick?"

"I'm okay," I slowed down, relaxing against my bed. "And yeah, I feel sick so I may not go at all this week." He remained silent, before speaking. "You feel that bad? Do you...do you need me to come over?" "No!" I shouted, wincing. "I meant, no that's not necessary."

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"Did you eat? I can bring you some food—" The worry in his tone made my heart sink. "I ate," I lied. "I'm perfectly fine, Dean. It's just a stomach bug." "Sophia...do you remember what I said to you in the car?" I remembered. "I know it's hard but...you need to let others take care of you for a change," He reminded me gently, and I could only hold the tears back as I responded. "Do you remember what I said?"

"Sophia-" "I gotta go, pretty boy. Don't worry about me, I can take care of myself." I ended the call and clicked the icon in the middle so the episode would go again. I knew I was being an asshole, but I'd rather be an asshole than have Dean find me in this state. Despite his hard exterior, his kindness the other day made me realise just how big his heart is and it would crush me if I was yet another worry to his life. I sighed again, shutting o my phone and looking up at the ceiling as I waited for Alex to come back. In all honesty, I was relishing in her presence. It was nice being friends with another girl, someone who can relate so heavily to my thoughts and emotions.

My mind once again went back to those memories, and I was trying to

find what exactly had led me to this moment. How did I even find the courage to leave and start new? "You're useless! You never cared about me, all you cared about was having someone with cash." He yelled, starting up another fight that I had no energy for. It seems like this is all he wanted to do these days; argue. "That's not true!" I exclaimed back, but was immediately met with a

palm to my face. I froze, shocked. He had never touched me before...it was usually all verbal attacks. The numbness faded and my eyes stung with tears as I brought a hand up to soothe the ache. "Don't raise your voice at me." "I'm sorry," I whispered, looking down ashamed. He was right, I knew better than to talk back. "Why did you go out without telling me? You wanna leave me so bad? You ungrateful bitch."

"No, no! That's not true," I begged. "I was just hanging out with my friends. I love you, I want to marry you." I took a step forward, cupping his face so ly. "Do you still wanna marry me?" I prayed the answer was no. I prayed and prayed and prayed but the grin I received had already made me lose hope. I was never getting out of here. He relaxed considerably, pulling me closer in his embrace

with a hand palming the back of my head as he pushed my face into his chest. "Of course I wanna marry you, babe. You're mine. Always. No one will ever have you," His hold tightened, my eyes closing as tears streamed down my face. I felt like a prisoner. I felt alone and hopeless. You're mine, he had said. Like he owned me. Like he could do anything he wanted.

More tears welled up in my eyes as the thought now occurred to me. I would never escape this house. Never escape him. I was trapped. I shook my head relentlessly, wanting to erase that memory all together. My chest tightened and I worked on my breathing, needing to calm down before Alex returned. I hadn't gotten a text from him since the night of the party, which had me both relieved yet paranoid.

My phone rang with a voicemail and I picked it up, clicking open the app in order to hear what someone le. "Hello? Sophia? I might be coming back a bit late today. I have some things I need to catch up on along with a quick grocery store trip so don't get out of bed or I swear to god I'll kick your sorry ass down the stairs. Gotta go, bye!" I sighed, slouching as I wondered what I could do to kill the time. There wasn't much you could do during bed rest besides watch videos or read, however I couldn't do the latter since I still hadn't gone down to the library to check out some books yet. Pulling up my laptop, I studied my notes for half an hour before

getting bored once again. Scrolling through my email, I paused over an unfamiliar one that was sent to me yesterday. Clicking it open, I

"Alex, it's open!" I shouted, not wanting to get up.

The knock continued making me let out a hu, gripping my torso as I stood up. I decided to take a break from oxycodone. As much as I needed it, Dean's annoying pretty voice kept filtering in my head and

"Are you serious?" His eyes narrowed, taking a step forward. I

"Listen, Sophia." He started o so ly. "I know that you're trying to distance yourself from me. I know that you told me that you can't be there for me like others can, though I frankly don't care because I know I can be there for you. For some reason you've grown on me—" I shot him a pleased look and he sighed, continuing. "---and you're my friend which means I care about you. Which also means that I'm someone you can rely on when things get tough, or you wanna fucking cry, or laugh or whatever. I'm here for you, I promise. Those

"Dizzy?" He repeated in disbelief, ignoring my little joke. "Have you

I refused to look him in the eye, lying to him was giving me physical

sucked in a shaky breath as my eyes were glued to the image attached. It was me, on the floor half naked bruised up and bloody. My skin turned cold, it was from a while ago, I noticed. I recognized the flooring as the same one from the house I had lived in for three years. And I only ever wore that outfit once until it was ripped o of me to shreds. What the fuck? Above was a note in the subject line, short and simple. "What would you do when he's next?" I laughed, fear brewing up in my system. He really is fucking insane. A knock sounded at my door and I continued my gaze at the screen, still in disbelief.

