

say don't go

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say don't go

by [emmynotocar](#)

Summary

“Okay, and? You don't know me, and acting like some hotshot TA with a chip on his shoulder is a good way to piss people off.”

“You're very argumentative.”

“I'm a pre-law student.”

“It shows.”

In which Alex Claremont-Diaz moves to Connecticut to obtain his Pre-Law degree in political science to be near June and Nora—where he meets Henry Fox, the TA, and soon to be English 102 project partner. Alex thinks he knows himself... until he gets closer to Henry, and allows him to embrace the person he's been suppressing his entire life.

or

Taylor Swift song themed college au with movie and book canon content that hopefully you all will love 🤖

Notes

haven't shared my writing publicly ever, so this is so big for me. thank you to phee, aka [strwbrryfox](#), for being my beta and for letting me know the comma goes inside the quotation marks 😭 your comments and suggestions have made me a better writer—thank you so much.

and thank you to cmq for creating the characters of Alex and Henry. they've forever changed me.

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

Miss Americana and The Heartbreak Prince

The educational industrial complex is a thorn in the side of Alex Claremont-Diaz. He leans back in the driver seat, gripping the steering wheel as he recalls the painful conversation he had with the UNH student advisor the summer before the fall semester. He thought getting accepted into their Legal Studies program would come without complications; so when the advisor dropped the bomb that several of his credits from UT Austin would not transfer over, Alex could hardly feign politeness.

“What could be in the curricula of these courses that wasn’t covered in my associate’s degree?” Alex remembers asking in disbelief. “These are core general education credits; shouldn’t they be transferable?”

“I’m sorry, Mr. Claremont but—,”

“Claremont-Diaz, please.” Alex stops his advisor.

“Mr. Claremont-Diaz, we were highly impressed with your application and want you to complete your undergraduate degree here. Unfortunately, some of your prerequisite credits are not applicable to transfer. This is not uncommon,” she continues, “but these courses are all available to complete in one semester, and then you can complete your bachelor’s in Political Science for Pre-Law.”

Alex knew arguing with academic advisors was moot; they were simply the messengers, not the senders. Part of him still wanted to say “fuck it,” go on a tangent about how universities have become greedy business institutions and walk out the door, and deny UNH the admission of a future lawyer-turned-politician.

But he heard his mother and father’s voice in his head telling him that this was an opportunity; passing up a full ride to an amazing college on a qualm about retaking some of his general education courses would be foolish.

Besides, disappointing Texas Governor Ellen Claremont and California Senator Oscar Diaz was probably not the grandest idea. They were already unhappy with June and him since they moved halfway across the country, dragging Nora along with them. The reality was simple in his head though: June gets her journalism degree, Nora does whatever Nora does (he still isn’t too sure about the many minors and majors she partakes in) and Alex comes home with a degree in political science and his license to practice law. It *should* be the compromise of the decade.

And yet, it wasn’t.

Ever since June became politically avoidant to chase her dreams of falling into Ethel Payne and Ann Curry-esque journalism, they looked to Alex to follow in their footsteps. They hardly respected June’s decision—he forever dreads holiday dinners consumed with tight

jaws and excessive wine drinking that eventually leads to shouting between his parents and ends with June's disinterested resolve. In retrospect, June is grateful for Alex's interest in politics—it saves her from the overbearing expectations of their parents.

Unfortunately, the transfer of these expectations to Alex means he can't stop pursuing this path, a burden that has led him to a rather successful college career.

So, failure isn't an option for him.

Still, he couldn't help but feel embarrassed signing up for courses he knew only freshmen were taking. When the advisor informed Alex that one of the courses he'd have to retake was English 102, he already felt the irritation of being a 21-year-old debating Jane Austen amongst teenagers who, more than likely, couldn't understand the literature they read. Even his 18-year-old self fell victim to poor reading comprehension, bad writing, and flaunty vocabulary in his old essays—Alex isn't looking forward to a twice-per-week reminder of his old collegiate persona.

Hopefully, he can sit in the back of the class and endure the hour and 30 minutes twice a week.

As he pulls into a spot in the student lot, a text message from June appears on his phone screen.

June 💕

Good luck today. ❤️ Try and make friends. btw Nora says hi

ACD

no need to, im not looking forward to 18 year olds asking me what my major is. also hi nora

June 💕

i don't think they will be that interested in you. Get off your high horse. this semester will be a breeze, it's literally just prerequisites. text me when you have a free moment? we can get lunch

ACD

sure

When June and Nora moved to Connecticut with the hopes of completing their Bachelor's degrees at UNH, Alex felt obligated to follow them. Their collective dreams of completing graduate school together at Yale were quite literally around the corner. Between art history galleries, indie coffee shops, and dreary weather, Alex learned to love this tiny state over the summer. June and Nora made sure to take him to the State Capitol, where he wandered around aimlessly shaking the hands of confused state legislators.

Now, Alex fantasizes of a time when young Poli-Sci students will eagerly shake his hand.
One day.

Alex takes a sip from his coffee thermos, eyeing the time on his dashboard. 8:45. He knows sitting in his car and waiting until the last minute to head in isn't going to make the class end

any faster, but he can't help but linger, scrolling through Instagram until the clock hits 8:55.

Finally, he gathers his backpack and wearily begins the walk to his first class. Alex isn't usually one to be late, but there he was entering his first class at 9:02 AM. Remorse twists in his gut as he apologetically ducks his head, avoiding the harrowing glare he receives from his professor—a tough-looking Indian woman with daggers for eyes. Alex makes a mental note not to be late again to avoid this look.

Hastily, he finds a seat open in the second row, sitting next to an inky-haired girl whose face is littered with piercings. Before he can settle in, he hears the door of the classroom open and looks up to see one of the most beautiful people Alex has ever laid eyes upon walk in.

It's a boy; tall and lean with golden blonde hair neatly styled in a way that made him look more important than he probably was. He's a little haunted-looking, broad-shouldered, and classically handsome. The moles on his face were perfectly placed around his mouth and jaw, which caught Alex's eye as he jutted his chin out. He's overdressed in a gray cashmere sweater pulled over a light blue button-down and dark slacks to complete the look.

Alex squints in disbelief, wondering why a student would ever choose to dress so formally this early in the morning. He can't imagine wearing anything less comfortable than his hoodie and jeans. It's almost as if this guy walked in straight from a dress-down day for Prep school. He looks *ridiculous*.

The guy's eyes are wide and blue--with hints of green maybe?-- catching Alex's momentarily, then confidently scanning around the classroom as he walks right up to the professor. The eye contact they share feels a beat too long as if he knows Alex from somewhere.

"Henry, so glad you could join us," their professor says as she shakes the boy's hand.

"Professor Gupta, apologies that I'm late. I hope I didn't miss anything important," Henry replies, his voice deep and thick with a British accent so posh, Alex has to stop himself from rolling his eyes.

Of course the walking epitome of Prince Charming would be British.

"No, I was just getting started," Professor Gupta turns to look at the room. "This is Henry Fox, he will be your TA for the semester. I will provide our contact info as we go over the syllabus in case one of you needs to reach out."

Oh. So he's the TA—not exactly a classmate.

Henry awkwardly smiles at the room, then looks around for a seat. Alex pretends not to notice him walking over to their row, casually slipping into the seat next to him. He can smell the fancy cologne on him; what college student takes this much time to be so presentable for a general education class at 9 in the morning?

As their professor begins to prattle on about the syllabus, he can't help but look beneath his eyelashes at the boy next to him. Alex found him distracting yet annoying; maybe it was the

British accent, maybe it was the expensive sweater or cologne, but he couldn't help eyeing this beautiful anomaly sitting beside him.

"Henry Fox." Alex looks up from his notebook and turns his head, greeted with a hand that is probably moisturized and manicured.

Alex looks down at his hand momentarily, thinking, *"Didn't our professor just introduce you to us?"*

Still, he takes Henry's hand, shaking it softly as he whispers back, "Alex Claremont-Diaz."

Ok. So he feels the need to do personal introductions randomly 5 minutes into class. Alex can't help but feel like he's about to hate his 9 am time slot on Mondays and Wednesdays.

"So, most of your work will be done independently throughout the semester. You'll be expected to analyze many of the readings, some short stories in your textbook, and some from books you can do on the syllabus. However, you'll need a partner for an analysis project of any topic where you'll both need to simulate two clear interpretations. The goal is to find common ground where you both can demonstrate each of your interpretations but agree on an overall perspective. The proposal is due October 29th, and the project is due December 2nd. It'll be 15% of your grade, so don't wait until the last minute to do it," their Professor eyes the room, eliciting a few sheepish reactions from several students.

After class ends, their professor encourages them to come up and sign in with their partners if they have one. Alex sighs, knowing this means his hopes of blending into the background for this class are over. He turns over to the pierced girl to give her the "Want to be partners?" look, but is met with the back of her inky head as she establishes a partnership with the girl next to her. Reluctantly, he slinks back into his chair, looking at Henry through the corner of his eye. Henry is already packing up with an urgency that annoys Alex further--as if he has somewhere better to be.

As pairs of students go up together to sign in, it dawns on him that he will have to reach out to someone in the class to form a partnership. Part of him hopes he can just work alone—surely he can present two sides to an argument without a counterpart. Alex swallows his pride and heads to the professor's podium, waiting for several of the pairs to sign in and leave.

"Hi. Alex Claremont-Diaz, sort of in need of a partner," he says, unable to stop himself from cringing. "I can work alone if there's no one left."

Professor Gupta looks at him with pity and replies, "We usually have an even number of students but I got a drop request this morning. Usually, I would do a group of three, but that seems to end with a less-than-effective product. I'm afraid working alone isn't an option either. So I'll allow you to pair with Mr. Fox despite him being the TA."

Alex looks up at the ceiling in disbelief. Of course, he'd be the fucking one to get paired with the teacher's assistant because some kid dropped the course the morning of. Before he can protest, his professor calls Henry over. He feels mortified as he comes over, a look of concern pointed in his eyebrows.

“Mr. Claremont-Diaz needs a partner and you’ll be helping him throughout the semester. Your part of the presentation will not be graded, of course. Is this alright with you?”

Henry nods, not even looking at Alex as they awkwardly stand in a near-empty class. Their Professor hustles out, leaving the two boys to address their less-than-ideal situation.

“Look,” Alex starts with a sigh. “I know this probably isn’t what you hoped for, getting put up to do more work the first day of classes but—”

Henry puts up his hand.

“It’s fine. I figured this might happen. As long as you follow my lead and don’t bail on the classes, it should be easy to get an A on our project.” Alex gapes at Henry, astonished that he would be so brazen to assume he’d let him take the lead.

“I’m not some slacker. I’ve taken this class before.”

“Oh, did you not pass it the first time?” His accent is so polite, you could almost miss the smugness in his voice.

Asshole.

“No. I passed it. Thanks for assuming though. I transferred from Texas so a few of my general education credits didn’t transfer over. But, yeah, I totally see why you might think I failed a prerequisite course,” he says dryly.

Alex feels bad for being snarky, but can’t help feeling irritated at Henry’s bluntness. He doesn’t even know why he’s explaining himself to this dude—he owes him no explanation.

“That’s not what I meant, Alex.”

Alex hates how good his name sounds being said in that proper British accent.

“How exactly did you mean it, then?”

“Exactly the way I said it. I simply asked if you didn’t pass the course. You interpreted that as me assuming the worst of you,” Henry frowns.

Alex snorts and retorts, “Yet you approached me with the notion I need to ‘follow your lead’ and not ‘bail on the classes.’ Don’t you think that’s a bit presumptuous? Like, who even talks to people like that?”

Henry seems to consider Alex’s point for a moment, before shaking his head and saying, “I tend to have low expectations. It’s not personal, just precautionary.”

“Okay, and? You don’t know me, and acting like some hotshot TA with a chip on his shoulder is a good way to piss people off.”

“You’re very argumentative.”

“I’m a pre-law student.”

“It shows.”

Alex narrows his eyes at Henry. “You’re very observant,” then mumbles under his breath, “dick.”

“What was that?” Henry peers at him.

“Nothing.”

“Hm, thought so. Well, my number and email are in the syllabus, so if you come up with anything before the proposal date, just give me a shout.” He shrugs, quickly exiting and leaving Alex standing there like an idiot.

Their conversation has such a strange tension to it; Alex’s heated ambiance contrasting with Henry’s icy demeanor makes for an exchange that leaves him unsatisfied, to say the least.

Alex tries not to think much about Henry, but he can’t stop himself from thinking about what he said. He sat through his next class, unable to focus, replaying their conversation. Retaking classes was by no means unusual in college, but who brazenly asks their project partner if they passed the class upon learning they are retaking it? Most people would just accept the fact without inquiring about the reasons behind it.

Just what Alex needed: some British asshole thinking he is a charity case and doing him a favor by being his partner.

As if he isn’t already dreading class, now he has to worry about the person he sits next to thinking he’s a moron. These thoughts fizzle his confidence, chipping away at the walls he’s built up. How can one interaction with someone he just met cause such insecurity within him?

Classes end for the day, and Alex texts the group chat he has with Nora and June that he’s not feeling up for lunch. He drives home in silence, grateful to be done with his classes for the day. As he enters his apartment, he’s relieved to find it empty. Right now he just wants to sulk in isolation. He lays back on his bed and pulls up the syllabus on his phone, scrolling to Henry’s contact information. Particularly, he doesn’t even like the dude but finds himself wanting to prove he is eager and serious about the class. He puts Henry down as “Dickhead” in his contacts.

ACD

hey, it’s Alex from eng102. just wanted to text you so you have my number now

Dickhead

I appreciate your enthusiasm.

ACD

yup

He sets his phone down and knows he won't get a reply back—surely, a stale reply deters further conversation. Closing his eyes, he drifts to sleep, thinking about how much Henry pissed him off. As he attempts to ignore the image of Henry's beautiful face in his head, he guarantees to minimize their time together so he won't have to deal with the snob.

When Alex wakes up, sweaty and discombobulated, the dryness in his mouth is prominent. He swallows, slowly becoming aware of the ache in his groin as his brain registers the hardness between his legs. Alex can't remember the last time he flew solo, but figures his stressful first day needs alleviating. He frees himself from his shorts, beginning to jerk himself off, and bites down on his lip to stop his moans in case his roommate is home.

Alex isn't one to get so turned on randomly, but his arching back and heels digging into his mattress say otherwise. He hasn't gotten laid in a while—hopefully that changes soon.

His pace quickens, imagining what pretty girl could be found at the end of his cock. He recalls exes and hook-ups but oddly finds himself losing interest as he scrolls through several faces in his mind. After a few minutes with no success, he gives up and curses under his breath.

“Since when did I become the guy who needs a fantasy to get off,” he mutters as he grabs his phone to check his texts.

Alex's already elevated heart rate skips a beat when the notification that Henry texted him appears.

Dickhead

Look, I know I was a bit crass earlier for assuming you didn't pass the course. It was rude of me and I am sorry. Meet me for coffee before class on Wednesday and we can talk? Let me make it up to you. x

Alex is dumbfounded. He's had arguments with friends before that resulted in petulant silence for weeks. Less than a day of knowing Henry and he is extending an olive branch over coffee? His fingers are shaky as he types out a reply, a brisk “ok sounds good” and hits send before he can overthink it.

Oddly, the ache in his groin is back. It had been so long since he'd come, and he desperately didn't want to lose his peak again. Still, as he mindlessly stroked himself, he searched everywhere for a fantasy or partner to grasp on, oddly settling on the sort-of-douchebag of the day: Henry Fox.

Interesting.

Alex furrows his eyebrows in surprise, feeling heat in his stomach as he imagines Henry in bed with him. Suddenly fantasizing about the softness of his plump lips on his neck, trailing

along his jaw until they rested on Alex's needy mouth... it all was so different but felt so normal at the same time.

He thought of Henry's British accent whispering in his ear about how difficult he was. The notion of hooking up with Henry, who is a man and his TA, is so wrong, that it feels *right*. The most interesting part to Alex is that, as he's stroking his cock, he doesn't even fucking care that Henry is a guy. The part that makes him leak from the tip of his cock is the fact that Henry is a guy. The wrong part, oddly, is that he's his fucking TA.

And when he cums, god, he swears Henry's name almost comes out of his mouth. Instead, Alex lets out a guttural moan as he comes, his body jolting and shaking as his psyche catches up to grasp that he just got off to another man. When his body stills, he blinks up at the ceiling, feeling an afterglow settling throughout him until it finally hits him. *Did he really just come to the idea of his fucking English TA kissing him?*

Apparently, Alex has something to learn about himself. One day at his new college and he's jerking off to guys who are pricks to him.

Springing up from his bed in confusion, he strips and throws his soiled clothes into the hamper. All he could think was scrubbing the lust and desperation from his skin, so he headed for the bathroom.

The steam from the shower covers the mirror quickly, but Alex sees through the mist, studying his reflection. The dark overgrown curls hung on his forehead, sweat dripping down his temple, muscles taut across his skin, the look of satisfaction in his warm brown eyes—he knew he looked ravished despite the confused tightness in his chest. The contrast of how he felt on the inside sought to defeat the glowy Alex staring back at him in the mirror.

As the water hits him, he quickly washes away the events that occurred mere minutes ago. Alex unravels beneath the heat, shoving down any productive thoughts of self-discovery.

He *knows* himself. He's not into guys.

Alex loves women—everything from their soft hair, smooth skin, and delicate touch. To reassure himself, he attempts to make multitudes of reasons in his head for why he knows he's into women:

1. He loves having sex with girls.
2. He loves taking girls on dates, spoiling them with dinners and flowers.
3. He's obsessed with their fashion, the way they dress, and the fact they always look so well put together.
4. He crushed on Nora for so long that she took pity on him and dated him for a week—only to realize they were better off as friends.
5. ???

Alex can't fucking think of a number 5 except for, well, he's always been *straight*. Like, the type of prom king, always-having-a-girl-on-his-arm, type of straight.

He knows Henry is probably a douche looking to score ego brownie points with Alex during this meeting. And yet, the thought of meeting him outside of school makes him a bit cocky. It's as if *Henry* is one of the girls he's ghosted in the past; except this time, he definitely isn't going to ghost Henry.

Now isn't the time to explore or doubt who he is. He's Alex Claremont-Diaz; he's from Texas and is getting his degree in political science. He wants to go to law school and be a prosecutor; he wants to be the one to seek justice for those who were wronged.

Alex feels disillusioned towards any signs of veering away from the path he set for himself. Yet, he can't shake the feeling of exhilaration as he imagines what Henry Fox could say to him over a cup of coffee.

Alex ends his shower and gets ready for his part-time job as an intern for a law firm specializing in immigration/deportation cases. He hopes Attorney Luna has a stack of cases for him to read to keep him busy.

But as he drives to his internship, he ponders if Henry will text him the following day to verify their coffee date. Alex laughs to himself, in disbelief these thoughts are still plaguing him.

The Alex Claremont-Diaz he wants to be doesn't meet pretty British dickheads over coffee before class, but why not indulge his inhibitions and entertain the Alex Claremont-Diaz he becomes when no one is around?

Enchanted

Chapter Summary

“Your girlfriend must be enthralled by a romantic like you,” Henry says with a hint of question.

Alex looks out his office door, ensuring no one is within earshot before replying, “I don’t have a girlfriend.”

“Ah.”

“You?”

Henry coughs. “No.”

“Should I be worried if Prince Charming can’t find a date?” Alex jokes, sensing Henry’s discomfort over the phone.

“It’s not that I can’t find a date. The people I’ve dated don’t interest me, and the people who interest me I can’t date.”

TA Henry takes pre-law ACD out on a coffee date. ❤️ getting to know each other phase. Alex finds out something big about Henry, his feelings only growing bigger and more convoluted with each sip of coffee he takes all chapter long. 🤔

Chapter Notes

thank you so much for the love on my first chapter. y’all have no idea how much it meant to me. here’s chapter two, and I plan to post three in the coming days!
as always thank you to my beta phee, aka [strwbrryfox](#)

Alex can’t remember the last time he’s checked his phone this much. It was Tuesday night, and Henry still hadn’t texted him any details regarding their coffee plans. He’s resorted to pacing back and forth around his apartment, until finally tossing his phone face down on his bed.