I didn't want to get myself addicted. "Alex, did you go get pizza again because I told you I didn't need you wasting money on me. Why the fuck—" I swung the door open, eyes widening once I saw who was behind the door. "Dean," My voice squeaked. "Sophia," He nodded, tilting his head as his eyes searched my body before landing back onto mine, staring intently. In his hands were notes, handwritten I could tell as he continued to analyse me. "What are you doing here?" My hand on the knob started to shake, I still couldn't stand for longer than a few minutes before the pain became unbearable but I held on. I shi ed, trying to hide my body behind my door.

hesitantly took one back, cursing because I no longer had the support of the door. "Yes?" "I'm here because I'm worried about you." "You can feel that way?" I tried to joke, but frowned once he glared at me. "Well, I'm fine so...you can..." The hand that was holding my chest started to shake slightly and I knew I needed to walk to the bed before I fell. "You can go. Don't worry," I gave him a sincere look, taking another step back. He took another forward, having enough space to close the door behind him and lean against it, his hands crossed over his chest in regular Dean fashion.

aren't empty words to me." I felt like I couldn't breathe- both due to Dean's speech and because my chest burned painfully. Tears collected in my eyes from his words as I looked down, studying my hands not wanting to expose my vulnerability. "You're permanent." He whispered, taking a step forward like he was going to pull me in for a hug. At that I let the tears fall, taking a stumbling step forward and cursing myself once I couldn't hold myself up anymore. I fell straight to my knees, wobbling slightly as Dean shouted my name, catching me in time before I hit the ground. He set me down slowly, an unknown look in his eyes mixed with worry as I groaned. "Sophia! What happened? Are you alright?" I choked out a laugh. "Sorry, just a bit dizzy. Your speech probably did

that to me."

been eating properly?"

pain and I hated it.

"Yeah I—" My door swung open, Alex waltzing in unknown to us on the floor. Her gaze was down on her phone, scrolling on it as she started to speak. "Hey! I was thinking, maybe we should get pizza tonight? It's my treat, of course." She glanced up when I didn't reply, zeroing in on me and Dean together, my eyes wide and Dean's in confusion. "Oh shit," She squeaked out. Then turned to me, "I'm sorry! Why the fuck didn't you tell me he was here before?" "Why the fuck are you even here?" He asked her first before turning to "Sophia called me," She frowned. "She was...feeling a bit sick and needed someone to take care of her." "It was bad enough that you needed to be taken care of?" Dean sucked in a breath, his hands stroking my hair in a soothing motion. He seemed visibly alarmed, his eyes constantly searching my entire

body for any sign of injury. "It's okay, Dean. I'm okay," I reached a hand up to the one that held my cheek, trying to comfort him. It seemed like he really needed it when he relaxed his hold, still keeping me close. "You're staying with me for the time being." He concluded, shi ing so he could place both hands under my body. I couldn't stop him because mine were too busy holding the material down, gritting my teeth from the sudden movement as he stood to his full height. "That's not necessary!" Alex said frantically, moving to stand in front of Dean before he could walk out. "I'm taking care of her just fine!" "I'm sorry if I don't quite believe you a er the interaction in the hallway the other day." He said to her, his tone hard. "I don't trust you." "Sophia does," She faltered.

"Sophia's fucking crazy." He paused, shaking his head before looking at me. "I didn't mean that, I'm sorry." "Dean," I tried to catch his eyes but he refused to meet mine, setting me down beside Alex as he turned, looking for something. He looked scared almost, like seeing me almost faint was terrifying to him. "Dean!" I called out weakly again, watching him open my closet door and grab my backpack, taking out clothes and folding them so they fit inside. Once he was done packing my stu , he shoved it towards Alex. "Fill this with whatever else she needs." Alex gave me a hesitant look and when I nodded at her in defeat, she nodded at him, going to my dresser and taking out underwear and sports bras. Lastly, she walked towards the side table, eying me as she motioned towards it while Dean was distracted. When I gave her a pleading look, she swi ly opened the drawer and slipped the orange bottle inside before zipping it shut. "Here," She thrust it back towards Dean. Alex hesitated, not quite wanting to leave me alone but I just shook my head at her, telling her she should go. Sighing, she walked out the door. A er the door shut, I turned towards the man responsible for this current situation.