He is not desperate enough to continue obsessing over passive plans made with someone he *just* met. As Alex approaches his desk to get ahead of some readings, his phone finally buzzes.

The next thing he knows, he's racing to his bed, landing on his stomach as he dives for his phone. His browline glasses nearly fly off his face as he collides with the mattress.

Dickhead

Hey. I'm sorry for not texting sooner, today was so swamped and whatnot. Do you still want to meet for tea tomorrow?

ACD

? tea...?

Dickhead

Oh. Coffee, tea? I know a place we can meet that's close to campus.

ACD

as long as you don't stand me up

Alex practically chokes aloud as he hits send. He doesn't know what's overcome him and considers blocking Henry before he can humiliate himself further. Flirting with pretty boys who he probably wouldn't give a second glance to was bad enough, but flirting with his prick of a TA-turned-English partner was worse.

His phone buzzes again with another text from Henry.

Dickhead

Ha. I try not to get all my conquests hopes up.

The shit-eating grin plastered on Alex's face can probably be seen from the darkest corner of the planet. Admittedly, he loves testing boundaries, and flirting with people he probably wasn't supposed to flirt with was his tool to do so. Henry's response fuels this side of Alex, the side of him most people would never get to see.

ACD

time, place?

Dickhead

Renaissance Café, 8 AM, and don't be late.

ACD

one day of knowing me and you're making demands? you sure know how to make a man feel special

Dickhead

Indeed I do.

ACD

do you take all your students out or am I just different?

Dickhead

Can you not make it seem like I'm some predator?

ACD

presumptuous again, are we

Dickhead

Not really.

The sudden ice in Henry's texts makes Alex freeze; has he gone too far? He scans over their brief messages to see if his flirty texts have been too forward, but the sudden dryness is self-explanatory. Henry's probably a prude—and Alex is, well, not.

Rolling over to his back, Alex stares back at the very ceiling that witnessed him get off to Henry Fox last night. If overhead interior surfaces could communicate, they'd tell stories of sexually confused half-Mexican pre-law students who gawk at them every night.

Alex removes his glasses and tosses them on his nightstand, folding his arms behind his head as he lays back down. *What on earth is going on with him?* Since when did he find himself enamored over someone he just met? With someone he had argued with the first day they met?

Usually, it was the other way around. Alex was not unfamiliar with the doe-eyed college girls he'd encountered in shared study spaces, their meetings beginning and ending on twin-sized beds in dark dorm rooms. He was always polite but clear he was not looking for a serious relationship; still, Alex had been on the receiving end of more than a few pining flirty texts beckoning him back to them. He never denied them a reply, but his lack of reciprocation eventually made their interest wane.

It's not that they aren't good enough—moreso Alex is never truly satisfied with himself. Between school, his internship, and his personal life, no version of success quenched his desire for fulfillment. It's a curse and blessing; the glass ceiling keeps moving, the ladder he's on is always extending, his fingertips brushing the surface of satisfaction, and yet, Alex never reaches it. Even if he's ahead of everyone else, it means nothing unless he breaks through that damn glass ceiling.

He thinks a guy like Henry could understand that—he seems tortured enough to relate to Alex's deep-seated tendency of self-loathing and doubtfulness.

Alex almost feels himself slipping into unconsciousness until his phone buzzes on his chest, waking him. Eagerly, he squints and reads the text on his screen.

Nora 🐱

stop ditching us, alejandrooo

you're due to buy me and June lunch plus the new season of Drag Race UK is on and June says they're bringing back Andrew Garfield as a host

He rolls his eyes.

ACD

tell june garf only seemed like a good judge bc he was funny during the lip syncs and no I bought lunch last time, it's ur turn 😏

Nora 🐱

excuse me. his insight on beautiful women MATTERS. come over anyway we will order pizza tmrw

Alex tosses his phone to the opposite side of his bed and rolls over before he can keep himself up with any more texts from Nora or Henry. Sleep is his friend when he wants to isolate and escape his thoughts, best friend, and sister. He loves Nora and June, but one hour with Alex would be all it took to crack him open. He isn't ready to talk about this until he knows for sure what this is.

Sleep washes over him, clouding all worries he has, erasing every bit of context preventing him from a thoughtless state. The last thing Alex remembers is his texts with Henry, Andrew Garfield's British accent goading a seasoned drag queen, and ends up dreaming of unattainable British men.

Alex finds himself glancing at his reflection in a deeply tinted car window he passes. He checks his hair, straightens his blazer, and checks that the black t-shirt underneath has no stains. He dawns on the ridiculousness of wearing a blazer and his nicest chinos, knowing he is overdressed for such a casual meeting. But seeing Henry dress so formally for that first day of class inspired Alex to—just this once—dress to impress.

As he approaches the cafe, his anxiety thrums unsteadily through his neck. He places two fingers against the side of his windpipe and feels his pulse, counting the beats in his head as he stands across the street. Calculating his pulse calms him, reminding him he isn't going to die. Alex sees the crosswalk sign light up and strides forward, leaving behind the person he was on the sidewalk.

Henry's already there, sitting in a booth right in front of the window of the cafe. Their eyes meet and it's—it's different. What was once neutrality across Henry's face transforms into relief, his eyes mimicking his smile as they turn upwards upon Alex's entrance.

Did he meet a different Henry Fox just yesterday?

"You clean up quite nicely. I didn't think your wardrobe would include trousers that weren't those slouchy bottoms you wore on Monday," Henry quips with the faintest half-smile on his face.

"I'm an intern at a law firm. Thought I'd show my faithless partner that I'm more than a pretty face," Alex grins as he slides into the booth opposite Henry. "This is a one-time thing.

I'm usually all about comfort."

Henry coughs. "Right."

Alex's heart skips a beat. His flirtatious manner seems to cause Henry's face to flush a soft pink, heat filling his cheeks so easily. He can't help but stare as Henry lifts a cup of clear hot liquid to his mouth and takes a sip. Part of him wants to tease him for not ordering coffee at a cafe at 8 AM but remembers how he brought up tea last night instead of coffee. Of course, Henry is a stereotypical Brit.

"I'm glad you came. I am sorry for Monday's nonsense; I was an arse, and I thought we could just start over if that's okay?" Henry asks, eyes full of hope.

"Yeah... I was acting a bit difficult as well. I want to start over too," Alex admits. "Though, why the sudden change in heart?"

Alex looks down at Henry's hands to see him fiddle with a small golden ring on his pinky finger—likely a signet ring, heavy, and marked with the letter 'H'.

"No one has ever spoken to me like you did," Henry confesses. "I—I had a feeling we probably got on better than our first initial meeting."

For once, he isn't quite sure what to say. But Alex finds Henry's admission to be flattering, somehow. He can't exactly recall the amount of times he's called TAs a "dick" and ended up on coffee dates with them in the following days. Alex chalks it up to his Southern charm.

"Er, I went ahead and ordered tea for myself. I've only been here for ten minutes or so. I really like this place, it kind of reminds me of home," Henry says softly into his cup of tea.

"How long have you lived here?"

"Hm. Maybe two years? My older sister Bea lives in New York and we take the rail back and forth to each other. I don't mind Connecticut, the weather is quite cold and rainy just like England."

Alex opens his mouth to reply but instead nods, tapping his fingers against the table faintly. Part of him just wants to listen to Henry and get to know him. There aren't too many people who could pique Alex's interest like this.

A young woman approaches them with her notepad. She's cute, short, and brunette. Alex's type. However, he can barely take his eyes off of Henry. Ever since he first laid eyes on him, there's been a magnetism emanating between them. It's like water; it shouldn't be this natural to be around him—but it is.

When the waitress asks him if he's ready to order with a flirty smile, he tears his eyes away and looks up at her, returning her smile with a polite smile of his own.

"Yes, thank you," Alex can't help but say in a charming voice. It's his southern background slipping out. "I'll have a coffee, black, 2 sugars with a dash of cinnamon, please?"

“O-of course, I’ll get that for you right away,” she stutters and quickly strides away.

Alex turns his eyes back to Henry, who is looking at him with a bit of aversion. He catches Henry rolling his eyes almost, and wonders if he’s getting whiplash. Has he done something wrong?

“Um,” Alex says with uncertainty deep in his chest. “I really am grateful you texted me and invited me here. I’m new at UNH and I don’t have many friends yet. So. Like. Yeah.”

“Well, I am grateful you didn’t react like a total royal fanatic. Especially after our argument. It is hard to have a shred of normalcy around here, unfortunately.” Henry’s eyes shift out the window, avoiding Alex’s confused stare.

Royal fanatic?

“Why would I be a ‘royal fanatic’? You know all Americans aren’t alike, right? Some of us are aware that not all British people descend from the monarchy,” Alex laughs, hoping Henry would join in with him.

But Henry doesn’t laugh. He looks at Alex incredulously, as if Alex just said something so dumbfounding. The waitress brings Alex his coffee, but this time his eyes stay on Henry. He looks down at his dark blue blazer and button down, realizing Henry *really* does dress way too formally. They probably look like two businessmen having coffee together.

Alex takes a sip of his coffee, and Henry still hasn’t said anything.

“Okay, man. What did I say? You’re acting weird,” Alex blurts out, unable to keep it together as he watches Henry go through many emotions on his face.

“Don’t you know who I am?”

The laugh he lets out comes out way too rude. “Am I supposed to? Are you fucking with me?”

Henry seems uncomfortable now, looking around to see if anyone is within earshot of them. Alex does the same, turning back to Henry as if to verify that, indeed, they are alone.

“I thought you knew, or maybe looked me up.”

“Okay, now I’m really lost. What, are you famous in England or something?”

“Erm. Sort of?” Henry looks like he’d rather be anywhere but here.

“Spit it out.”

“Prince Henry of Wales. Currently taking a few years to study in America and visit my sister. We are pretty far down the line of succession, and Connecticut seems to not recognize who most of the Royal Family is,” Henry takes a deep sigh and sips his tea. “I just thought perhaps you knew since you seemed... I don’t know?”

Alex mentally collapses for a moment. He looks around and thinks cameras will pop out any moment, catching his reaction to his classmate professing his royal status in empty coffee shops. But no one shows up, and the silence between them is filled with the steaming sounds of espresso machines and Lana Del Ray singing in the background.

“You *are* fucking with me, right?” Alex leans forward and half-whispers.

“No.”

He takes a deep swig of his coffee, and then humors Henry; immediately, his phone is in his hand, googling “*Henry Fox Prince of Wales*”. He hits search, and. Well.

Hundreds of articles come up about him, reporting on his move: “Where’s Prince Henry?” Photos of Henry in royal attire, posing in big groups of white people wearing clothes more expensive than his tuition. He even has his own fucking Wikipedia page. Alex makes a mental note to read it later.

Alex looks back up at Henry, a sheepish look plastered on his face as they both realize Henry’s royal status.

“Fuck. You actually are a Prince.”

“Quite. But if you call me Prince Henry I might have you kicked out of school so... Consider keeping it quiet?” Henry tries joking.

“I’d never tell anyone if you didn’t want me to. But, like, why does it matter? You can’t tell me it’s better being a college student instead of being home having people waiting on your hand and foot,” Alex rolls his eyes.

“You would be surprised.”

“Try me.”

And Henry does. He tells him that the guise of anonymity provides him with the privacy he’s never had since he was a child. He tells him stories of how the press tormented him and his sister—who was once recovering from addiction in rehabilitation centers—and how he had to follow her to America when he heard how freeing it is to be ‘unknown’ and live a normal life. Admittedly, Henry can’t deny he still has a personal equerry named Shaan, and at least one security detail watching him from a distance at all times. When he points out a black car up the block with tinted windows, Alex flushes as he remembers checking his appearance out in that same tinted car window.

Even as Henry prattles on about how happy he is in Connecticut, Alex can sense there’s a shred of pensive sadness hidden within the faint circles beneath Henry’s eyes. He knows Henry isn’t lying about being happier here than he was back home—but Alex recognizes there’s probably a more profound reason for Henry taking up residence here. He has his own: his mother and father’s tendency to get involved in every move he makes in his education. Alex wonders if Henry’s parents approve of his move to America.

“So what happens if someone knows you’re Prince Henry? Like, do they get thrown in a secret dungeon so they can’t expose your whereabouts?” Alex laughs.

Henry narrows his eyes. “Yes, Alex. I send everyone who recognizes me to prison,” he says sarcastically. “Do not be barmy with me. Most people just want a photo, an autograph. The worst we have had to do is pay off a few people with NDAs tied in.”

“So... I don’t suppose you have a few grand sitting around for me?” Alex grins at him.

“So, you’re admitting you’re a harlot looking for a payout?” Henry grins back at him, shaking his head at Alex’s stupidity.

They chat until the waitress comes back, placing their receipt down with sly eyes as neither boy seems to notice her. Alex grabs for it, but Henry’s faster.

“How much is it?” Alex feels ridiculous asking, knowing it can’t be more than \$5.

“I’ve got it. I ordered my driver breakfast and a latte and sent him out, so I can just take care of your coffee too,” Henry waves him off as lays a \$50 bill down on the receipt.

Alex gapes at him. He knows royalty tends to be rich, but is surprised at him leaving such a big tip. It practically causes Alex’s heart to swoon, and he swallows down the butterflies gathering in his stomach. He follows Henry out of the cafe, thanking him for paying for his coffee and saying next time is on him. Henry just smiles, and quickly begins the walk to his private car.

“Ride with me to class?”

Alex just nods, unable to find the words for what’s happening. They’re silent the whole ride in the backseat, not even looking at each other. He worries that looking at Henry would produce nothing but word vomit, and Alex isn’t even sure if the words would coincide with the reality of his head or his heart.

Henry really is a prince. An actual product of British royalty—and he’s somehow English partners with him. Alex never cared much for the Monarchy, hence his unfamiliarity with Henry’s royal status. So far, Henry’s nothing like what he would imagine a prince is like; the innuendos in his texts, the desire to be unknown, pursuing Alex as a friend—he does seem like just a normal guy.

They sit next to each other in class again, and this time Alex forces himself to focus. Yet, he can’t help but catch Henry’s eyes on him when he thinks he isn’t looking, his blue eyes flicking away the second Alex sees him. It’s all so weird; he can’t recall crushing on boys like this before. He can admit when he finds someone attractive, but Henry’s tranquil energy draws him in, contrasting with his manic energy to create a vitality of equilibrium he’s never experienced.

When class ends, Alex feels like they’ve come back to the world together. He looks over at Henry and before his brain can catch up to his mouth, he says, “You and I should hang out more. Just text me when you want to.”

Henry looks over at him with a quirked eyebrow. "I will do that. Enjoy the rest of your day."

And just like that first day, Henry is gone. And Alex is left again in that room, wondering when he will see the Prince he's befriended next.

Rafael Luna can only be described as who Alex wants to be in ten years: a handsome, badass Latino lawyer running his own law firm, dominating the local court news cycle regularly, and overworking his interns to the point of mental collapse.

Okay, maybe not that last one.

But Alex *does* glorify Attorney Luna; however, today he ponders his icon's sanity when he asks Alex to stay late to research the legal statutes on a case he had already provided a 10-page memo on before. A tax accountant was getting sued by the State of Connecticut for fraud; this was nothing particularly unusual, except her clientele was mainly made up of undocumented immigrants who didn't speak English.

When Luna asked him to research the case weeks ago, he dove into his books, citing vital information Raf could use against this monster; only to have him insist that he needed more from Alex.

"Kid, you did great work. But we need more than a memo filled with legal jargon about the basics of why defrauding poor people is shitty. We barely have witnesses due to the fact most of her clients are undocumented and won't testify," Luna leaned in the doorway of his office. "I need you to dig deep and research the details of the case."

"The details seem clear to me: some woman made a buck off the backs of people who couldn't even read the documents they were signing, sounds open and closed to me," Alex replied.

"And yet the district attorney is nervous. The firm representing this woman isn't going down without a fight," he counters.

"Well. I will go over the case details and see what I find."

"You've got this, I know I can depend on you."

But Alex definitely doesn't have a grip on the case. He re-reads his memo, then re-examined the case details and came up with nothing. Everything about it is classic corporate tax greed; he can't imagine why the district attorney would be hesitant to move forward with setting a trial date.

After tormenting himself with Luna's legal books, he grabs another cup of coffee and checks his phone.

Prince Dickhead

[image] Is it immoral of me to share with you that half the papers turned in were complete rubbish? By the way, I loved your analysis on The Yellow Wallpaper. It was brilliant.

Alex opens the image and views the front of his paper, marked with red.

ACD

yet why is my masterpiece riddled with your graffiti

Prince Dickhead

Even the best writers aren't absolved from literary mistakes. ;)

Before his mind can catch up to his coffee-laden fingers, Alex is calling Henry.

"You know, I could have your little TA position taken away with all the shit you talk to me about my classmates' papers," Alex threatens into the phone.

"Um. Alex?"

"Yeah?"

"We've never spoken on the phone before."

Alex leans back in his chair, taking a deep breath. It's true; they haven't spoken on the phone outside of their usual texts and chats in school. But Alex really wouldn't mind if Henry were the one calling him. It's easy to talk to Henry; he's never disinterested nor judgmental, a trait Alex didn't expect from a member of the Royal family. That, and maybe the sound of Henry's laughter at Alex's stupid comments brings him a joy he isn't quite familiar with.

"Did I interrupt a Royal emergency or something?"

"No. I'm just surprised, not many people would call in place of texting."

"Well, that's not me."

"Hmm." He could practically hear the smile in Henry's voice.

"So, despite defacing my paper," Alex laughs, "what did you like about it?"

Alex usually isn't one to fish for compliments, but he's peer-reviewed Henry's work before; getting a compliment from him on a paper is like Beyoncé telling someone they have a good singing voice. He has to know what Henry thought about his work.

"You understood the message the author was sending. Anyone can write about the oppression of women and why they think it's *bad*, but not everyone can understand the narrator had to descend into madness to truly be free," Henry says. "The symbolism is important, obviously, but I found your interpretation of the themes to be rather... contrarian to most people's."

"Go on," Alex says in a low voice.

“Your perspective on domesticity is quite grim.”

“Can anyone read a story like that and walk away feeling good about getting married and having kids? I certainly didn’t feel inspired afterward.”

“The story’s purpose is not meant to inspire nor deter domestic affairs. It’s a statement about how forced domesticity can be damaging to those, especially women, who are unwilling,” Henry explains.

Alex goes silent for a few moments, then states, “I think that’s crap.”

“Pardon?”

“You heard me. The woman who went insane—you said she had to go mad to be free. Most people who read the part when John fainted after seeing she destroyed the room and was crawling around were probably uncomfortable; not because it was written to make them uncomfortable, but because some of them couldn’t understand why she just didn’t get better,” he sighs. “It’s because we are taught that being in love and having a family is the answer. So the idea that the ones who are supposed to love us can drive us to insanity instead of heal us scare people.”

“It sounds like you're speaking from experience.”

Alex pauses. “Maybe. My parents are divorced so my perspective on love tends to be Shakespearean.”

“Your girlfriend must be enthralled by a romantic like you,” Henry says with a hint of question.

Alex looks out his office door, ensuring no one is within earshot before replying, “I don’t have a girlfriend.”

“Ah.”

“You?”

Henry coughs. “No.”

“Should I be worried if Prince Charming can’t find a date?” Alex jokes, sensing Henry’s discomfort over the phone.

“It’s not that I can’t find a date. The people I’ve dated don’t interest me, and the people who interest me I can’t date.”

“What does that even mean, Henry?”

“Do you really not know?”

The silence over the phone is louder than ever. It isn’t the type of silence that symbolizes the end of their conversation, but rather the start of something they both knew would be

irreversible. Alex wishes he weren't at the law firm so he could reply to what he thinks Henry wants him to say.

Like a coward, Alex replies, "I don't."

"How can someone so intelligent be so daft?" Henry sighs.

"I'm not a mind reader; if you want me to know something you have to tell me. It's called communication."

Henry hesitates. "I figured it was obvious with my being a Prince and all. NDAs, press exposure, courtships. True love once you sign at the dotted line. Not exactly the most sexy."

Alex feels his heart drop. Of course, that's what Henry meant. *What else could he mean?*

"Yeah... well, there's someone out there for everyone," he cringes at his own words.

Henry's silent for a few uncomfortable beats. Alex very pointedly waits for his phone to explode to save him from saying anything else that can be found written on a Hallmark card.