"What the fuck was that?" I demanded, pushing away Dean's hands when he tried to pick me up again. He shoved them deep in his pockets, not wanting me to see the slight shake in them.

"I don't trust her, Sophia." He frowned, continuing to avoid my gaze.

"I don't give a fuck," I leaned back on the wall. "You don't make

"You were controlling me." I deadpanned, cutting him o . "I hate

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decisions without asking me first."

"I wasn't making a decision, I was—"

habit of making me feel that way.

being controlled, Dean." He paused, looking down and my heart skipped a beat. Shit. I shouldn't have said anything. I should have kept my big mouth shut because I always find myself in a situation like this. "You're right, I'm sorry." He breathed out, looking back up at me. I was surprised. He was...sorry? "You're sorry?" I asked out loud, not understanding if I heard him correctly. "Yes. I shouldn't have made decisions for you. Even though I don't trust her, you do, which means I should trust you. I'm sorry, Sophia. I shouldn't let my anger get the best of me. That's my fault." He stepped forward, still not touching me. "Can I take care of you?" "What?" "Can I take care of you, Sophia?" He repeated and my heart skipped a beat, all of a sudden feeling flustered in his presence. He had a bad

I paused, trying to think clearly but was too emotional from his speech and apology and I nodded, accepting. Dean smiled slightly, looking at me again. "You promise to not run out on me again, troublemaker?" I laughed, wiping away at my eyes with another nod. "I promise." "Alright," He sighed, bending down and swinging my bag over his shoulder so it was secure. "Then let's get out of here." With a hand around my waist, he helped me walk over to my door, my hand making sure the fabric of my shirt continued covering my stomach. Flicking my lights o and shutting my door closed, we made our way out of the dorm area and over the same route to his house. Fortunately, it wasn't far. A quick five minute walk which kind of took ten since I was a bit slow. When we made it to his unit, he let me go and opened his door, gesturing for me to walk in first before he followed. "Do you need anything?"

"No."

against his couch cushions.

didn't want him to feel bad for caring about me.

"Oh, the easiest huh?" I grinned at him.

"It's okay, Dean. I'm serious. Don't worry about it. I was the one that disappeared without explanation. Let's just forget it happened and

"Well the pizza's coming. Cheese, because it was the easiest option."  $\vec{a}$ 

"Is this some sex joke?" He genuinely looked confused. "Because I

"I honestly don't know if I should laugh or be scared that you actually

"They exist," He nodded, setting his toothbrush in the holder before turning to me. "And if you keep believing they don't, they'll get you.'

getting ready to push past him when he stopped me once more, holding me in place. His right hand came up, gently holding onto my

"Sophia..." He whispered, letting me see his concern in full. "Why do

chin as he forced me to meet his gaze.

you have bruises on your body?"

believe in ghosts." I admitted.

"Why would they even want me?"

He looked at me suspiciously before slipping out his phone. "You still

"You were very rude to Alex, by the way." I pointed out, leaning back

He ignored me. "So does that mean cheese or..." "I'm serious! She was just helping me." "I know, I'll apologise to her if I see her. I just... I wish I could have helped you," Dean sighed, tapping something on his phone before putting it away. "But I understand why you didn't call me." "You do?" "Yes," He nodded, going into the kitchen to fill some cups of water for us. "This whole friend thing is new for you and I don't want to rush. I'm sorry again for shouting at you," He frowned. "I was really worried but that doesn't excuse it." Once he was done, he came over, giving me my glass with an ashamed look on his face. He felt immense guilt, it was obvious and I

move on, okay?"

don't get it."