"Okay... this conversation was indeed enlightening. I'm going to continue grading papers, if you don't mind," Henry says.

"Sure, yeah. Um, bye."

"Bye, Alex."

Alex hangs up and looks down at the books and paperwork scattered on his desk. He can't possibly read another sentence after his phone call with Henry. His brain is turning off for his own sanity; Alex needs these moments of emotional downtime, or he ends up overwhelmed and useless.

Sighing to himself, he cleans up his workspace and accepts the lecture Attorney Luna will be giving him tomorrow upon not seeing the new memo on his desk. Alex would rather get his ass chewed out than turn in work that is less than acceptable.

Alex shuts the light in his office off, closing the door tight behind him. He thinks he could hide his feelings behind that very door, but deep down he knows it's nestled deep in his chest, the unfamiliar ache of uncertainty of just *who* Henry Fox was to Alex Claremont-Diaz.

Message In a Bottle

Chapter Summary

Finally, the silence in the room breaks as Henry clicks his tongue and says, “Christ, you really are as thick as it gets, aren’t you?”

June and Nora confront Alex about his sudden absence, which allows Alex to confide in them about his friendship with Henry. They get together at a party where they briefly meet Pez, Alex gets jealous and well... Henry does something about it.

Chapter Notes

thank you so much for the love on the first two chapters. your kudos, comments and words of encouragement are everything to me.

thank you to my beta, aka [strwbrryfox](#) as always

“Okay, you know you’re really pissing off one of the only two people responsible for reporting to our mother and father you’re not dead?” June practically shouts as she and Nora burst into his room.

Alex sits up and pauses his music. “I’m aware. They told me your sole birthright was to look after me and make sure I’m not dead and rotting away on the couch. I don’t think we’d get our deposit back if I left human-sized stains on the upholstery.”

June smacks his arm and Nora sits next to him as she hovers and crosses her arms. It’s October 1st and Alex has seen his sister and best friend all of two times since the start of the semester. Back at UT Austin, they spent countless nights in June’s dorm, Alex spread out on the couch and Nora snuggled under the covers with June. Sometimes they’d wake up to bags of Jack-in-the-Box and stolen cups of coffee from the student lounge—June always snuck out early, making sure Nora and Alex woke up to something to eat. Nora would read them the news from her phone, making them laugh by reading articles about their parents from “The Hill.”

He understands their anger; but he thinks they should understand his distance. It isn't about them, but rather Alex recoiling into his shell after finding out he would have to retake a few prerequisite courses. Alex and Nora were always competing against each other in high school; he was used to being neck and neck with her, so the sudden loss of his academic companion is an added blow to his less-than-ideal situation.

Naturally, when it came time for Nora and Alex to transfer to UNH, Nora opted to dorm with June. Alex didn't like the idea of living in dorms with a stranger, so he moved in with a guy he interned with at the law firm. Even then, between Alex's internship, Nora's new job at an accounting firm, and June being in the last stages of getting her Bachelor's, there isn't really time for sleepovers.

"Alex, we are worried about you," Nora softly nudges him. "You don't reply much anymore, and you're not even going out to parties. We know you're sitting at home listening to Freddie Mercury and Frank Ocean."

Alex defensively closes out his Spotify where his "icons" playlist is still going. Nora knows him way too fucking well.

"I'm fine. God. Really. What is your problem?" Alex says with exasperation.

And it's partially the truth; despite having to retake some of his courses, Alex can't remember the last time he's enjoyed the semester so much. His classes are easy because he's already passed them before, so he spent much of his free time briefly studying, working out, interning, or—talking to Henry. Henry's usually unavailable to hang out but it doesn't stop them from texting, with the odd phone call here and there.

They've met up twice at Renaissance Café; eating every pastry on the menu at one meeting, and trying the French dish 'croque monsieur' at the second—which was just a hot sandwich with ham and cheese for \$14. They joked about how it was such a scam, and Alex nearly got them kicked out because of his roaring laughter once Henry explained croque monsieur was just French for 'mister crunch'.

Their messages contained mindless banter, inside jokes, and comfortable gaps of silence in between. When Henry didn't reply for the whole day, Alex felt like it was important to send a goodnight text, or link him to a "Politico" article and simply say, "This is a good read." He knows Henry loves to read, and reads everything Alex sends him even if it was just political articles on bills that failed in the Senate. It usually ignited their convo back up, with Henry sending articles back about book bans in Florida.

Everything is so natural between Henry and himself; it was one of the more congenial friendships he's had to date.

"Okay. I'm done with the whole you playing dumb act. If you want to ditch us for some girlfriend or new friends, that's fine. The least you can do is reply in the groupchat," June says and turns to leave.

Nora springs up and calls out, "Hey, come on. Let's not walk away. Clearly, something is going on, Alex, right?" She turns to him, her curly brown hair falling over her shoulders as

she leans toward him. Nora is always trying to mend the cracks in the group.

“There’s no girlfriend. And I’ve made one friend. That’s all. Shit, you guys make it seem like we are breaking up,” Alex rolls his eyes.

“Who’s your friend?” June asks, turning back towards Alex’s bed.

“His name is Henry.”

June and Nora glance at each other. Somehow he knows it isn’t good.

“And does this Henry happen to be the senior TA who happens to also be the Prince of fucking England?” Nora grins, throwing her arms around his neck.

Alex fucking knew it. He knew Nora and June would somehow know about Henry going to school with them. It made sense; they were more aware about pop culture and international celebrities than he is.

He clicks his tongue and replies, “Yeah, that would be the one.”

Finally, the scowl on June’s face breaks out into a twisted smile, full of knowing and something else he couldn’t quite put his finger on.

“Who knew you could befriend royalty? I faintly remember you whining about me hogging the TV to watch Lady Martha Fitzroy and Prince Philip get married. You kept saying the royal family were purely figurehead and couldn’t believe American television was wasting air time on a couple who was manufactured to mend British-American relations,” June teases.

“And I’m still right about that. I won’t be watching one second of that shit.”

“Yet you’re the one who whines when your favorite couple on Love Island is voted off—you’re a sucker for British culture at heart,” Nora states matter-of-factly.

“I’m not ashamed of that.”

Nora and June laugh, crowding him on his bed. Alex can’t deny that he has missed them and is grateful for their intrusions; sometimes his isolation truly got the better of him. The girls often brought out a side of him that made him a bit more optimistic and a little less critical of the world around them.

Alex tells them about his classes, leaving out subtle details involving Henry when he talks about English 102. He knows they wouldn’t understand their friendship, and part of him wants it to be just for Henry and himself to have. Involving his sister and best friend would ruin it somehow, and he just can’t risk that.

After catching up, Nora orders pizza for them, and June rants about how one of her professors is batshit insane for thinking Stephen King is a classic literary genius.

“Authors like him should not be hailed as the blueprint for literary success if they write their female character’s story arcs with such disregard and with sexist undertones,” June explains. “I’ve read his books. They’re okay—though I always feel like I need to book a therapy appointment afterward due to the sheer number of run-on sentences and detailed child abuse that goes on for several pages.”

Alex loves listening to his sister talk; he thinks it’s what brings them all together, as she always has the most unique outlooks and perspectives. He never misses the glimmer in Nora’s eyes when she listens to June talk—his eyes have a similar glimmer, albeit with different motivations behind them.

Between bites of mushroom and pepperoni pizza, Alex and Nora huddle together on his bed, intrigued by June’s rants about how Chatgpt and TurnItIn are counterproductive—she says the irony of the usage of AI-generated work being sniffed out with other flawed AI programs pisses her off.

Nora informs Alex that he would love her Information Policy course, claiming she constantly gets to discuss public policy issues that impact communication technologies. He smiles when she tells him of a debate she had with some white boy about the impacts of data mining, and how he was tongue-tied after she informed him of the negative aspects of data being transferred and sold without *explicit consent*. Nora is truly amazing, a nerd full of facts and data—it’s no wonder he and June love her so much.

When they finally leave and give him one last lecture about his due diligence to keep in touch, Alex collapses back on his bed. It’s Sunday night, and he finds himself yet again staring up at the ceiling.

Henry would like Nora and June, and he knows without a doubt the girls would shower Henry with love the second they met him. But it dawns on him that their friendship felt so private that inviting anyone along to participate might be invasive.

Alex takes his glasses off and places them neatly on his bedside table. Part of him wants to text Henry, but the other part of him wants to sleep away these thoughts. His body chooses the latter, despite his subconscious bringing Henry along in his dreams.

“Hey. Do you think Stephen King is sexist?” Alex turns towards Henry at the end of their class.

He has been thinking of their project, and wonders if Henry loves or hates Stephen King. If he loves Stephen King, perhaps he can choose a King novel with Henry, and they can debate the author’s intentions when it comes to writing about women for their project.

“I don’t recall knowing Stephen King, I would have to ask him,” Henry slyly smiles, causing Alex to whack his shoulder playfully.

“I mean, do you think his writing is sexist?”

Henry purses his lips before a thoughtful look spreads across his face. “I think he could probably write just as effective stories without subjecting his female and adolescent characters to violence and abuse. A lot of readers and writers alike have felt his female characters are just there to prop up male protagonists, with them ending up being interpreted through a misogynistic outlook.”

Alex nods, biting back a smile of validation. June would definitely love Henry.

“Do *you* think Stephen King is sexist?”

“I think it’s possible to tell a good story and develop interesting character arcs without using torture porn. Sexual violence in the horror genre is an overused trope,” Alex frowns. “He’s an ok author, but he probably should’ve laid off the coke and went to therapy before writing some of his books.”

Henry raises his eyebrows but nods once in agreement.

“What brought this on?”

“Oh, just seeing if we will ever pick a project topic,” Alex hi teases. “We seem to agree on a lot when it comes to reading.”

“I am sure we will find something to dispute. And it will indeed be our downfall, so be prepared to never hear from me again once we do,” Henry laughs and stands up.

Alex looks up at him, a pang of emotion in his chest at the thought of never talking to Henry again. He painfully laughs with him, despite the thought of not being friends with Henry fucking with his usually carefree demeanor.

Lately, Alex has been walking with Henry to his second class. Usually, their walk is filled with endless back-and-forth chatter, but this time Alex just listens to Henry talk about how one of the papers he graded was completely plagiarized, and how he didn’t report it to the Dean, instead taking the student—a freshman—aside and warning them about the academic consequences of plagiarism. Alex nods, not saying anything but wallowing in awe of what an amazing fucking person Henry Fox is.

“This is me,” Henry stops and turns, seemingly awaiting a reply from him.

“Yeah, I know. I’ll text you later,” and Alex turns as fast as he can, hustling to his mathematics course on the other side of the floor.

But Alex doesn’t text him. Instead, he focuses on work and school, delving into anything but talking to Henry. The next few days are near radio silence between them, with a few texts here and there, but nothing significant. Alex begins to think he conjured up a friendship from his imagination.

Nora 🐱

guess who was invited to a party this Saturday and will be bringing you two along with me to get drunk ?

June 💖

You? Does this mean Alex is coming out from his hole?

ACD

free alcohol a heart cannot say no to

Nora 🐱

alejandro, so nice of you to join us at the mention of getting drunk

ACD

im a simple man

And then a thought invades his mind: Henry should come. He realizes their friendship needs a formidable liquid to ignite a proper bond between them: alcohol.

ACD

can i bring Henry

June 💖

I don't think princes are allowed to go to college sorority-frat parties.

ACD

let him decide that

June 💖

Go ahead and invite him

And Alex immediately does.

ACD to Prince Dickhead

you're coming out with me to get drunk this saturday

Prince Dickhead

I have to grade papers this weekend.

ACD

nah you can do that another day. take a break

Prince Dickhead

Maybe another time.

Alex sighs deeply, frustrated by Henry's lack of social availability. He knows Henry is shy, but wants everyone to see the vibrant and witty guy he became when it was just Alex around. He tries one more time:

ACD

please?

Minutes go by without reply. Alex begins to think he's gone too far yet again and regrets his last text. Every time he feels himself getting close to Henry, they take turns shutting down or overstepping boundaries. A buzz radiates from his phone.

Prince Dickhead

Okay.

Alex totally doesn't freak out.

ACD

cool. just leave the equerry at home and maybe don't wear gray sweaters that make u look like an old man

Prince Dickhead

Are you the fashion police? Shaan doesn't come to outings like this. He has other things to do.

Alex shakes his head as the joke goes over Henry's head. He copies and pastes the details of the party and texts them to Henry, unable to stop smiling. First party of the semester, introducing his best friend and sister to Henry, getting drunk and loud music to block out his thoughts.

How could this Saturday possibly get any better?

"Alex, can you please stop checking your phone? Henry said he's gonna come; and if he doesn't, it just means you've scared him away with your incessant neediness," June teases him as he checks his phone for the fifth time in the last hour.

“I just want to make sure he doesn’t get lost,” Alex shuffles and shoves his phone into his pocket, taking a swig of whiskey from his cup.

“Princes are chauffeured around everywhere, Alejandro. He will be here when he’s here. Let’s just have fun for now,” Nora chimes in, grabbing Alex and June’s hands and pulling them into a crowd of dancing drunk young adults.

The music is so loud, just as Alex hoped it would be. When the DJ plays ‘Yeah!’ by Usher, Nora makes him laugh as she squeals and calls out “This is my fucking song!” June gives her a bewildered look but shrugs, wrapping an arm around Nora’s waist, raising her cup in the air, and giving into the song’s beat. Alex loves this side of them: Nora’s chaotic energy and June’s inability to resist going along with it.

The three dance and poorly sing along in unison to Usher’s typical lyrics of infidelity masked beneath banger club music. Nora sings all of Lil Jon’s ‘yeahs’ and ad-libs in his raspy voice, clearly drunk. Usually, June wouldn’t listen to something like this, but she hypes Nora and Alex up for what’s to come.

When Ludacris’ part comes on, Nora and Alex go crazy.

“*Hey, hey, Luda!*” June sings.

Nora, tiny and nerdy, suddenly spits, “*Watch out, my outfit’s ridiculous, in the club looking so conspicuous! And roar, these women all on the prowl if you hold the head steady, I’m a milk the cow!*” Alex jumps in to shout “*yeah!*” as Nora continues to tap his entire verse perfectly as if she was Ludacris himself.

Alex turns around and shakes his ass, eliciting laughs from the girls. He sings along, “*Take that and rewind it back, Lil Jon got the beat that make your booty go,*” clapping once and bumping hips with June.

As the song ends, Alex feels a soft tap on his shoulder. He turns and—*oh fuck*. Henry is standing before him, sporting a navy blue UNH crew neck sweatshirt, a button-down collared shirt underneath. His hair is free of gel and for once, he looks like Alex’s age. Somehow his hair looks longer when not confined by hair products. You would hardly be able to tell Henry is the Prince of Wales with how casually he’s dressed right now.

“Oh god. Did you see any of that? Just pretend it was decoys of Ludacris, Usher, and Lil Jon and not me, my sister and best friend singing disrespectful lyrics about women’s asses,” Alex blurts out.

Henry raises an eyebrow. “Indeed I saw most of it, I think. It was... something. Endearing, honestly.”

Alex isn’t sure if the dancing, alcohol, or Henry calling him ‘endearing’ is making him sweat—but he feels a bead of sweat trickle down his spine.

“Shut up,” Alex eyes him up and down. He gestures weakly to Henry’s sweatshirt in an attempt to change the subject. “This is different.”

“You said don’t dress like an old man. I’m simply obliging to the dress code you gave me,” he grins, his accent low and smooth.

Alex opens his mouth to tease Henry but hears June’s throat clear behind him. “Oh! Right, Henry, this is my sister June, and my best friend Nora Holleran. They go to UNH too.”

“Henry Fox. I’ve heard about you, June. You’re quite the academic achiever in the senior class,” he holds out his hand.

June peers up at him, a sheepish and toothy smile spreading across her face. She shakes his hand. “Thank you... I’ve heard great things about you as well, but from sources I can’t disclose.” She slides her eyes towards Alex, and he considers killing her drunk ass.

But Henry just laughs, unbothered by her joke about gossip regarding his Royal status. He turns towards Nora and shakes her hand as well, and says, “I’ve heard about you too, Nora. Alex says you’re his chaotic equivalent. A pleasure to meet you both.”

For once, all Nora can do is nod, her grin mirroring that of June’s. Alex shoots them a glare, knowing they’re swooning over Henry’s British charm and basic social etiquette that most American men lack. He gives them a *‘please act normal’* look, and they just giggle, clearly intoxicated and unable to hold a sober demeanor after their dance session and meeting Henry.

“Okay, well, Nora and I are gonna go find something to do over there, so you two can catch up. Byeeee,” June locks elbows with Nora, dragging her away from a confused Henry and Alex.

Alex gently shoves Henry’s arm and says, “You came. I’m glad, I was beginning to feel like you were too good for us commoners.”

“Ha. Well you seem to be pursuing me to come out to this party, so I thought I would indulge for once and see what the ‘commoners’ do for fun,” he mimics Alex’s accent.

Alex feels heat in his neck and face; he punches Henry’s shoulder to break the tension, waves him over to the kitchen, and pours him a drink from one of the big pitchers on the counter. He hands it to Henry, who looks at it with a puzzled look on his face.

“It’s vodka and some cherry drink mix. You’ll like it, trust me, Your Majesty,” Alex says.

“‘Your Majesty’? If we are going to use titles here then at least refer to me as Your Royal Highness,” Henry licks his lips.

“You are so annoying!” he exclaims.

“And you’re an arse! You love to argue with me.”

“You like it,” Alex informs him.

Henry just stares at Alex with a look he’s seen before, a look that could only be found in the dark bedrooms of dorm rooms with twin beds. Alex blinks and thinks he’s imagining things as Henry chugs his drink, closing his eyes and coughing once he finishes it.

“I did like that, you were right,” he says, leaning closer to Alex. “Alex—”

“Henry Fox! Love, what are you doing here?” A buttery voice calls out to Henry in an accent so British, it rivals Henry’s poshness.

Love?

“Percy Okonjo—mate, it’s good to see you,” Henry hugs a handsome dark-skinned boy with bright pink hair.

Alex feels jealous as they embrace, narrowing his eyes and taking a sip of his drink, resentful of this Percy character for interrupting his conversation with Henry.

“Alex, this is my best mate, Percy. He majors in Philosophy, we went to school together at Eton back in England,” Henry says excitedly with an arm hooked around Percy’s shoulders.

“Mr. Claremont-Diaz, it is my pleasure. I can’t believe I’m meeting Henry’s protégé finally. This one hasn’t piped down about you since linking up. Call me Pez, like the sweets.”

Alex stares for a moment, slightly tipsy and losing his usually engaged stature. “Yeah, nice to meet you, ‘Pez’.”

Henry and Pez exchange a look at Alex’s clipped tone, awkwardly turning back to each other. They continue to drink and chat together, while Alex sits nearby at the counter. He can tell they’re all becoming a bit drunk, so when Pez suggests they go dance, Alex just nods and follows them to the dance floor, not wanting to be left behind like some loner.

Alex finds June and Nora, who are still trashed and twirling each other. Upon seeing Alex, Nora throws her arms around his neck, hanging on him as she sways her body with him. June comes up behind her, hands on Nora’s hips she pulls her back to her chest. He knows they’ve always had a thing for each other, and unclasps Nora’s hands to let her descend back into June’s arms. Right now he isn’t sure he wants to fight June for Nora as a dance partner.

He is used to third-wheeling but feels uneasy as he turns away from the girls. And then—Alex’s jaw drops as he sees Henry and Pez dancing similarly to June and Nora. Except, Henry’s arms are awkwardly dangling at his side and he’s laughing as Pez seems to be guiding his hips clumsily.

Alex can’t help but stare and feel pissed at Henry’s behavior—was he *trying* to make him jealous? Alex scoffs and shakes his head, the music is loud and thumping in his chest, his heart beating out of tempo with the song.

When Henry looks over his shoulder at Alex with languished eyes, he’s had enough. He can’t even hide his disdain as he shakes his head at Henry, and storms away. He’s drunk, and confused, but also infuriated with Henry Fox. *Who the fuck does he think he is?*

Alex finds shelter in an empty room upstairs, closing the door right behind him.

Does he really think dancing with another guy in front of him was okay? Henry is always flirting with him, making him feel things he didn’t have half the capacity to comprehend.

Why do all that just to come to a party he invited him to and then hang out with Pez instead? It's such a dick move.

Because it's been Henry's schtick since the beginning. Alex should've fucking known; this prick was showing his true self the first day they spoke.

The irony of the situation smacks Alex in the face; was *this* how he made girls feel when he never followed through with his flirty advances? Pathetically pining over someone who never wanted anything to do with him in the first place?

A knock cuts through his maddened inner thoughts. He shouts that the room is taken, but it opens anyway.

Alex turns to curse out the intruder but sees that it's Henry. He comes in and closes the door behind him, his back flush against the door as Alex's eyes pierce into him.

"Are you okay?" He asks, eyes wide and peculiar.

"No, man. I'm not fucking okay," he snaps, turning away as Henry steps forward. "I need to be alone."

"What happened?"

And Alex finally cracks.

"*You* happened. *You*, who pisses me off by leading me on. *You*, who looks at me with *those* eyes while dancing with another guy. *You*, who always leaves me thinking there's something between us when I now know there clearly isn't. *You*, who confuses me and makes me think you might want me back," Alex says hotly, pinching the bridge of his nose between his fingers. "I can't even fucking look at you right now."

Henry is silent. That further pushes Alex over the edge because how could he possibly be silent after professing his feelings with such clear vitriol? Alex is facing away from Henry, gripping the back of a chair to hold himself up. Has the past month been in his head?

Finally, the silence in the room breaks as Henry clicks his tongue and says, "Christ, you really *are* as thick as it gets, aren't you?"

Alex turns to verbally berate him but Henry's already striding across the room, grabbing Alex's shoulder and spinning him around.

Henry throws his arms around Alex's neck and smashes his mouth against his, kissing him with a force so intense that Alex stumbles back.

Henry Fox kisses him with everything he has, lacing his fingers into Alex's curls and pulling on them with a frustrated determination to show him how bad he wants him. Alex pulls back to look at Henry's face and nearly dies on the spot. Henry's panting softly, face red like wine, lips tasting of vodka and cherry flavor. He crushes his mouth against Henry's, moaning softly in relief as they kiss frantically, his hands gripping Henry's hips with greed.

Alex's brain short-circuits; the fact he's making out with his TA, a guy, a fucking *Prince* is going to force him to do some serious self-reflection later—preferably sober.

"Shit. I'm an idiot," Alex mumbles against Henry's lips.

"Quite."

Suddenly, the tension between them became self-explanatory; Henry *wants* Alex. Alex feels the same, probably always has since the moment he got off to the thought of Henry kissing him. The texts, the banter, the meetups in the cafe—it all built up to this.

Alex feels his heart in his throat yet again, but this time it's from heat coursing through his veins. Henry is an amazing kisser, needy and thirsty for Alex's lips. It's his first time kissing a guy, but it's nothing like kissing a girl. Kissing Henry is romantic, arbitrary, and intoxicating as the world around them goes dark.

He pulls back again to move Henry's hair from his forehead, his thumb stroking down the side of his face. He's still got a grip on Alex's hair, pulling his head backward. Alex stares at him from beneath his eyelashes, swallowing hard as Henry leans forward to press soft kisses on his mouth, then down his jaw.

"Leading you on, hm?" Henry mumbles against the hollow of his throat, his skin tingling with each kiss he leaves. "You really are infuriating, d'you know that?"

"Oh, *I'm* infuriating? Did you hear anything I said?" Alex pulls back from Henry's mouth, eliciting an exasperated groan from him.

"You mean the part where you came in here sulking because you thought I fancied another man who wasn't *you*?" Henry argues back, as he quirks an eyebrow at him. "Do you need a play-by-play or have I made my feelings clear, darling?"

Alex sucks his teeth and pulls Henry in closer by his waist. "I could use a little more persuading, Your Majesty."

"You won't be getting anything from me if you keep improperly addressing me," he nudges his nose against Alex's teasingly. "It's 'Your Royal Highness'."

Alex leans in to kiss Henry, not wanting to waste any more time talking, but as soon as their lips meet, a hard knock comes at the door, causing Henry to jump backward and out of his arms. The panic on his face gives a clear and concise message: he doesn't want to be caught with Alex, for whatever reason.

"I'm going to go home, we will talk about this later," he says as checks his appearance in a wall mirror, combing his fingers through his hair.

"Well, we can just go back to my place and talk if—" Henry shakes his head, cutting Alex off with a wave.

"I promise I'm not going anywhere. I just need—I just need to get some things in order first," Henry reassures him, grabbing his hand and squeezing it. He pecks Alex on the mouth, so

sweetly, as if they've done it a hundred times before.

And then Henry is gone, leaving a slightly intoxicated Alex Claremont-Diaz a wreck inside the well-kept walls of some stranger's bedroom.

Dress

Chapter Summary

In lieu of sleep, Alex opens the Notes app on his phone and begins crafting a list of things he was sure about in his life:

- 1. Getting his degree in political science.*
- 2. Becoming a lawyer.*
- 3. Nora and June are his best friends.*
- 4. English 102 has become his favorite class.*
- 5. The tamales he orders from Acapulcos make him homesick.*
- 6. Frank Ocean releasing another album was just as possible as Wyoming voting Blue in a general election.*
- 7. Henry.*

Henry. He was sure about Henry.

or

Henry provides Alex with an NDA. Alex and Henry become intimate for the first time. it's very special and realistic, especially for Alex. two college idiots already falling in love.

Chapter Notes

thank you to phoe, aka [strwbrryfox](#), for being my beta

thank you for the support and love and comments. this is a very special chapter—it was very fun to write it.

celebrating the rumours of RWRB 2 tonight!

Alex debates not going to Monday classes; it's 7 AM, and he's snuggled deep under the covers, replaying the events of last night over and over. The moment Henry kissed him, nearly every drop of alcohol in his body disintegrated, sobering him. He remembers every

hair pull, every second their lips met, and yet—radio silence from Henry once he left that room. It's as if it was all a fever dream.

Alex can't bring himself to text Henry. It's bad enough he left him alone in that room—horny, confused and in crisis. He can't imagine what he would say to Henry now. *What could he say?*

Jerking off to a guy is one thing, developing what he thought is a platonic crush was another thing, but kissing said guy just affirmed Alex's inkling surmise: he *probably* isn't straight. And neither is Henry.

He's had his suspicions about Henry; the mysteriousness surrounding his dating life during that one phone call, the flirty texts, always trying to pay the bill when they got food together... In so many ways, it finally dawns on Alex that he and Henry were never 'just friends' and the entire time they've been building up to that explosive meeting at the party.

Alex groans, finally rolling out of bed and taking a well-needed shower. The hot water loosens the knots in his muscles but he's still plagued with anxiety threatening to purge out his mouth. He hasn't been this nervous since his mother was elected governor of Texas during his freshman year at UT Austin; yet, oddly, he feels more nervous about facing Henry. Gun-wielding right-wing fanatics pissed about losing an election to a woman? Mildly concerning. Sitting next to your TA after he shoves his tongue in your mouth at a house party the night before? Potentially vomit-inducing.

He steps out of the shower and wraps his towel around his waist. He douses his curls with his Curlsmith foaming cream, styles them messy and loose across his forehead, then moves on to shave the stubble already growing along his jaw and around his mouth. For a moment, he considers leaving it, but his urge to be presentable on the outside overpowers any desire to succumb to how he truly felt: like shit.


After brushing his teeth, he throws on a hoodie and jeans and fills his thermos with coffee. It's nearly 8:30 AM; in his head, he counts down the minutes until he has to sit next to Henry for an hour and a half. One and a half hours pretending they didn't share the greatest kiss of Alex's life. Pretending Henry didn't leave him after sprouting nonsense about needing to "get things together."

Alex practically jumps when his phone buzzes.

Nora 
hii

Fucking Nora, making him think Henry texted him.

ACD
hey

Nora 
where did you go last night?? you just disappeared. henry too

ACD

we got bored

Nora 🐱

you're a bad liar, Alejandro

Shit. Nora knew something was going on, but Alex couldn't tell her. She'd tell June, June would tell their parents, and their parents would probably accidentally mention in a CNN interview that their only son likes men to pander to the LGBTQ community. *Probably.*

ACD

it's the truth. that party was wack asf, way to show Prince Charming a good time with bad music and cheap booze

Nora 🐱

totally. y'all missed the part where we did body shots off June and played beer pong. it was funnnnn

ACD

stop i do not want to hear about people drinking off my sister's body. plus we do the same shit at every party. easy entertainment for the masses

Nora 🐱

when ur done being mysterious and better than all of us let me know 🙄

ACD

will do

Alex scoffs and shoves his phone back into his pocket. It's 8:45 AM, and it takes ten minutes to drive to school. He's going to be late and it's because Nora distracted him with her prying little texts. Fuck, why did she have to be so intuitive about the subtle changes he is going through?

It's 9:04 AM, and Alex's hand hovers over the doorknob to English 102. He knows Henry will be there, and the thought makes Alex want to die on the spot. He swallows hard, opens the door, and steps in.

Henry looks up from his English handbook, and, *god*. He has always thought Henry was handsome, but he's never looked more gorgeous than he did right at this moment. The moles around his mouth, along his jaw, and near his eyes are like a constellation Alex has never seen before; he has never truly been mesmerized by their allure until he was so close to Henry's face.

The corner of Henry's mouth twitches upwards, his eyes lighting up as they lock with Alex's. He can't help smiling back, thinking of—

"Mr. Claremont-Diaz, thank you for joining us," Professor Gupta says and gestures a hand towards the classroom. "Feel free to take a seat."

There are a few huffs and giggles throughout the room. Alex quickly takes his seat, flipping his book open to the page written on the board. *Greek Tragedies: The Three Theban Plays*. The irony almost makes him laugh out loud; Sophocles himself is surely mocking Alex for being distressed over his own modern-day tragedies.

He forces himself not to look at Henry, listening to their professor discuss one of the plays.

But then he feels Henry's knee brush against his, losing all focus. Alex's head snaps to look at Henry but he's not even looking at him. He's staring ahead, his arms crossed and a thoughtful look on his face; it's as if Alex isn't there. It's probably an accidental touch.

He tries to follow along, writing down Professor Gupta's notes about the structure of Greek tragedies:

1. **Based on a familiar event.** *Like kissing Henry.*
2. **Unity of time, space, and action.** *Kissing Henry last night in a stranger's bedroom.*
3. **The audience undergoes a catharsis.** *Alex having a sexuality crisis at 9 AM.*
4. **The protagonist is a person of noble stature.** *Henry is literally a fucking Prince.*
5. **The protagonist has a weakness that causes his downfall.** *Henry's inability to communicate, and Alex still being unable to resist him.*
6. **The audience may feel pity for the protagonist.** *Who wouldn't if they saw how completely enamored Alex was for Henry?*
7. **The protagonist gains some insight about himself and comes to understand his weakness.** *TBD.*

Alex bounces his knee nervously, unable to keep still while thinking about the parallels between his life and a Greek tragedy. He places his elbows on the table and rests his chin in the palms of his hands, and from the corner of his eye, he sees Henry's arms unfold.

Suddenly, there's a light hand on his knee, squeezing it ever so softly. Alex looks down, studying the porcelain skin of the hand. His eyes travel up to the black wool-knitted sleeve before finally making contact with a pair of empathetic blue eyes. Henry is rubbing soft circles into his knee, holding it in place and preventing Alex from bouncing it any further.

It's not a permanent solution to the fear of discovering his sexuality at 21, not even close to it. But this subtle touch so privately done beneath the table stopped his world, the racing thoughts and fears; his feelings for Henry suddenly made so much sense to him. How could Alex not fall for someone who's been so unabashed about getting to know *him*?

Henry spends the rest of class gently stroking his knee, squeezing it every so often if Alex starts to get antsy. He knows anyone around him can't see them, covered by the modesty panels of the desks and the darkness of the room. Still, he wonders if Henry would ever have the gall to hold his hand above the table and show everyone they were more than just friends.

Aren't they?

When Professor Gupta dismisses them, Henry takes his hand away and immediately starts packing up his messenger bag without so much of a glance in Alex's direction. Realizing that Henry is going to make a run for it, he tosses his notebook and textbook into his backpack and dashes after him.

He doesn't get very far down the hall and into the stairwell before Alex is on his heels, ready to tackle Henry and force him to talk to him.

"Henry!" He calls out, finally finding his voice.

Henry makes it to the bottom of the stairs and looks back up at Alex, a sheepish look on his face.

"Alex."

"Wh—why are you leaving so fast? We should talk," he says, hating how breathless he sounds.

"We will."

"When?"

Henry looks nervous. "Not here."

And there it was, rearing its ugly head in front of him: Henry didn't want whatever they had to be a public thing. Alex isn't sure if he's losing his mind; he has never been one to chase girls like this. It was humiliating, being unsure of Henry's feelings when he was wearing his heart on his sleeve.

"Okay, well, next time maybe keep your hands to yourself? I'm not really into being caressed under the table for an hour and then chasing after said carreser afterward. It's kind of shitty," Alex huffs and tries to stomp past Henry.

Henry grabs the sleeve of his hoodie before Alex can get far. "I won't touch you again if you don't want me to. But we will talk, I promise. Can I come over to your place tonight?"

He stares at Henry with defeat but nods. And just like that, he's gone, leaving Alex once again. Whatever happens tonight, Alex is going to make sure that's the last time Henry leaves him in a state of dejection.

Classes and his internship are painful to get through, but Alex doesn't find much relief once he gets home. It's almost 6 PM, he's tired and Henry hasn't replied to his text which he sent his address and availability. Still, Alex immediately goes to work in his room, starting to throw dirty clothes from the floor into his hamper. He makes his bed and straightens up his desk, making sure his space looks at least presentable if Henry comes. He isn't sure what to expect, but he isn't about to let an actual Prince see his dirty socks and boxers on the floor.

Once he's done, he hears a knock coming from the front living space. It was 6:35 PM; he told Henry to come at 6:30 PM. Alex jumps up and runs toward it, not wanting his roommate to come out and potentially see Henry and him going back to his room. Besides, his roommate is studying to be a lawyer as well—this profession tends to lack a clear standard of ethics and boundaries.

Alex opens the door and Henry's standing in front of him, his pea coat buttoned up and hands shoved deep in his pockets. Despite his frustration, Alex softens and blinks a few times, unable to fathom that Henry actually came to his apartment.

"Hello," Henry says.

"Hi."

"Are you going to invite me in or are you just going to stare at me like a halfwit?"

"I don't think you should be talking to me like that after ghosting me," Alex squints.

"Alex, let me in."

"You're late."

Henry rolls his eyes and steps past Alex, looking around at the living space with an appreciative and polite look. He almost wants to let Henry stand awkwardly in here but grows impatient and drags him by the sleeve to his room. When he closes the door behind him, he stares at it for a moment before turning around to see Henry with the same look in his eyes from last night.

Alex is the first one to move. Henry follows by cupping his face, his mouth finding Alex's immediately and with desperation. Alex kisses him back, pulling his body against his own. It's as if the tension between them had never existed; any negative emotions Alex felt disappeared once Henry was in his arms.

"I have been wanting to do this all day," Henry pulls back, a laugh escaping his full lips. "You looked so good today, did you know that?"

Henry goes in to kiss him again, but Alex pulls away, prying Henry's hands from the sides of his face.

"I'm not kissing you until you tell me why you're acting so secretive as if you can't talk to me." And Alex has to force himself to believe this because the way Henry is looking at him should be fucking illegal.

He frowns at Alex, running his fingers through his hair as he looks at the floor. "I can't really get involved with people on a whim."

"I'm not just 'people'. I didn't think we'd hook up or anything—I just don't like being ignored after being kissed like that," Alex admits.

"Kissed like what?"

“You know what. It’s kind of fucked up to kiss me and then leave me feeling confused.”

Henry sighs and sits back on Alex’s bed, removing his messenger bag from around his body and opening it. He beckons Alex over with a finger; he obliges, sitting towards the top of his bed, cross-legged. Henry gives him an unsure look before reaching into his bag and pulling out a thin-looking document in a plastic cover.

“Can you keep an open mind for me?” he asks Alex, his voice full of hope.

Alex has always been open-minded; for fucks’ sake, he isn’t sure if he can be more open-minded after making out with the Prince of *fucking* England. But Henry sounds like he did that day when they first called on the phone—and Alex is NOT going to be a coward this time.

“You’re annoying me by being all cryptic and shit. Just explain yourself now before I change my mind,” Alex scoffs.

“Okay... Please know this is just a formality, and I completely understand if you tell me to piss off after you read it. But I, erm, want to do this right. And this is the only way,” Henry cringes, handing him the document.

Alex takes it and reads the bold words on the cover silently.

NON-DISCLOSURE AGREEMENT (NDA)

He flicks his eyes up at Henry, who looks like he wants to die. A vast range of emotions are ripping through each of them, yet the silence and stillness of the room differentiates the storm brewing inside him. Alex isn’t sure if he’s pissed or relieved; pissed that Henry spent the whole day gathering paperwork for Alex to read through so he can kiss him with a clear conscience, or relieved that this offering of paperwork is a sign of continuing whatever they have going on.

“You left me to go make sure you had the paperwork ready to give you the green light so you can ‘fuck me’,” Alex states flatly.

“No! Christ, Alex, do you hear yourself? Read it,” Henry urges him on. “I said it’s a formality more than anything.”

“I’m not reading it in front of you; you do remember I’m pre-law, right? I’m not gonna skim through a fucking NDA and sign it just to get with you.”

“Of course, I remember and know that. Why are you so angry with me? If you need to talk about it, we can and will,” Henry says, his voice soft but stern.

Alex tosses the document to the side and stands up, turning his back to Henry. Part of him wants to open his door and make a show of telling Henry to get out, but another part of him is screaming to sign every dotted line on the NDA and give himself to a Prince. Neither option seems like a good idea, so he turns back towards Henry, staring at him with as much restraint as possible.

“I’m pissed because you can’t just spring this on me. It’s—it’s insulting!” he exclaims.

Henry narrows his eyes at Alex and simply states, “You’re insulted. Without discussing it or even reading its contents?”

“Yeah. I am.”

Alex recalls their conversation from a few weeks ago when Henry told him the woes of his dating troubles; specifically commenting about signing NDAs, and how signing on the dotted line wasn’t “sexy.” He imagines people before him being handed NDAs, recklessly signing them without reviewing the terms and obligations just so they can fuck—date—Henry. He isn’t one of those people; Alex understood the gravity of legal documents such as an NDA. The consequences of breaking one could amount to lawsuits, financial penalties and even criminal charges. *Was it really worth risking his freedom to get to know Henry beyond friendship?*

“You really do love to argue. You’re not even reading it because you think it’s an attack on your fragile ego,” Henry accuses.

“Ego? As if NDAs aren’t a complete slap in the face; you’re basically telling me you don’t trust me.”

“Have you given me any reason to? I’m an heir to the *fucking* throne,” Henry swears, stunning Alex.

Henry rarely swore; the way “fuck” sounds coming out of his perfect proper mouth, vowels rounded and proper, shouldn’t have turned him on so bad. Yet here he is staring down at Henry, fists clenched, unable to decide if he wanted to push him backward onto his bed or throw him out of his room.

“Could you, for once, not be so dim? I appreciate you not acknowledging my title and treating me normal, but *god*, Alex, if you feel the same way I do, you would see this as me being cautious and attempting to protect myself and preserve whatever *this* is,” Henry gestures between them.

“*This*?” Alex mimics Henry. “You essentially told me that your failed dating life has a common theme of NDAs! So, Henry, tell me: *why* would I sign a document if ‘this’ is just going to fail in your eyes?”

“If you won’t even read it, I see no point in pursuing us,” Henry clenches his jaw, his words stinging.

“Then go.”

“I will.”

“Then do it.”

“I am.”

Henry gets up, grabbing the document off the bed and shoving it into his messenger bag aggressively. Alex realizes he really is about to leave, and regret hits him immediately. He knows he was arguing just for the sake of being right, but once he sees the disappointment on Henry's face, he knows his combative stance made him the one in the wrong.