Hours passed and we finished eating the pizza, currently getting ready for bed. Dean and I stood side by side in his bathroom, he was brushing his teeth while I was washing my face. "You're such a sore loser," I said, rubbing in the face wash. "I wouldn't have to be sore if you didn't push me o the couch!" He retorted. "I didn't push you, the ghosts did!" I grinned wickedly, washing o the product. During our dinner, I had found out that Dean hated scary movies (but could read scary books just fine?) so I suggested we watch one. Seeing him cower in fright was my new favourite hobby. "You better stop saying that," Dean mumbled, rinsing o his mouth with water. "The demons will hear you and will come and actually do

His eyes shone with that unknown look again, and I still couldn't decipher it. "Why wouldn't they?" I swung open the mirror, a cabinet was there where I had stored my moisturiser. The small movement towards it made me wince, and since the mirror was in front of me Dean could see my expression. "What's going on, Soph?" Dean asked, tilting his head in question. "It's nothing," I cleared my throat, turning my body around. Before I could take another step, Dean put a hand on my arm, stopping me. I sighed, stepping out of his hold before applying the lotion to my face, rubbing it in. "What the fuck?" Dean cursed. I looked towards him, noticing his eyes were zeroed in on my body and with a glance down realised my shirt had ridden up just slightly due to me applying my moisturiser. In alarm, I yanked it back down,

"I fell." I said lamely, knowing he already figured it out. With caution, he removed his hand from my face, moving down to the end of my shirt and I didn't stop him, only holding my breath. He sucked in a shaky breath, his eyes scanning all over my torso. I felt exposed. Ashamed. Ruined. "Who did this?" He asked with a whisper, hand shaking as his eyes kept looking all over. "No," I shook my head, not being able to tell him. I kept my head down as I let myself drown in my tears. I hated crying in front of people. I hated it so bad. "Sweetheart," He let go of the fabric, both of his hands up now up to cup my face, li ing them so he could search my face. My eyes were tightly closed. "Look at me." He urged.

I bit the inside of my cheek, refusing to break. I wouldn't do it, I couldn't. "Who did this to you?" His voice was low as he asked again, almost a murmur but filled with rage that I almost whimpered in relief. "Please," I breathed out. "I can't..." I paused, my voice cracking. "It's okay," He said back, pushing my head so ly into his chest. His large hand cupped the back of my head, using it as an anchor to keep me close to him. "I'm here." With those words, I shattered. "He still haunts me," I sobbed, shaking in Dean's hold. His arms only tightened, giving me the strength I needed. "He's miles away but he's everywhere. He took everything from me... I have nothing le . "You have me," Dean pulled back, leaning so he could look me in the

"Isn't it?" I exclaimed, yanking my shirt up once again, this time to look at myself. "Look at me," I turned, staring at myself in the mirror. I whimpered, my eyes blurring again. Ruined. I was ruined. "Look at me and say that!" "I'm looking," Dean stared at me through the mirror. His hands hesitated before splaying over my torso, running over the length. "And I see a body that's yours. Not his." I faltered, leaning back against him, not being able to carry my own weight any longer. I was utterly exhausted now, my mind blank and all I wanted to do was drown. Dean helped move me out of the bathroom and into the guest room, setting me down on the bed

before bending down in front of me with my hands clutched in his. "You're not his, Sophia. You never were." "I will be soon," I sobbed, head in my hands as I let it all out. "He's already here." "What does that mean?" My hands shook as I slipped out my phone, swiping to the messages and showing him. His hands cupped over mine, stopping the tremors as he glanced down. He stilled. "There's more," I said hoarsely, showing him the email next. This time he took the phone completely from my hands, cursing at the photo "That sick fuck," Dean whispered. "He's not getting you. I won't let that happen." "I can't let you get hurt," I shook my head. "You mean too much to

to stare into his.

needing his body for warmth and comfort again unknowing how I ever survived without it. He simply held me, his right hand coming up to caress my cheek. I leaned further into his touch, my eyes clearing

He searched mine, and I started to lean in, our lips millimetres apart.

I could feel his breath fan over my mouth, his lips so terribly close and I wanted nothing more than to kiss him. I decided I would make a decision and do it, so I moved forward when he paused, leaning back before our lips could touch. My heart burned with rejection and it

"I like you too much to fuck this up," He murmured. "When we kiss it'll be at the right moment and because you really want it. I won't

"You're not," I closed my eyes, leaning my forehead against his

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must've shown on my face when he started to explain.

take advantage of your vulnerability, Sophia."

shoulder. "But I understand."

"And I can't let you get hurt. You mean too much to me." "Dean," I called out again, tears falling heavily. I slumped forward,

ugly body and everything.

"I can't." "Why not?" "It'll hurt." I cracked. "Sophia," He so ly spoke, his hands back down to look at my stomach, as if he couldn't believe it was really there. He took me in,

eye. "You always have me, Sophia." "My house, my money, my clothes, my body, my mind, my life." I continued. "It'll always be his." "That's not true—"