Arguments like this take Alex back to when he was no older than nine years old, rooting for his parents to come back together under one roof and just talk. His father would already be out the door, on a plane to DC, and his mother would be in the kitchen filling out paperwork, consumed with her then-campaign for a seat in Congress. Both were unwilling as ever to compromise or consider anyone else other than themselves; Alex fucking refuses to be his parents at this moment.

"Wait," he sighs as Henry opens the door. There's no response but Alex continues, "I'm sorry. God dammit, I will read the fucking thing. Just. Don't go."

He hears the door click shut, barely being able to process Henry spinning him around and practically jumping him. They're kissing frantically like they were last night, and Alex feels the anger between them dissipating with each kiss.

"Mm—what about the NDA?" he asks between kisses.

"To hell with it for now. We can talk about it later," Henry replies breathlessly. "I just want this right now. Please, can we just...?"

Alex just nods, knowing that whatever Henry is going to ask for, he will give to him.

And then Henry is pushing him back, his legs hitting the edge of the bed; he sits down, watching Henry toss his bag to the floor and begin to unbutton his coat. Alex knows where this is going; the way Henry shrugs off his coat, kicks off his shoes, and then straddles his lap is all too familiar to him. His heart is beating so fast in his chest; he knew this part would come eventually, but he didn't think it would be tonight.

But the way Henry kisses him and runs his fingers through his curls is entrancing, and Alex isn't one to shut down make-out sessions based on qualms about his first time being with another guy. He's sure Henry doesn't want to hear it either; so, Alex lets himself be kissed with no intention of stopping what could come next.

Alex feels Henry fumbling with the bottom of his hoodie, his hands sneaking underneath the hem and pressed flat onto his stomach. He gasps at his cold fingers running along his abs, tracing lines up and down until Henry pulls back and rests his forehead against his.

"Is this okay?" he asks, his hands freezing in place.

Alex can only nod again, his voice continuing to be lost. Henry leans forward to peck his mouth softly, his hands resuming and moving to his chest as Alex's hoodie scrunches up. When Henry sees this, he lifts Alex's hoodie up and over his head, exposing his bare torso. He can hardly regulate his breathing; being this close to someone who was just his friend 24 hours ago is incomprehensible, but welcome nonetheless.

“Are you nervous, love?” Henry says, half-taunting and half-genuine.

That pet name does it for him; Alex grabs Henry and brings him down with him, resuming kissing him with a determination to disprove any signs of nervousness. Alex opens his mouth to deepen their kiss and Henry’s tongue gently flicks against his, the taste of him driving him absolutely insane. When Henry pulls back for air, a small string of spit connects between their mouths; usually, Alex would be embarrassed by it, but the way Henry’s full lips look swollen after kissing him distracts him from any self-conscious thoughts.

“Can I touch you?” he asks, his voice a whisper against Alex’s mouth.

Alex nods again, which makes Henry grin as he just places his hands against Alex’s chest, teasing him. It’s clearly not the touch both of them were consenting to.

“Use your words. Open your mouth and tell me what you want.” Henry’s Royal authority was something Alex could get used to.

“Touch me.”

“Here?” Henry’s hands squeeze his shoulders.

“Lower,” Alex demands.

“Here?” His hands move to his face, his thumb stroking Alex’s bottom lip softly.

“Not even close.”

Henry drags his fingertips from his face down to Alex’s lower abdomen. “Here?”

“You’re almost there, Your Majesty.”

“It’s your Royal Highness, that nickname is so *foul*—,” Alex cuts him off with a laugh, and Henry laughs with him, his gummy smile making Alex’s heart swoon.

Their moment of laughter settles between them, their smiles becoming smaller as the room becomes so quiet Alex swears he can hear both of their hearts beating. Henry leans back, his hand lingering on Alex’s zipper as he pops open the button on his jeans. He looks up at Alex, seemingly asking for permission to continue.

Alex blinks a few times, and whispers, “Go ahead.”

Henry wastes no time; the next few minutes are hazy as he lets Henry stroke him at a pace he swears is so agonizingly slow, but feels better than any touch he’s ever experienced. When Henry brings his manicured and moisturized Royal hand up to his mouth and *spits* in it, Alex has to sit up on his elbows so he doesn’t miss one moment of what he will do next. He’s had handjobs before; unfortunately, the girls he was with often skipped any form of lubrication and just went for a dry handjob, occasionally leaving him cringing at the uncomfortable friction.

But Henry palms him with his wet hand, and, *oh*—at one point, Alex has to bring one hand up to his mouth to stop himself from moaning. He can't tear his eyes away from Henry's gaze; with the way he works his hand so perfectly until Alex is bucking his hips, he isn't sure he will last long.

"Fuck... please," Alex rasps, one hand gripping Henry's thigh.

"Please what? You want me to stop?" Henry teases.

"Fuck you."

"I don't think you're quite ready for that."

On any other day Alex would've bantered with him, but he feels himself unraveling beneath Henry's touch. When Henry sees Alex biting his lip and looking vulnerable, he uses his free hand to caress his cheek.

"Hey, it's okay. I can stop," Henry says and stops his hand.

"No, don't, please," Alex practically begs. He feels every nerve in his body electrified. "I want you to... please, just make me cum."

The words taste saccharine on his tongue. Henry nods and goes back to stroking Alex, watching as he begins to come undone. He stares up at his ceiling like he did that first day he met Henry, his legs tensing and toes curling, except this time Henry's the one getting him off.

"I'm gonna—," Alex warns, but Henry doesn't stop.

He comes hard, losing his vision for a moment as Henry mumbles "That's good" and "So good for me" until his body stops jerking beneath him. It takes Alex a moment to open his eyes back up, blood rushing up to his head and around his groin, making him a pile of mush as he comes back down.

Henry gets off him, laying next to him and letting Alex recover. His mind is racing; he never imagined in a million years he'd be in bed with a British Royal, getting jerked off to the best orgasm of his life. He wasn't even sure what he was expecting when he invited Henry over tonight.

Suddenly, it dawns on him he should be returning the favor to Henry; he doesn't want Henry to think he's one of those guys who lays back and expects to get without giving. Wordlessly, he rolls onto his side next to Henry, kissing him passionately and messily. Henry murmurs Alex's name, but he ignores it, kissing down his neck, then down over his sweater-covered chest. Beneath his lips, he feels Henry's heart skip a beat at what Alex intends to do.

"Alex," Henry says again. "You don't have to."

"Have to what? I just want to make you feel good, is that alright?"

"You don't have to... you know."

“But I want to.”

The look on Henry’s face when he says this is so starstruck, that it practically melts Alex on the inside. He looks surprised, as if he thought Alex wouldn’t be interested in touching him back. The staunch reality is the opposite; Alex has never wanted to touch someone this badly before.

“If you’re okay with it, I’d like to try. I’ve never... done *this* before. But I want you to be the first,” Alex admits.

“Okay.”

“Just tell me if it’s terrible?”

Henry looks at him in disbelief but nods anyway. He wants to get to know Henry’s body and make him feel as good—if not better—as he just felt. Alex has no clue what he’s doing but doesn’t resist the urge to lift Henry’s sweater, scooch down, and start kissing his stomach. He feels Henry’s fingers tangled in his curls, his breathing unsteady as Alex presses open-mouthed kisses against his skin.

He unbuttons Henry’s pants and pulls them off his legs, leaving his light blue plaid boxers on—for now. Alex presses a kiss against his hip, his thigh, and then the bulge in his boxers. Henry moans and Alex shushes him, not wanting his roommate to hear him about to blow Henry. After teasing him with more kisses, Alex hooks his thumbs in his boxers and Henry lifts his hips, letting Alex completely undress his lower half.

What was happening between him and Henry in his bedroom was going to inevitably and irrevocably change him *forever*. Discovering himself through being with Henry feels more right than anything. He isn’t even sure what he wants in his life anymore; he just knows he wants Henry like this: sprawled out on his bed, half-naked and wanting him back.

He puts his mouth on Henry, looking up at him with curiosity; he had given oral to girls before but it was usually in the dark where he couldn’t see their faces. His bedside lamp is on, highlighting the glow on Henry’s face as Alex begins to suck him off. His eyes are closed, mouth slightly parted, eyebrows arched as if he is in heaven. The sight of Henry like this should be illegal; yet, here Alex was relishing in the pride of causing the Prince of Wales to come undone.

The next few minutes are, well, the best of Alex’s life.

“Alex, that’s s’good,” Henry breathes out, placing a finger under Alex’s chin so he can meet his gaze once again. “M’close, so if you don’t want it in your mouth, stop.”

But Alex doesn’t care, slinging one of Henry’s legs over his shoulder and holding Henry’s hips down as he writhes beneath him. He feels Henry’s foot pointed then curling against his skin, his heel pressing into his lower back. The breathy sounds Henry makes in place of moans are encouraging; he knows these sounds and what is coming after them.

When Henry comes in his mouth, he gags a little, taken a bit by surprise. Alex has never tasted cum before, but quickly swallows it. The slightly sharp and bitter aftertaste in his mouth isn't unpleasant, but he can't feign shock when Henry pulls him up by his hair and kisses him, open-mouthed and eager. Alex remembers girls who hated being kissed after giving him blowjobs, but Henry seems to crave being kissed.

"So... that happened," Alex finally says. Henry is still coming down, so Alex grabs his boxers and shimmies them back up his legs. Henry lifts his hips to help Alex but still says nothing when Alex lies next to him.

Alex stares up at his ceiling, feeling suddenly self-conscious at Henry's silence. Minutes go by, and Alex is already replaying and memorizing their encounter to analyze later. Not knowing Henry's thoughts is driving him crazy. He forces himself to ask the pitiful question to put himself out of his mind's torment.

"Henry... Did I do something wrong?"

"What? No. Alex. I'm—god. I've imagined this so many times before, but having it actually happen was..." he trails off.

"Was what?"

"It was better than what I could have imagined."

Henry's indirect praise eases his anxiety. After a minute of further silence, Alex gets up and heads to the bathroom, wetting a washcloth and cleaning his stomach of any sticky evidence. He wrings it out and wets it again, going back to Henry and handing him the cloth to wipe any cum off his hand and body. Alex takes it back, tosses the washcloth into his hamper, lays down, and pulls Henry close into the crook of his arm. The silence is a comfortable afterglow; Henry rests his head on Alex's chest and Alex feels his eyelids growing heavy.

"Should I go home?" Henry asks.

"Hmm?"

"You're falling asleep."

"No, I'm not. I'm resting my eyes."

"Okay, well, I'm going to go home while you 'rest your eyes' and pretend you aren't completely knackered," Henry laughs and sits up.

Alex can't help but watch Henry re-dress from the corner of his eye. There was something truly mesmerizing about watching the Prince of Wales do himself up so casually. It makes Alex want to pull Henry back down to bed with him, just so he can take him apart again.

"So, after I leave, you are going to read this," Henry firmly says, reaching into his bag and holding the NDA out. "Write down any questions you have, and if we need to revise something, we will discuss it."

“Are you assigning me homework, professor?”

“No, but I’d appreciate it if you didn’t make it seem like I’m your teacher of some sort.”

“But aren’t you?” Alex teases.

“Alex.”

“Hen, I’m gonna do it,” the nickname escapes his mouth, saying it with feeling.

It’s insane to him how just within a month and a bit Henry has gone from being dickhead Henry Fox, his TA, to Prince Henry of Wales, his TA, to just Henry, his friend, to... well, Alex isn’t sure who the fuck is looking back at him at this moment. He just knows he wants *more* of Henry.

“Right.” Henry hands him the NDA. “Erm. Goodnight, Alex.”

Henry starts towards the door, and Alex can’t help himself; he softly asks, “You know you can kiss me goodnight, right?”

Henry stops and hesitates, seemingly considering his options. Alex knows he’s pushing boundaries a bit, especially considering he hasn’t even read the NDA yet. Admittedly, part of him is testing Henry to see what he actually wants from Alex; reading it in the form of a legal document seems boring. Poking and prodding a Prince to see what he can get away with is much more enticing.

He half-expects Henry to tell him to shut up and just get to reading, but instead, he steps toward Alex’s bed, leans down and softly kisses him. It’s so brief and sweet, but full of meaning; Alex has to cough and look away so Henry doesn’t see the starstruck look in his eyes. It’s reminiscent of the goodbye kiss from the night before—getting kissed by the modern-day version of Prince Charming is surely unforgettable.

“Goodnight, Henry,” he whispers.

And just like that, he’s left alone in his room, wrecked and having to face the reality he was so vehemently against earlier: the NDA. He throws his hoodie back on, and heads to the bathroom to take his contacts out. This type of reading will definitely irritate his eyes; Alex can usually tolerate his contacts for most of the day and would’ve taken them out earlier, but knew Henry was coming over that night. No one but his family and Nora get to see him in his glasses.

After popping his contacts out and putting his glasses on, Alex sits at his desk and places the NDA in front of him. Usually, he would prefer to do legal readings in his office at his internship, but at the risk of someone seeing it, he decides it’s best to do it at home.

NON-DISCLOSURE AGREEMENT (NDA)

This Non-disclosure Agreement or (“Agreement”) has been entered into on the date of:
_____ *and is by and between:*

Party Disclosing Information: Henry Fox with a mailing address of 38 Carte Avenue, New Britain, CT (“Disclosing Party”)

Party Receiving Information: Alex Claremont-Diaz
with a mailing address of 4527 Pennsylvania Avenue, New Haven, CT (“Receiving Party”)

For the purpose of preventing the unauthorized disclosure of Confidential Information as defined below. The parties agree to enter into a confidential relationship concerning the disclosure of certain proprietary and confidential information. (“Confidential Information”)

1. Confidential Information:

“Confidential Information” shall mean all information relating to His Royal Highness Prince Henry’s personal life, and daily activities, including, but not limited to, finances, technical data, medical files, past and present relationships, or information that is considered salacious to third parties. Information relating to the Royal Family is included. Any information transmitted orally is included, and the Disclosing Party must provide writing indicating that said oral communication constituted Confidential Information.

2. Exclusions from Confidential Information:

Receiving Party’s obligations under this Agreement do not extend to information that is: (a) publicly known at the time of the closure or subsequently becomes available to the public through no fault of the Receiving Party; (b) discovered or created by the Receiving Party before Disclosing Party; or (c) is disclosed by Receiving Party with Disclosing Party’s written approval.

3. Obligations of Receiving Party:

Receiving Party shall hold and maintain the Confidential Information in strictest confidence for the sole and exclusive benefit of the Disclosing Party. Receiving Party shall not, without written permission from the Disclosing Party, publish, copy, or otherwise disclose to others any Confidential Information. Any Confidential Information especially shall not be disclosed to news sources, journalists, politician affiliates nor press-related persons.

4. Time Periods:

The non-disclosure provisions shall survive the termination of this Agreement and Receiving Party’s duty to hold Confidential Information in confidence shall remain in effect until said information no longer qualifies as a trade secret or until Disclosing Party sends Receiving Party written notice releasing Receiving Party from this Agreement, whichever occurs first.

Initial of Disclosing Party: _____

Initial of Receiving Party: _____

Fuck.

Alex places his highlighter down, wondering what he's gotten himself into. This NDA was crafted to legal perfection, likely to prevent any loopholes. For a moment, he feels guilty for understanding why anyone wouldn't want to sign this; the lack of outline of what would happen if he were to break the NDA is enough motive for himself *not* to sign it. He can imagine how harrowing it must've been for people with no legal knowledge to read something like this.

He writes a few questions down, tucks the paper into the document folder, and then slips the document into his backpack. Tomorrow is Tuesday which means he won't see Henry; Alex will have to ask him to meet up or wait until Wednesday after class.

Alex takes his glasses off and places them on his bedside table. He was definitely going to need to sleep early after this insane night; from receiving the NDA to hooking up with Henry, he was exhausted. He gets into bed hoping to immediately fall asleep, but finds himself staring up at his ceiling yet again. His tendency to have therapy sessions with ceilings has got to stop.

At such a critical point in his life, Alex has never felt so uncertain about the future. Before meeting Henry, he thought he knew himself better than anyone else—besides Nora and June. Now, he is finding himself entangled with the Prince of England on a Monday night in October, and yet, it felt so right. Hooking up with Henry made more sense to him than anything he's ever done in his life.

Alex wonders how it's possible to be so uncertain of the future yet so content with the present—it didn't make any sense. Nothing fucking made sense to him anymore.

In lieu of sleep, Alex opens the Notes app on his phone and begins crafting a list of things he was sure about in his life:

1. *Getting his degree in political science.*
Becoming a lawyer.
2. *Nora and June are his best friends.*
3. *English 102 has become his favorite class.*
4. *The tamales he orders from Acapulcos make him homesick.*
5. *Frank Ocean releasing another album was just as possible as Wyoming voting Blue in a general election.*
6. *Henry.*

Henry. He was sure about Henry.

Alex closes his Notes app, falling asleep before he could elaborate any further on the sixth bullet point.

Paris

Chapter Summary

June and Alex go for a run where Alex realises he may have been hot for the lead singer of the Killers ever since he was a teenager. 😭❤️ Alex and Henry talk about the NDA, and these two doofuses come out to each other. Introduction to a semi-original character!

Chapter Notes

wow! thank you for the love on this story. I appreciate any love you give me, always.
chapter 6 coming soon ❤️

as always, thank you to phee, aka [strwbrryfox](#), for being my beta

Tuesdays are Alex's favorite day of the week; he has no class or work, so he often spends this day working out, lounging around catching up on movies and shows, or listening to music. So, when June sent him a text offering to go running together this morning, he immediately texted her back agreeing to meet up. Going on runs with June was a Claremont-Diaz special back in Texas, always having some of their most important conversations as they ran.

"Hi, Bug," he greets her when they reach their starting spot at the park.

"Good morning, Alex. Four laps, three miles? And don't punk out after the second mile like you did last time. Cardio is just as important as weight lifting," June says as she stretches her calves.

Alex rolls his eyes. June tends to prefer running, especially outdoors—she says it helps her clear her mind. His preference nowadays was lifting weights in the setting of a proper gym. Usually, he would fight her on the chosen activity for their shared workouts, but Alex's mind had barely had a quiet moment in the last three days. He could use some head-clearing, or at least organize his thoughts long enough so he can formulate a coherent text to Henry.

Henry. The British Prince of Wales, who did very bad things with him last night in his apartment. And gives him NDAs but still ends up half-naked in his bed without so much of a consideration of signing it. Alex can still feel Henry's toes curling on his back, the arch of his back causing his hips to sink away from his mouth—

“Earth to Alex! Hellooooo! Come on, dude, I want to get our run over with and then we can have a little treat afterward. I’m thinking donuts or bubble tea?” June calls over her shoulder, already several paces ahead.

“Bubble tea,” he agrees. “We can walk to that place on Chapel, then we can go to the Yale Art History Gallery up the street? We can make bets on how long it takes the security guard to follow us around in the African Art exhibit.”

“As usual, you’re a sucker for punishment.”

“Hey, if they didn’t treat me like Killmonger, I wouldn’t have to act like I’m about to snatch one of the masks and start a revolution in the surrounding suburban neighborhoods,” he says, stretching his back out.

June places her hands on her hips and rolls her eyes. “You’re such a dumbass. Enough of the *Black Panther* references—let’s get going.”

He sticks his tongue out at June and takes off, jogging briskly so he doesn’t overtake her. Alex is much taller than her at 6’0”, whereas she is 5’7”, but emanates the confidence of someone taller than anyone else in the room. June never shies away from using her voice; it’s the very thing that inspires him to constantly be involved in the world around him.

And then there’s Nora—5’2” yet the loudest person in the room. When Alex brought Nora home in high school, June gravitated to her, unable to resist her sharp wit and charm. After a few quarrels with June about who Nora was closer with, they settle on a solution of equally “sharing” her. Nora insists she loves them both equally, but Alex senses the slight edge June has over him. He once envied it, but now understands how different forms of love cannot be quantified and contrasted fairly.

Alex can’t help but wonder if he and Henry share the type of connection June and Nora have. The thought makes him feel light-headed.

June picks up her pace, completing the first lap with ease, Alex jogging a couple of feet behind her swinging ponytail.

Alex opens his phone, clicks on the album “*Wonderful Wonderful*” by The Killers and hits play. He’s loved this album since it first came out, only playing it in times when he’s needed an emotional release. There’s something melancholic yet soothing about listening to Brandon Flowers serenade him over banger after banger.

Brandon Flowers. Alex remembers sitting with June on her bed at the age of 14, her crackly laptop speakers blaring “Mr Brightside,” watching a music video of a young Brandon Flowers surrounded by uniquely painted burlesque dancers.

Alex remembers being fascinated by the burlesque dancers, their beautifully painted faces, doused in flowy tulle and vibrant colors as they disinterestedly performed for well-dressed men. Their waists were cinched tight with lace corsets, modeling expensive French lingerie, showing off their assets—he was attracted to them, of course.

But then. *But then* he remembers close-ups of Brandon Flowers, dressed in a cheap tuxedo, gold vest, and polka-dot tie. His bottom waterline is lined with black eyeliner; the beauty marks under his warm brown eyes, above his eyebrow, and along his jaw, make him just as beautiful as the dancers.

Me too, thought Alex after June said she finds the lead singer hot.

Oh. *Shit*.

Suddenly, it hits him: Henry isn't a discrepancy in his desires—his interest in Henry is correspondent to how he's always felt—attracted to both men and women.

It makes sense, the way he's gone through life with a non-partisan approach to dating. The way he loved women up-close and admired men from a distance, his straying eyes in locker rooms, the irritation he felt when people assumed he had a girlfriend. Then he remembers the tears he couldn't suppress when his mother told him the Supreme Court voted 5–4 in favor of gay marriage in *Obergefell v. Hodges* when he was 17.

Fuck. Alex really *is* thick in the head.

When Alex comes back from his thoughts, he's a whole couple of strides ahead of June. He slows down, falling behind her again, avoiding her curious eyes, full of questions. Usually during their runs, they gossip and bicker, but this time Alex stays silent, music and his thoughts preventing him from engaging with her.

As they finish off their final lap, Alex takes a deep gulp from his water bottle. June just watches him, wiping sweat from her upper lip and staring at him inquisitively.

“So, are you going to tell me what's wrong?” she finally asks. “Usually you won't shut up during our runs, but this time you've given me the bus-stranger treatment and put two AirPods in.”

“Huh? Nothing is wrong. Just stressed about work and midterms,” he lies.

June's eyebrows pinch together, clearly not believing Alex in the slightest. “You know you can talk to me, right? I know things have changed since Nora and I moved in together, but she's still our best friend, and you're still my brother. I'm worried about you... you're acting differently lately. We aren't in Texas anymore, Alex.”

Alex feels guilty for lying, but this is something he has to deal with on his own. He needs to come to terms with his sexuality before sharing it with the people who've known him his entire life.

“I know, Bug. I am okay. Really.”

“Okay.”

“I mean it.”

“I'll be ready to talk when you are,” she walks past him.

Alex hates how his sister knows he's lying.

"What—no bubble tea?" he calls out.

"You can come, but the price for a bubble tea will cost you honesty and some ass-kissing for lying to your big sister," she calls out over her shoulder and flips him off.

Alex rolls his eyes, catching up with her and thanking her for the run, but claims he needs to get home and take care of some things. June frowns, but waves as he heads home, going in the opposite direction of him.

Alex pulls out his phone and taps Henry's name on his phone.

ACD to Prince Dickhead

can you come over tonight?

The response is immediate.

Prince Dickhead

Maybe. What time do you need me?

Alex cannot stop the shit-eating grin that is plastered on his face.

ACD

you could come in an hour? if that's possible

Prince Dickhead

Office hours are for the next two hours.

Shit. He forgot Henry has office hours.

ACD

i can come to you..?

Prince Dickhead

I'll probably have students here trying to revise. I can't use office hours for personal meetings. I'll just come when I can, alright?

ACD

alright

Prince Dickhead

I'll make time for us, I promise.

Us.

There's something savory about the way Henry texts him like this. The subtle acknowledgement that they are no longer two individuals, but a pair that comes with compromises for meeting times. Henry makes him feel important and chosen. It makes Alex wonder about the last time he's ever felt intentionally picked by someone.

It's 3 hours later when Henry knocks on his door.

Alex has already re-read the NDA several times, trying to gather his thoughts like a normal person and not like a law student. When he tries to reenact sternly speaking to Henry, every word that comes out of his mouth ends up being overcast by smiles and small laughs rippling from his chest.

Fuck. He's acting like a complete idiot when he needs to be serious. A spontaneous hook-up pre-NDA signing and processing one's sexuality at the same time likely isn't a productive combination.

He checks his hair, smooths his shirt, and opens the door to see Henry, classically gorgeous and patiently awaiting Alex as usual.

"Hello." Alex will never get past that accent for as long as he lives.

"Hi, my roommate is at our internship until 7:00. So we can be as loud as we want to be, and we don't even have to hide in my room—" Alex is cut off by Henry's disbelieving stare as if he has four heads. Oh, fuck. Henry thinks he was referring to them having sex. "Oh no, I didn't mean, like, loud as in us fucking—"

Henry clamps a hand over Alex's mouth. "You really need to stop talking and invite me in first."

Alex blinks, and Henry removes his hand from his mouth. He isn't sure why he's blubbering like an idiot, but it's probably because he is technically sneaking around with Henry, who makes him feel things equivalent to being electrocuted by high-voltage. It results in sensory overload, so intense that Alex's mouth and brain disconnect, and allow his stupid heart to take over.

"Right. Yeah, come in. Let's hang out in the living room, there's more space out here anyway," he gestures to the area containing an ugly orange couch and small coffee table his mother insisted he needed. Henry's already seen it, but Alex has a feeling he will be seeing it a lot more now.

"So, I take it you read the NDA?" Henry asks as he sits down, his eyes following Alex as he does the same.

"Yeah." Read, highlighted, analyzed, and then made a mental list of a million questions about the NDA. But suddenly, the words Alex wants to say aren't coming out.

“Any thoughts?” Henry’s smile is so unsure and almost fragile as if the next words out of Alex’s mouth might shatter him.

“I think—uh. Do you want anything to drink? I have water, coffee, soda?” Alex says, stalling.

“No, thank you. Bloody hell, Alex, if you are not going to sign it, that is fine by me. I—,”

Alex cuts him off. “I want to sign it. God, I do. But what exactly am I signing up for? Am I your boyfriend? Friends with benefits? Fuck buddy? What do you want from me so much that you have to draft a legal document saying I can’t tell people about us?”

And it’s the question that’s been bothering Alex the most: what exactly happens after he signs the NDA?

“Well—erm, God forbid my Grandmother finds out, she and my family tend to love blackmailing, suing and harassing people I’ve dated in the name of ‘protecting’ me. With this, they won’t dare come after you, and if we fall out, there’s minimal risk of me being... outed,” Henry says with a vulnerability that leaves Alex with an acrid taste in his mouth. It’s very likely that someone before Alex had threatened to expose their relationship with Henry. The thought makes his blood boil.

If the Queen of England blackmails a 21-year-old law student for blowing her grandson, Alex thinks her doing so might reflect poorly upon the crown more than Henry’s gay activities as a private citizen. He isn’t sure whether to laugh or frown at the inherent shame some of the Royal family has towards queerness—surely the shame of a racist past and a wealth-driven monarchy would be more concerning than one of their Prince’s sexual proclivities? *Apparently not.*

“Hen...I would never.”

“Likewise,” he agrees. “I know you wouldn’t. But other people in the past came close to it. So.”

“You didn’t answer my question.”

Henry narrows his eyes at him. “Are you really fixated on slapping a label on it?”

“If I sign this NDA, I have questions that need answers, so I’m not making any rash decisions,” Alex says softly. “I need... reassurance.”

“Okay. Ask me anything,” Henry replies, serious. Instead of asking a question, Alex adores the mole above the corner of the right side of his mouth and actively does not think about leaning in to kiss it. “Or you can gawk at me?”

The blunt comment about Alex’s lack of focus snaps him back into their conversation. “Sorry,” he shakes his head and grabs the NDA off the coffee table. He retrieves the list of questions he jotted down the night before, but upon viewing them, he flicks up at Henry and realizes he already knows the answers to every question. Unfortunately, every question he

wrote was through the lens of a law student. The real questions he had were ones only Henry Fox could answer—not a law theory textbook.

So, he slides the list of questions back into the folder, tucking it behind the NDA. He begins compiling a list of questions in his head while picking at a piece of frayed threading that has come loose in the couch's upholstery.

From the corner of Alex's eye, he can see that Henry sighs, and then begins to undo the buttons on his coat. After taking it off, he delicately places it next to him, then moves to loosen his blandly colored grey tie, following it by unbuttoning the cuffs on his button-down shirt and rolling the sleeves up his forearms. Oh—*he's getting comfortable*, Alex realizes.

“Alex?”

Without thinking, he blurts out, “Are you gay?”

Henry leans forward, his lips pursed, and clearly suppressing the response he so badly wants to give. He taps his chin comically, then pretends to think hard about his answer to Alex's question instead.

“Hm. You know, I've never quite thought about whether or not I was gay despite all my homosexual tendencies.” He crosses his arms and stares theatrically into the distance. Then he turns back to Alex and curtly says, “Yes, Alex. I am very, very gay.”

“Oh. Nice.”

“And you?”

What about him?

“I'm... bisexual. Yeah,” he says to himself just as much as he says to Henry. The proclamation of his sexuality out loud sounds foreign on his tongue, yet the word ‘bisexual’ feels so fitting as to *what* he is.

“That makes sense. I would be a tad worried if last night I hooked up with a straight guy—though, er, I had my suspicions you wanted me long before the party.” Henry bites his lip, a faint flush of red in his cheeks.

Since the first moment you walked into our English class, he thinks.

“I've never been with a guy before you, so these feelings were very... difficult for me to grasp onto and comprehend. I may have needed a moment to stop rationalizing my interest,” Alex shrugs, continuing to pick at the fraying fabric on the couch.

“Is this why it's difficult for you to sign the NDA? Because I am the first guy you've been with?” Henry asks flatly.

“Does that bother you?”

“Should it?” Henry raises an eyebrow, seriously asking.

At this moment, Alex truly knows Henry is a genuinely good guy. He's known of people who wouldn't date virgins, not wanting to be burdened by the pressure of being the "first." He's not even a virgin himself—but Nora has informed him of the stereotypes imposed upon people discovering their sexualities, and the reluctance of the gay community to engage with people she refers to as "baby gays." Yet, here Henry is, looking at Alex with not a care in the world, which is a massive fucking turn-on.

"No," he replies confidently. "It shouldn't."

"Is that all you wanted to ask me?"

"I also wanted to ask if this means I can't talk to my sister or Nora about it? Like, in my own time, of course," Alex rambles. "I wouldn't tell them about what we do, just that I'm seeing you and maybe that I'm bi if that's allowed and okay with you of course."

Henry looks at him endearingly. "You can talk to Nora and June about us. But be... scarce of the details, perhaps?" His look changes to mild concern.

"Details? What details?" Alex asks, playing dumb.

"The details regarding what we do... in private. In the bedroom," Henry cringes at his own words.

"Oh, you mean like when you jerked me off, and I blew you?" Alex knows he's pressing his luck.

But Henry narrows his gaze at him, a muscle tensing in his jaw. His eyes are dark, full of reminiscence of the night before. Alex feels pleased with himself; he loves knowing he's causing Henry to be unable to continue their conversation without thinking of Alex in a lewd way.

"You have such a foul mouth, and for what reason? I'm going to be the respectful one and wait until you sign—I will not be tempted by these... obscene and indecent statements," Henry says with firmness, his chin jutted out.

Alex laughs, not because what Henry said is so ridiculously British and polite, but because he can genuinely say what's on his mind without the fear of offending Henry. He can't remember the last time he felt able to be the version of himself that is unfiltered, manic, and vulgar. Even more so, he adores the way Henry pretends he isn't completely smitten with Alex. It makes him want to take Henry's proper demeanor apart with his teeth.

Without another thought, he grabs a pen lying astray on the coffee table and flips the NDA open. He finds the signature portion for *Receiving Party* and promptly initials his name on the dotted line. Before Henry can utter a single word, Alex turns to him, handing the pen and document over.

"I'm in," Alex grins. "By the way, you can drop the act of pretending you aren't completely thinking of taking me on this couch right now. Isn't it exhausting pretending you don't want this sweet ass?"

“You’re impossible,” he says, signing the NDA without looking up. “Who knew law students could be so incorrigible? I find it rather interesting you’re the one trying to seduce *me*, yet yapping off at the mouth about how bad I want *you*. Just an observation.”

Alex thinks back to the day they first met when he thought Henry acted so above him. If things were different and he knew he was bi then, he probably would’ve gotten on his knees in that empty classroom and used his mouth to get back at Henry.

Henry tosses the NDA and pen on the table, then motions with his finger for Alex to come closer, casually demanding, “Come here.”

And Alex obliges, scooting closer to Henry. He sits up on the couch, tucks his legs underneath his ass, and faces him, patiently awaiting the next royal command. When Henry sits back with a smug look on his face, Alex leans in for a kiss. Henry turns his head away, the corner of his lips fighting a smile.

“Listen, Your Majesty, you’ve done enough filibustering for the night. Kiss me or I will end up submitting the most egregious essay disgracing your favorite authors—Jane Austen and Oscar Wilde are NOT safe.” Alex flicks Henry’s shoulder.

And then Henry has one arm around his waist, another hooked around the back of his left leg, pulling him into Henry’s lap. Alex barely has time to register what’s happening, except that when all is done, he’s straddling Henry. To steady himself, he grips the tops of the couch cushions on the sides of Henry’s head. He’s rendered speechless, not used to being manhandled so easily.

“What?” Henry places a finger under Alex’s chin, one of his arms still gripping him firmly in place by his waist. “I thought you wanted to be kissed. Has that changed, love?”

Love? Faintly, he tries to remember the time his roommate is supposed to come home from his shift at the Law Firm. Alex looks over his shoulder, scanning the kitchen for a dingy microwave clock reading 7:04 P.M. The firm closes at 7; the drive is at least twenty minutes so if he and Henry hurry maybe they can—

Then Henry’s using that same finger to guide Alex’s chin back towards him, the math for how much time they have fizzled out as Henry leans up to kiss him. There’s something innate about being in Henry’s lap, being kissed like—well, as if he is *delicate*, acquiescent, meant to be thrown around and dominated.

They make out for a while, slow but full of intensity. It’s somehow all very new, and yet nothing feels more comfortable than when Henry slides his arm down to his hip, grabs a handful of Alex’s ass, and pulls him even closer. Henry lets out a groan between kisses when Alex tests the waters by grinding himself down on Henry’s groin.

He pulls back, shifting his weight off Henry’s lap. “Did I hurt you? I can get off.”

“No,” Henry grabs him and pulls him back, their centers reconnecting. “Stay here.”

Alex lets go of the couch and cups the back of Henry's neck, easing his fingers into his beautiful blonde locks. He makes a mental note to tell Henry to not cut his hair anytime soon. "Just making sure I'm not crushing you. I am taller and probably have 20 pounds on you, after all," he points out.

Suddenly, Henry lets out a charming laugh. "No, you are definitely not taller than me. Heavier, maybe—but I think I can more than handle you."

When Henry goes to kiss him again, Alex leans back and takes his hands out of his impossibly soft hair. Henry peers up at him in confusion.

"I am 6'0". I am taller than you, for sure. Unless you have been slouching this entire time to appease my ego. Very generous of you, especially from someone of such stature," Alex jokes.

"I am 185 centimeters. Which is basically 6 foot and a bit," Henry informs him. "I don't think you're 6'0", dear. Someone has lied to you."

"Then we are the same height."

"If you say so."

The contrast of how fast the tone changes during their conversations and while they hook up is unlike anything Alex has ever experienced. Here he is, comfortable in Henry's lap, just having signed a legal document procuring permission to *be* in said lap, and they're arguing over who is taller. He can't imagine any other way he'd want to spend his Tuesday nights.

"Oh, you're such a little shit—," he's cut off by the sound of keys in the door.

As fast as he can, Henry shoves Alex off his lap, tossing him to the side as if he were a bag of feathers. He grabs his phone from his pocket and pretends to aimlessly scroll on a blank screen as his roommate enters the front room.

"Hey, Alex, oh—hello."

Alex presses his home button to show a time of 7:24 pm. Shit. Time flies by when he's with Henry.

"Hi, man. This is my friend, Henry," Alex gestures to a very red-faced Prince, clearly surprised. If this is going to be a secret, he needs a better poker face. There will definitely be more run-ins if they're going to fool around at Alex's apartment.

"Hi. I'm Hunter Richards, Alex's coworker and roommate." Hunter extends a hand to Henry over the coffee table.

"Henry Fox. Nice to meet you." Alex hears the clipped tone in Henry's voice. He forgets how different Henry can be when he's around people he doesn't know.

Alex rarely interacted with Hunter; he just knew they worked together as interns sometimes, and that his dad is a politician from New Jersey. When Alex was seeking places to live while crashing at Airbnbs, he overheard Hunter complaining in the break room at the firm about

how high his rent was. It was practically fate—no sweaty dorm rooms, and split rent with his own room. Alex smoothly talked his way into the extra room, but they never hung out beyond takeout dinner plans and work. It was an arrangement; as long as he didn't wake up with the dude at the foot of his bed wielding a kitchen knife, Alex was good.

Besides, Hunter is a plain white guy—fuses himself to the couch on Sundays, beer bottles scattered across the coffee table, and surrounds himself with similar-looking white guys. Those days Alex just turns his music on loud, prays they don't accidentally flip the channel to CNN or CPAC, and start using their brains in conjunction with alcohol to discuss politics. Then he'd have to get involved.

When Hunter eyes the NDA on the table, the bold lettering clearly catches his attention. "What's that?" he asks. Damn Henry and his choice of translucent plastic folders.

"Oh, nothing. I know Alex is a law student, so I thought I'd get some legal advice about a document of mine." Henry grabs the NDA and shoves it into his bag. "I appreciate his help. It's mutually beneficial since I help him with his English assignments."

"He's not a law student yet. Just pre-law," Hunter corrects Henry, a faint but smug smile plastered across his stupid, WASPy face. "But I understand the desire to obtain free legal advice—maybe you could come down to the firm with your document and talk to Attorney Luna."

Before Alex can tell him to fuck off, Henry replies with, "Hm. I think I'm all good, actually. Alex seems rather educated for someone who's pre-law."

Hunter rolls his eyes but smiles politely at Henry's reply.

"Yeah. I bet he is. Anyway, I'm spent so... I'll see you around, maybe? Alex has never brought anyone over except his sister and her girlfriend. It's nice to see a new face 'round here." he tosses his keys into a decorative bowl on the counter, then slinks to his room down the hall.

Alex just nods once, with Henry smiling painfully at Hunter's clear rudeness.

They hear a small click of a door and let out an adjacent breath of air together.

"Holy fuck. I didn't realize he's such a dick. I barely know him but he's never been that way when I brought Nora and June over," Alex whispers.

"That's probably my cue to go, anyway. We have class in the morning, and with midterms coming, I'm going to be swamped," Henry whispers back, and begins to get up.

"You know you're welcome over here anytime to do... whatever. We can sit in silence while you grade papers and crush the dreams of aspiring English lit majors," Alex sighs, pretending to swoon.

"How about—er," Henry cringes at himself but continues, "You can come over to my place, and I can make you dinner? Shaan has to fax over the NDA to the board back home, but

that'll be approved, regardless. We can just eat, talk, and... I dunno. I just want you one on one without interruptions."

"Are you asking me out?"

"Yes?"

This is new, he thinks. Maybe it's the fact that Alex doesn't date, being so deeply ingrained in hookup culture has damaged his already fragile view of dating and relationships. But there's this British dude on his couch, asking him over so he can cook him *fucking dinner* and Alex is star-struck.

"Okay... yeah. I'll come. Your equerry isn't gonna pat me down though, right? I can handle you being grabby but I draw the line at non-consensual body searches," Alex laughs nervously.

"As long as you don't try to assassinate me like—er, what's his name? Nixon? Reagan? One of those guys. Keep the firearms at home, perhaps?"

"I'll keep that in mind. Leave the assassination attempts at a minimum."

Henry grabs his jacket and bag, looking down at Alex keenly as he gets ready to leave.

"I will text you. Goodnight, Alex," he says in a low voice. Then, he leans down and gives Alex a brief kiss, his eyes not moving away from the hallway just in case Hunter decides to make an unwelcome appearance again.

"Right, um, goodnight."

Then Henry's gone, the NDA's out of his possession, and Alex has never wanted to talk so badly to someone about what the fuck is going on in his life. Being a transfer student from Texas with a total number of friends you can count on one hand fucking sucked.

One, being Nora. Two, being his sister, June. Three, being Henry, the subject of the matter he needed to discuss. The agony of not being able to tell them about Henry was torturous—he knew they'd accept him, and of course, demand the juicy details of what a Prince is like in bed. But he respects Henry's privacy and boundaries. Betraying Henry after he's opened up to him about his complicated past relationships and NDAs would surely result in the end of their friendship, surely.

And then there's that part of Alex that is greedy and wants to keep all of Henry to himself—every lewd memory, filthy retort, and clandestine encounter—kept just between the two of them.

Alex wills himself off the couch and up to his room. He throws a disgusted look in the direction of Hunter's door. Even without his Southern manners, being rude in front of guests gives him a bad impression of the guy. Hunter Richards. Richards... The name sounded a little familiar to Alex. He said his dad is a politician in Jersey after all—surely, Alex must

have heard of him before. Probably some moderate Democrat daddy who bought his kid's admission into university.

He sighs, realizing this means Henry probably shouldn't come over if Hunter has any political connections. The political world is cut-throat and desperate to expose, castrate, and ruin opponents on both sides of the aisle—cordiality has never been more dead. If the press found out about a political leader's bisexual son fooling around with a member of the British Monarchy, the headlines would be career-ending:

**SENATOR DIAZ ROYALLY BLOWS CPTPP DEAL... MEANWHILE
CLAREMONT-DIAZ SON BLOWS BRITISH ROYALTY**

At least his father's re-election campaign in California would go over seamlessly with gay youths—but his mother's career might not hold over in Texas. A few months ago, the thought of disappointing them would've made him recoil, but now, the thought of embarrassing them in the press and jeopardizing their careers almost makes him laugh.

Something is changing, he realizes.

Alex hopes it's himself.

King of My Heart

Chapter Summary

The smile on his face disappears as he thinks of the time he's lost with Henry, every goodbye a reminder of what is to come next year. It felt difficult to enjoy the time he's spending with Henry knowing it would inevitably come to an end.

Deep down, Alex hopes that goodbye never comes.

or

Henry and Alex get to know each other during a date night that turns steamy and results in them deciding what to do their English presentation on. It's a classic; can you guess what it is?

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the wait on this one, loves. I wanted to do this one right and took my time with it. Thank you for all who continue to read, comment and view my work. You're all so lovey 🧑🏻

thank you to phee, aka [strwberryfox](#), for being my beta. ❤️

“Pick *Politics and The English Language* by George Orwell from the list of short stories and poems to analyze for your midterm paper,” Henry whispers sternly to him Wednesday morning.

Alex peers over at him; there's elation curling in the corner of his smile, his lips parting as if he's unable to contain the excitement over what he just told Alex to read. He isn't sure there's anyone in the world besides Henry who would be that excited to recommend a political piece to analyze.

“Why would I pick that?” he asks.

“It’s related to your major.”

“Well, yeah, but don’t you think I should research and analyze topics outside of my major? For the sake of, I don’t know, enrichment?”

Henry rolls his eyes. “Just pick it. Pick it, not because it’s related to your major, but because I am asking you nicely. No one ever picks this from the list—and now that I have er, influence? I think before I graduate I want to hear one perspective on this essay. So here I am. Influencing you.”

The room is quiet except for a few students sitting several rows behind them. Henry and Alex came early around 8:40, noticing several students gathered outside the class, which led to Henry pulling out his faculty key and opening the door for them to go inside. Alex ignores the fact that mere minutes ago he was kissing Henry in the backseat of a private luxury car, and is now watching him unlock a university classroom. He pointedly does not acknowledge how wrong and yet, how hot he finds it. Not one bit.

Alex takes a sip of coffee from his thermos. “I’ll consider it. I could probably just do a Sylvia Plath poem. What about *Daddy*?” he suggests. “Would it creep you out if I said the word ‘daddy’ a bunch of times in an essay and also made references to German authoritarianism?”

Henry flinches. Usually, Alex’s weird jokes make him laugh, but this time Henry just awkwardly smiles, takes a shaky breath, and goes back to his stack of essays he’s grading for another one of Gupta’s classes. The classroom starts to fill up around them, and Alex can’t resist slipping his phone out and texting Henry so nobody can overhear what he’s about to ask.

ACD to Prince Dickhead

is everything ok?

Henry’s phone buzzes on the table next to him; he glances at it, then double takes as he realizes it’s from Alex. Alex watches as Henry picks up his phone, and replies quickly, then shoots a look of confusion towards Alex.

Prince Dickhead

Yes? Why are you texting me when I’m sitting next to you?

ACD

im being discreet. didn’t think you’d want me asking if you were ok out loud if the answer was that you aren’t.

He hesitates for a moment then double texts.

ACD

did i say something?

Henry reads the text and turns toward Alex to reply, but then Professor Gupta enters the class. As the class begins, Henry leans over and whispers in his ear, “Come with me to my office after class, and we will talk.”

Alex just nods, shuddering softly at the feeling of Henry’s breath on his ear, causing tingles in his spine. He really needs to learn how to just text—the unintentional shivers given from just sounds of royal baritone in public spaces should *not* be allowed. Does Henry have any idea what that voice does to him? Which is ridiculous, considering Alex has never had a thing for British accents until Henry was a prick to him that first day.

Professor Gupta reminds everyone that the midterm paper is due next week; Alex did tease Henry about doing something else but decided to write it on the piece Henry suggested to him. He trusts Henry’s opinions and suggestions—whether they be from the motivations of a TA or... his friend with benefits? The label seems most appropriate for what they *are*. Alex hasn’t decided anything beyond that yet.

Class is dismissed early with their professor reminding them to submit their midterm paper before the midterm exam. Henry wastes no time once the hallway is clear of most people; he ushers Alex along with two fingers placed around the crutch of his elbow, guiding him towards the elevator. As they enter, Henry hits the button for the fourth floor eagerly, crossing his arms and leaning back against the railing. Alex just stares, unsure if he’s about to be cussed out in private for making Sylvia Plath jokes or if Henry just wants to show him the place he has his office hours. He hopes it’s the latter.

When the elevator hits the fourth floor, Henry walks out without so much of a glance in Alex’s direction. Alex follows a few steps behind, looking around to see if anyone notices. But no one seems to notice them making their way down the hall, to his relief. Henry stops in front of a door with a wall plaque marked “**HENRY FOX 408**” and opens it, holding the door open for a very nervous Alex.

He steps in and almost scoffs at how plain the office is. There’s a small bookshelf in the corner, containing impeccably kept copies of classic books from authors he recognizes; Shelley, Wilde, Lee, Miller, Dickens, Brontë, and of course, Austen. Henry’s not a total classical snob though—he has the entire book set of the Lord of The Rings series, A Series of Unfortunate Events, and even titles of young adult fiction books he recognizes from Nora’s own collection that she’s always screaming about. Alex grins at the fact he has caught himself a bookworm.

The rest of Henry’s office is typical; a filing cabinet to the right of the bookshelf, a few office chairs, a large desk containing a laptop, and several folders containing what he assumes to be his TA work. The only thing unique about his office is a distinctive black leather chair, Queen Anne style, with nailhead trim. Finally, something that he expects a Prince would refuse to forego: comfortable seating.

Henry sits in his boujee chair, gesturing for Alex to sit in one of the normal chairs. But Alex has just about had it over Henry's cryptic silence since this morning.

"Alright, cut the bullshit. What's wrong? Was it the joke about Sylvia Plath? You know that daddy poem is weird," Alex says, still standing.

Henry pinches the bridge of his nose between two fingers. "Alex, it's not that."

"Oh," he swallows, slowly sitting down. "Then what?"

"My father died a few years ago." Alex's heart sinks to his stomach. "Whenever someone mentions fathers or any parent-related stuff, I freeze. It's sort of the reason why I'm here. Yes, being close to Bea is a bonus—but, I can't be around my family when they're so obviously fragmented, but pretend not to be," Henry laughs painfully. "It led to Bea having... issues. And me... I dunno."

Henry raps his fingers on the edge of his desk. "I asked for deferment of my military service for a few years to study abroad, to get my degree in English literature. And now that I am graduating next spring, I have to go home to a mother who invests all her time in saving endangered species, a brother who is concerned I won't find a wife—a rather laughable feat—and a grandmother who thinks my being in America is just a way for me to shag as many guys without the loom of the crown over my shoulder. So, when you brought up that poem... it just reminded me of what I have to go back to."

Alex kicks himself for resisting the urge to research Henry's Wikipedia page. It would've been useful to know his father died, so he didn't make stupid fucking jokes about fathers. For once, the consequences of *not* stalking someone on the internet are biting him in the ass.

"Hen, I'm sorry. I would have never said that if I knew. I'm a fucking asshole," Alex says, his voice thick with guilt. He clasps his hands together and rests them on the edge of his side of the desk. The advice his mother gave to him and June about researching your opponents and allies apparently fell on deaf ears.

"Don't be. Don't ever be afraid to be yourself or say what you want around me," Henry says and reaches across the desk, grasping his hand around Alex's hands, his thumb drawing faint circles around the back of his hand. "It felt good to tell you anyway. My dad was the best. Talking about him makes me feel better. Bea and I talk about it from time to time, but I try not to bring it up since she's in recovery."

"Does she know about you?"

"Yeah, she does. She's the only one in the family who really knows besides Gran," he says.

Alex watches him stroke the back of his hand, his thumb trailing up towards the cuff of his sleeve. It still blows his mind that the thumb is attached to another man, who happens to be a Prince.

Alex can't resist himself. It's been on his mind since he's gotten to know Henry. He quietly asks, "After you graduate, do you have to go back to England?"

“Yes.”

The answer is so short but full of honesty. He counts the months till the end of the spring semester in his head; November, December, January, February, March, April, May, June... There's an unfamiliar rawness in Alex's throat as he swallows. This semester is already going by so fast, and next semester likely will become his first real semester as a junior at UNH. He won't share any classes with Henry. Their connections will dwindle fast. It makes Alex wish he could go back in time, shake the bisexuality out of his younger self, and spend every moment with Henry from the day they first met. If only things were that easy.

As if Henry reads his mind, he goes on to say, “We will have to make the best of our time together, hm?”

“Yeah... but I'm sure there are tons of guys waiting for you back in England. You're sort of the living embodiment of Prince Charming,” Alex laughs nervously.

“Well, there hasn't been anyone but you, of course.” *Oh.*

“You mean since Sunday night? Good to know you've been abstinent since we've hooked up.”

“Oh, piss off. You know what I mean. I think we both know this started long before Sunday night.” Henry twists his signet ring on his pinkie, his face flushed light pink.

He isn't wrong; Alex has probably had feelings for Henry since the moment he first saw him. At least Henry acknowledges it. The fact makes him so satisfied that he wonders if Henry's office is soundproof—or if his door locks from the inside.

“Okay, well, I have my math class, and I don't want to be late so... I will see you tonight, yeah?” Alex chews on his bottom lip.

“Yes, my driver will pick you up.”

Alex nods, leaving Henry's office with a sly smile on his lips. There's a part of him that feels privileged getting to know Henry like this—discovering every singular thing that makes up the Prince of Wales. There's something special about knowing Henry's secrets but most of all, it makes Alex want to protect him. Protect him from his family, the world, and his heart. Even while telling Alex he lost one of the people he loved the most, he was still worrying about Alex changing himself to satisfy Henry.

Selfless. Even when he's hurting.

The smile on his face disappears as he thinks of the time he's lost with Henry, every goodbye a reminder of what is to come next year. It felt difficult to enjoy the time he was spending with Henry knowing it would inevitably come to an end.

Deep down, Alex hopes that goodbye never comes.

It's 5 pm and Alex can't wait to leave his internship. Luna put him on client scheduling duty today, which is essentially answering emails and calls as if he were a receptionist. Ever since he bailed on finishing the research for the case last month, Luna has been assigning him nothing but scut work. It's been so long since he's been chosen to participate in a mock trial, that Alex thinks he's forgotten what the inside of a courtroom looks like.

Alex's phone buzzes.

Prince Dickhead

What is your email?

ACD

why? stalking me, your majesty?

Prince Dickhead

Just give it to me, you cretin.

ACD

acdiaz@gmail.com

Alex waits a few minutes, then sees a notification in his inbox that Henry sent him an email and opens it.

Orwell's Essay

Henry <hwales@gmail.com> 10/21/20 5:06 pm

to Alex

Alex,

Here's a copy of George Orwell's essay about Politics and The English Language (1946). I figured you might want a free copy, and will take up my offer on thoroughly researching and analyzing this interesting piece.

Please accept this email as a way of me saying I am very excited to see you tonight. Try not to dress like a hungover college student—and I will try not to dress like an old man.

P.S. You're not allergic to dogs, are you? x

From,

Henry Fox

Attached:

Politics and The English Language (1946) (pdf)

Alex laughs and immediately replies.

Re: Orwell's Essay

Alex <acdiaz@gmail.com> 10/21/20 5:10 pm

to Henry

Henry,

You're bold for emailing me Orwell's work at my job—you're really pushing me to choose this for my midterm paper, huh? What's in it for me? Do I get to choose my compensation for obeying a Prince's orders to appease a clear fixation he has on deceased British authors?

Would it help if I showed up naked? Also—no. Not allergic to dogs. Is Shaan actually a German shepherd? I'm even more excited for tonight now.

Yours truly,

Alex

Re: Orwell's Essay

Henry <hwales@gmail.com> 10/21/20 5:16 pm

to Alex

Alex,

Show up however you want. Read the damn essay when you can. I'll be waiting for you, thinking about how you practically begged me to get you off. As a reward for doing the bare minimum, I shall be sending you home, likely weak in the knees and needing 2-3 business days to recover.

Also, Shaan is still very much a human. The dog in question is named David.

Sincerely,

Henry

Alex wastes no time packing up his desk, shooting Attorney Luna a text about an emergency he has to take care of. Henry is a demon for sending him smutty emails while he's at work, and thinks about how they're unable to have conversations about Orwell and dogs named David without each other dropping unsubtle horny hints.

When he gets home, he pops out his contacts and immediately hops into the shower, thoroughly washing his body from head to toe. He exfoliates, washes, and rinses every nook and cranny, leaving no stone unturned. After he's done, he dries off and then moisturizes. To style his hair, he puts his glasses on to see and does his usual curlsmith routine, not wanting one curl out of place. He throws on a dark blue button-down shirt, dark jeans, and his favorite pair of leather Captain boots. Alex grabs the unopened box of Santal No. 33 that Nora got him for his birthday, and spritzes it onto his neck and body. He wants to look and feel his best for whatever might happen tonight at Henry's.

But then it hits him; he's only had sex with girls. After Henry kissed him, he stayed up late that night, researching the aspects of what would be expected if he were to mess around with Henry. He briefly watched one video, read several Reddit threads, and lamely deleted his search history once he felt that he obtained enough information to not make a fool of himself in front of the Prince of England. He has diagrams; he has his experience with Henry. He wants to do this. But the many years of thinking he's straight has prevented Alex from practicing, and now, his anxiety level is ticking upwards.

It's 6:30 pm and his phone buzzes.

Prince Dickhead

My driver is waiting outside.

Fuck. Now is not the time to be having a crisis. He takes one last look in his mirror and snatches his black leather jacket hanging off the back of his door. As he slips outside, he sees Henry's driver waiting patiently curbside, with the car door open. Henry really has to leave the chivalrous tendencies back in England.

Alex hops in the backseat, which is surprisingly empty. Henry's driver closes the door and gets in the front, immediately beginning to drive away from Alex's apartment.

ACD

so you sent a chariot to come pick me up? what am I? some Cinderella story to you hmmm hmmm?

Prince Dickhead

Well, I started making dinner and then I got caught up. Apparently, Shaan got concerned when I turned the stove on by myself.

ACD

lmao so what did you make me?

Prince Dickhead

You'll see.

He rolls his eyes and opens his email, scrolling to the message containing the PDF of George Orwell's *Politics and The English Language*. It's an essay a little longer than seven pages, single-spaced. Henry sure knows how to pick assignments that can make any college student want to give up before they even start reading. Alex scrolls through the essay and notices he can see surprisingly well, it's unusual for his contacts to pick up lettering on his phone this well, something only his glasses—

Alex's hand shoots up to his face, horrified to realize he forgot to put his contacts back in after he showered. His fingers find his browline glasses perched on his nose, on display for everyone to see. *You have got to be fucking kidding me*, he thinks. Alex hates the way he looks in his glasses; and now, here he is, on his way to a Prince's house feeling more self-conscious than ever.

As the driver pulls into a gated community, panic sets in. Alex takes his glasses off, folding them and tucking them into the pocket of his leather jacket. Whatever happens, Henry will *not* be seeing him in his glasses; he would rather spend the whole night blind than be caught in them.

"Mr. Claremont-Diaz?" A posh London accent calls out to him the second he steps into a small foyer, the details fuzzy around the edges but an entry clearly for people of wealth and status.

Alex walks up to the man calling his name, squinting to find any details of the man's face. "Hi?"

"Shaan Srivastava, his Royal Highness' personal assistant. Mr. Fox is upstairs waiting for you, the fourth floor, apartment 1231. First door on your left," Shaan says, hitting the button for the elevator door. It opens almost immediately. "Have a good night, the car will be ready to take you home at any point."

"Wait, what?" Alex says as he's ushered into the elevator. "I thought—"

"Farewell, Mr. Claremont-Diaz." Shaan doesn't even look up from the device he's holding in his hand.

"Bye?"

The elevator doors shut, and Alex is speechless. It's almost as if this has become routine for Shaan. As he lamely hits what he thinks is the button for the fourth floor, he tries not to imagine the men, who were probably more experienced than him, that have ridden this elevator up to Henry's apartment. Maybe Shaan sensed Alex's inexperience, took one look, and notified Henry it wouldn't be a long night after all.

Before Alex can make a run for it, the elevator opens to the fourth floor. He finds Henry's apartment, immediately to the left as Shaan said. 1231. And he would've hesitated on knocking if it weren't for the smoky smell emanating from the cracks of the door. Alex's nervousness flips off, and adrenaline kicks in. He barges into the apartment, smoke immediately stinging his eyes. A speaker is playing a Taylor Swift song he recognizes June plays when they ride in her car together.

"Bloody fucking hell, of course, I leave an oven mitt on a burner," he hears Henry shout to himself.

Henry has his back turned, waving smoke out a window from his living room. He hasn't seemed to notice Alex's presence in his kitchen yet. He grabs a hand towel and waves at the smoke lingering in the kitchen. "Hey, Your Majesty? I think you've set your kitchen on fire."

Henry spins around, an apron still wrapped tightly around his waist. "Christ. When did you get here? And, um. Yes? And I've also got bits of ash on the roast so I believe dinner is spoiled."

Alex squints, spotting a pot on the counter containing a slab of beef covered with grayish flakes of burnt oven mitt. "Indeed," he coughs, waving more smoke away. He really wishes he wore his contacts so he could properly assess his surroundings. "Isn't it the effort that counts?"

Henry unties his apron, throwing it over the back of a long, light blue couch. An immobile pile on the couch snorts, gets up, and hobbles up to Alex. He kneels to get a closer look and sees that it's a beagle, a little chunky. The dog sniffs his hand and then licks his fingers as Alex tries to pet his head.

"That's David. And this is my apartment—I would give you the tour but honestly, I just want to sit," Henry groans and slumps backward onto the couch.

Alex follows him, squinting at Henry's face as he sits next to him. "S'alright. I wasn't that hungry anyway."

Henry peers over at him, studying Alex's eyes for a moment. "Something is different with you," he sits up, getting closer to Alex's face.

Fuck.

"I wore cologne?" Alex replies.

"Santal 33, very nice. But no, you keep squinting. Is the smoke bothering your eyes? We can leave if you want."

"Yeah, it's just the smoke, but I'll be okay," he lies.

The smoke has mostly cleared, his eyes don't sting but he'd rather not admit to forgetting his contacts and needing glasses on their first date. Even if Henry ruined dinner, Alex would

surely be the one to kill the mood by wearing his glasses and stressing over whether he looked good all night.

Henry looks Alex up and down, finally taking in his presence and realizing they are, for once, alone behind a door that isn't privy to someone walking in them.

"Come here," Henry says, offering his lap to Alex this time.

Alex wastes no time, swinging a leg over Henry's lap and sitting atop his thick thighs.

"So this is the real reason why you invited me over, huh?"

"I really did try to make dinner."

"I know..." Alex leans down and kisses him, Henry's upper lip catching on his bottom lip. He knows he shouldn't say it but he does anyway: "I've been thinking about you all day."

"Is that so?"

"Mhmm."

Henry begins to slide his hands underneath Alex's jacket, placing his hands beneath his collarbone momentarily before pushing the leather off his shoulders. Alex thinks his nerves are finally going away, melting under Henry's delicate touch.

Until Henry goes to peel off Alex's jacket and knocks his glasses out of the inner breast pocket and into Henry's lap. His leather jacket falls to the floor silently, without the contents of his pocket. He thinks the universe wants him to die because Henry reaches for the glasses before he can and holds them up to Alex.

"I'm assuming these are yours?" Henry cocks his head.

Alex thinks for a moment then shrugs, "Yeah, for reading." He goes to take them from Henry but he moves his hand away from Alex's reach.

"I've never seen you wear them in class and we have read plenty."

"You're observant," Alex points out, then reaches for his glasses again. Henry yet again moves his hand as if unsatisfied by Alex's response. "I wear contacts instead. I see fine."

"I don't think that's the truth. You've been squinting a lot—"

"Yeah, because of the smoke."

A beat of silence as they stare at each other inquisitively.

"Put them on for me," Henry suddenly demands.

"Fuck no."

"Why not?"

“Because I don’t want to.”

“Quit being difficult and put them on for me, please?”

“You are so annoying.”

“And you’re a pain in the arse.”

Alex rolls his eyes, snatches his glasses from Henry, and puts them on. “Happy?”

The thing is, as much as Alex *hates* the way he looks in his glasses, he’s relieved to have the sharpness of his eyesight back. He can see the moles on Henry’s face, the quirk in his eyebrow, the smugness in his smile—it’s as if he *knows* Alex needs his glasses more than he let on. It’s infuriating and charming all at once.

“Quite. Is that better, dear?”

“No.”

Henry’s leaning in, and starts to kiss his neck. And if Alex weren’t so caught up in how he looked, maybe he would’ve been able to overlook Henry’s tendency to talk Alex into doing whatever he wanted him to do. But he can’t overlook it, and well. He decides to fight back.

He grabs a fistful of Henry’s perfect, soft hair and yanks him away from his throat, hard enough to get a soft “oh” from him. Then Alex gets up, pushing himself off Henry, and looks down at him. Henry’s holding steady, crossing his arms, almost as if he’s challenging him back. Alex is the first one to break the silence.

“Well, since I can see now, I ought to go. Thanks for having me over,” he turns to leave.

Henry grabs his wrist, sucking his teeth before laughing. “You’re *not* doing this. Take off the glasses if you want—but I won’t have you tease me for another *fucking* second.”

Maybe it’s because Alex is stupidly gone for being talked to this way, or maybe it’s because Henry’s looking up at him with big blue eyes, innocent yet full of want, but Alex crowds between his legs and gamely strokes Henry’s cheekbone. Henry doesn’t even say another word; he doesn’t have to. His hands find Alex’s zipper, but his eyes never break away from his own. Henry tugs his jeans and boxers down a bit and presses kisses against his hips and pelvis. His mouth focuses particularly on a freckle near his hip bone. Alex’s thoughts have never been quieter.

Alex wants to close his eyes, to stare up at the ceiling, to enjoy the moment but then Henry drags his tongue along the length of his cock, batting his eyes at Alex as he does so. His knees buckle, and Henry practically holds him up, chuckling at his reaction.

“All good, love? Do you still want to leave?” he murmurs, lifting Alex’s shirt and pressing kisses against his stomach.

He shakes his head and steadies himself using Henry’s shoulder. Henry continues, “I want you in the bed—just like last time.”

“Okay.” is all Alex can hoarsely reply. He helps Henry up and follows him through a door attached to his living room. A king-sized bed awaits them—but Henry wastes little time. Henry’s mouth is on his, fingers nimbly undoing every button on his shirt. Alex does the same, except a little clumsily due to his heart beating so fast so his hands are a little shaky. Soon, they’re both naked and Henry is pushing Alex backwards onto the bed.

It’s all so intense, and hot, and Alex isn’t sure if he’s caught up in being bossed around, or if he just needs to get laid, but all that’s on his mind is *I really like this person*. Alex is propped up on his elbows, watching Henry go down on him. He sees everything—the way Henry looks between his legs, the way his lips look around him, so perfect, and Alex can’t imagine missing a moment of it.

As if Henry reads his mind, he pulls back with a soft *pop* and says, “Now, aren’t you glad I made you wear your glasses? You haven’t stopped looking at *me*. It’s rather flattering.” Henry presses a delicate kiss on Alex’s inner thigh. “Talk to me, sweetheart.”

But all he can manage is a breathy laugh, dripping with desperation. Alex wants to tell Henry to not stop, but for the first time in his life, he feels a bit shy. He’s not used to asking for things; usually, they come to him with ease. The kisses on his thigh come closer to his groin, and Alex thinks Henry might resume sucking him off, but he just kisses and kisses the same spots, his lips forcing shudders and whimpers out of Alex. It feels like he might die on the bed right there.

“Hm?” Henry leans his head on Alex’s thigh and grins up at him.

“Baby—fuck, don’t stop.” The name falls out of his mouth. Alex isn’t sure where it came from—he’s never been one to use pet names.

The grin on Henry’s face changes into something softer and more serious at Alex’s plea. For a moment, Alex thinks Henry might continue teasing him. Instead and without a word, Henry pulls him closer by his hips, lifting both of Alex’s legs onto his shoulders. It’s too fast for Alex to react, but Henry’s mouth is on him again, more eager than before.

It shouldn’t be so intimate—the sounds coming from Henry’s mouth and the moans coming from his own are *obscene*—but Henry’s lacing his fingers through Alex’s and pinning his hands to the mattress and Alex can’t think of a time where he has had sex that was *this* good, and also just as meaningful.

He comes undone, hurling a slew of curses at the ceiling, many of which make Henry let out several muffled laughs. Alex is wrecked and completely drained by the time his body stops trembling. It takes a minute for him to gather himself. Henry’s kneeling between his legs, proud of his work.

When Henry comments about how he seems to have enjoyed himself, Alex has had enough. He snaps up and cups the back of Henry’s neck and pulls him down *hard*. Henry lands on top of him, fingertips pressed into his chest hair.

“That was aggressive,” Henry states.

“You’re fine,” Alex gestures to him. “Now, let me take care of you.” He reaches down but Henry grabs his wrist and stops him.

“You don’t have to.”

There it is again—Henry said something similar the first time they hooked up a few days ago. This time, Alex isn’t sure if it’s selflessness or something else. The first blowjob must’ve been bad, it makes no sense for Henry to turn him down.

“Why won’t you let me just—“

Henry cuts him off. “I don’t want to pressure you, or make you feel like you *have* to... do things. I know I’m the first... guy. And I respect that,” he looks away. “I don’t want you to think I’m taking advantage of you.”

Oh. Alex’s heart swoons. He isn’t sure if Henry can get any more perfect. But he does, because he’s on top of Alex, naked, and willing to forego orgasm because he’s being *respectful*. He wants to punch him and kiss him all at the same time.

“You’re a dumbass,” Alex scoffs.

“Excuse me?”

“You heard me. You’re a dumbass. I want to make you feel good too. I want something mutually beneficial, not to be your pillow princess. Okay?”

Henry’s face is bright red, even in the dim room Alex can see him recoiling at the term “pillow princess.”

“Okay...”

“Lay back,” Alex instructs. He pauses. “Wait, no. I need, um, lube.”

Now it’s Alex’s turn to be embarrassed as Henry rolls off him, opens his side table drawer, and hands him a bottle of lubricant. It’s all so new, so ridiculous, and he thinks he might scare Henry off if he hesitates so he flicks the bottle open, squeezes a decent amount of lube into his palm, and then he tosses the bottle to the side. Henry’s propped a pillow under his head and is watching Alex curiously.

It starts simple. He’s jerked himself off before, so he knew he could easily get Henry off. Alex didn’t need practice or diagrams for *this* part—and by the way Henry’s writhing around, he knows he’s doing good. Alex strokes him firmly, watching silently, waiting until the right moment.

When Henry’s breathing becomes shaky, he switches hands. It’s not his dominant hand, but it’s good enough for now. Alex takes his slicked hand and gently caresses the inside of his thigh, his thumb wandering to Henry’s perineum. He sweeps his thumb over the delicate skin firmly several times and Henry trembles, eyes widening as he realizes where Alex’s thumb is.

“A-alex,” Henry gasps.

“Yeah, baby?”

But Henry doesn't reply because Alex quickly sweeps his thumb over his rim and he's coming so hard with a shocked laugh. Henry's hips buck so many times when Alex repeats the motion a few more times. It's the hottest thing he's ever witnessed—the slightest touch of his thumb in the most forbidden of places elicits such a reaction from Henry.

Besides the short breaths coming from Henry, the room is quiet. Alex lays next to him, propping himself up on an elbow to get an even closer look at his face. Henry's chest is red, his stomach is sticky and he's staring up at his ceiling with big eyes, clearly speechless. This time, he knows that silence is a good thing. Alex's method of achieving it might've been new, but the result is the same.

After a minute, Henry turns to his side to face Alex, blinking a few times before leaning in to kiss him. It's a clear “thank you for making me cum” kiss, desperate and messy, and Alex starts to laugh as Henry finally comes back to his body and laughs with him. His glasses knock into Henry's strong cheekbones a few times, making them both laugh even more when Alex pulls back and they're crooked across his face.

It's so *good*. Alex doesn't want it to end—but then his stomach growls so fucking loud and Henry starts *howling*.

“You lied when you said you weren't hungry!” he shoves at Alex's shoulder.

“Well, would we really have done what we just did if we ate something first? I had to lie—it was for both of our sakes. For good orgasms,” Alex says proudly.

“You're ridiculous. What do you want to eat,” Henry asks, rolling out of bed and heading towards a dresser. He pulls out a pair of navy sweatpants and a white t-shirt, then disappears into a connected bathroom. Alex hears the water go on and takes it as a cue to get dressed too. He grabs his underwear and jeans and puts them on.

“Um, I'll eat anything really. Though I'm not sure what you have in your fridge that is Mexican-American friendly,” he calls out. *Where is his damn shirt?* He looks around the massive bed but just finds Henry's clothes which he neatly places onto the edge of the duvet.

“I can have Shaan order something for us,” Henry suggests, walking out from the bathroom completely dressed. “What are you looking for?”

“My shirt.”

“Do you want to borrow something of mine?”

Alex considers. “Yeah, okay.” He can't really walk out of Henry's apartment without a shirt.

Henry goes to the same dresser and pulls out a familiar article of clothing—the navy blue UNH crewneck hoodie he wore when he first kissed him this past weekend. He drops it into Alex's lap and then leaves the room. Alex doesn't point that out though; he just throws it on

and sits back on Henry's bed, pulling the collar up to smell it. It smells just like a Prince would--like clean laundry and fresh-cut grass.

He looks around Henry's room; it's so *boring*. Besides the king bed, dresser, and side table, there's no other furniture. There's no way the man he's gotten to know has nothing interesting in his abode. Alex gets up and goes into the bathroom where, alas, Henry's secrets are revealed to him. On a pristine white and gold marble counter is an array of expensive French skincare, hair products, and even beauty tools. The tools are flat on a shaving kit, next to razors and a blow dryer.

What a diva, Alex thinks with a smile. He shakes his head at the thought of someone like Henry needing any of these products. He's already so handsome—the type of handsome that didn't need any upkeep or revising.

Alex peeks out of the bathroom and sees no Henry still. He looks around the bland room and spots a red-patterned hardcover book on Henry's bedside table. Upon closer inspection, he nearly bursts out laughing; it's a collector edition of *Romeo & Juliet*. Alex can't believe he's caught Henry reading Shakespeare—a closeted gay Prince reading classic tragedies for pleasure is almost *too* ironic.

"Find anything good?"

Alex jumps.

"Jesus fucking Christ, how long have you been standing there?"

"Not long. I was enticed by the view of you bent over by my bedside. It was very distracting," he shrugs. "I asked Shaan if he could order us a few steaks. It's not the roast—but it's a good replacement."

"Did you just say you were looking at my ass?"

"Quite."

"Pervert. Nice copy of *Romeo & Juliet*, by the way. I knew you were into classics but this play is kind of... outdated. And corny," Alex points out.

"Please tell me you aren't saying this to me right now—because I can't fathom that someone who described his perspective of love as 'Shakespearean' is saying *Romeo & Juliet* is 'corny'. It's hypocritical that you don't like it since—"

"Okay, I get it!" Alex says, then pauses. "You remembered I said my perspective on love is Shakespearean during our phone call over a month ago?"

Henry seems to pretend to think for a moment. "Er, yes. Only because it was so... how do you say it here in America? *Angsty*?"

"Oh, you are such a dick!" Alex shoves him from the doorway and into the living room. "I'm just saying, don't you think horny teenager hysteria is a little boring? Plus, the whole story is based on the miscommunication trope. So many people had to die, then they *both* died, and

we are supposed to feel better because it ended with their families no longer fighting?” He plops himself on the couch.

“I don’t think we are supposed to feel better. I think we are meant to learn from it—what we learn changes based on who or *what* we identify with the most. For me, I think it teaches me to let things be as they are. The consequences of not doing so can be grave. Fate, hm?” Henry follows him to the couch, sitting a foot away from him.

Alex scoots over next to him, closing the gap. “Oh, so I’m dealing with a tragic romantic here? You’re on the side of ‘*let the horny teenagers be together because the alternative is death*’?”

“In layman’s terms, yes.”

“Because of *fate*.” Alex draws out the word.

“It was fate that they were meant to be together,” Henry says flatly.

“The beginning of the play basically said it was their fate that they were going to die.”

“In life and in death, sure.”

Alex isn’t satisfied with Henry’s responses. The play always pissed him off; in a way, it reminded him of his parents and how they avoided divorce for so long. Alex thinks if they had let their marriage die, maybe June and himself would’ve been better off. Maybe they would have suffered a little less as kids. Maybe not. The fact that two people just trying to *be* together could cause so much pain to those around them didn’t seem like the consequence of denying fate. It seemed selfish.

“I still think—“

“You do realize you’ve essentially picked the source material for our project, right?” Henry raises his eyebrows.

Fuck. Alex forgot about that project; he assumed when the due date came, Henry would let him pick whatever piece of literature he wanted and play the opposing perspective regardless of what he thought. Now, they finally found something they don’t agree on and it’s the most irritating play of all time. A topic bound to earn them the eye-rolls of their classmates. Time was ticking though, and unfortunately, Henry likely was yet again going to get Alex to do this.

“As long as you don’t show up and start sobbing your way through a soliloquy, Your Majesty.”

“Oh, and *I’m* the dick? Don’t show up and start ‘crying’ once you realize my interpretation of the play is indeed the superior one, compared to your... cavalier perspective,” Henry shrugs.

Alex laughs and smacks the side of Henry’s head with a couch pillow. He’s amazed by how even in moments where they disagree, it’s soft and lighthearted. It never ventures anywhere

ugly, and the flow of conversation never stops either. He's never had a friendship quite like the one he has with Henry.

A *friend*. A friend he hooks up with and then argues with about Shakespeare afterward. A friend he wants to kiss and touch and make feel good in private. Consciously, he knows Henry and him are just having fun; but when the dust settles, Alex has moments of clarity where he wonders '*is this it?*' Is this a friendship of sex and banter and nothing more? Does Henry want something more? *Did he even want something more?*

As they eat their steaks together, Alex steals glances of Henry from the corner of his eye. He looks *good* like this—post-orgasm, dressed down, cheeks pink and hair unruly. No one in the world is seeing Henry like this right now. People before him, maybe. But no one else but him at this moment.

Alex thinks about what Henry said earlier about letting things be as they are. He probably should follow and not mess with something when it's good.

Right?

I Can See You

Chapter Summary

“D’you have any idea what you’re doing to me?” Henry finally whispers, his eyes still shut.

“Tell me,” Alex leans in, their noses brushing lightly together, centuries of Henry’s Royal genetics just at the tip of his own nose.

Alex tells Nora he's kissed Henry. Henry shares a tidbit of his feelings with Alex for the first time since hooking up--making it clear to us that they were never "just friends"... Content warning: fluffy as shit, and contains a genuine proclamation that might make your heart swell two sizes too big.

Chapter Notes

sorry for the delayed chapter update--I had a lot of fun writing this and I hope you guys stick around to see where these two take us.

Thank you, as always to my beta, aka [strwbrryfox](#) for helping me work through my story when I am stuck.

It’s snowing in October. It’s a Friday in late October, and it’s fucking *snowing*. Snow is mostly unheard of in the south, and here it was snowing in the damn fall. Alex is snuggled deep under his covers with an extra layer of warmth atop him—a blue and white quilt his Abuela crocheted for him as a gift right before he left for Connecticut. There’s at least 3 inches on the ground already, a whopping half-foot of snow still to come, and Alex has no plans to venture out into the muddy New Haven streets for anything.

Alex’s phone buzzes. Somehow he gets the feeling his plans of not going out are about to change.

Nora 

we have a problem. call me

ACD

why? are you alright??

No response. Alex anxiously awaits a reply, but none comes. After two minutes, he calls Nora.

“Hi.” she answers on the first ring.

“Is everything okay? Is June okay?” his heart is pounding so loud in his ears, his mind racing through who could be dead or if someone hurt his girls. He’s already up and out of bed, throwing on a hoodie and lacing up his timberlands.

“Yeah, everything is fine. I was wondering if you could pick me up after work today? June has the car and they’re letting us out early so she won’t be able to pick me up until an hour or two later,” Nora says, the sound of her keyboard clicking away in the background.

Alex is going to kill her. “Nora. You couldn’t text me that? You gave me a fucking heart attack for nothing?”

“Nope, I’m desk-ridden and on a deadline bookkeeping for a shit hole company who hasn’t done inventory since 2017. It’s hell, Alex. I couldn’t call you because I literally have two hours to provide my report before the snow gets worse and we close,” she sighs. “Can you please come and get me at 2? I’ll have to walk if you don’t.”

“Of course I will, but fuck, you seriously need to work on your texting skills.”

“Bite me.”

“You’d taste bad,” Alex states, kicking his timbs off.

“Not as bad as your attitude,” Nora points out.

“Woof,” he says and gets back into bed. “I’ll come get you at 2.”

Nora huffs out a sigh of relief. “Thank you, Alejandro. I’d hate to report back to June that you’d be abandoning me—the consequences of not chauffeuring me would be detrimental.”

Alex laughs. “I’m not worried at all. What’s the worst you two can do to me?” A pause. “Nora?”

“Just come get me at 2. Don’t be late.”

Nora hangs up, her tone strange and airy. Alex wonders if she’s doing okay at her new job. She’s never been one to drop their bickering so suddenly. Nora’s always been the one to get the last punch in—it’s her signature. Whether she starts or ends a fight, she’s usually victorious, but this time she surrenders easily.

Alex shrugs it off and watches the snowfall from his window until it’s time to pick her up.

The drive to Nora’s job is short, but the trip is taking longer due to the traffic and snow. Schools were dismissed early, businesses shut down for the evening, yet here people were,

driving like assholes despite the slippery conditions. Nora is lucky he loves her so much.

When Alex pulls up to Nora's job at 1:59 pm, she's waiting at the curb, hands tucked into her North Face coat, dark curls peaking out around her tiny face from underneath her wool hat. She looks adorable, cold and very relieved to see Alex. He kicks the heat up and leans over to open her car door, swinging it open for her. "Get in, your Uber driver is here."

"Spectacular. Tell me why we moved to Connecticut again? There's no Ivy League in Texas, but I'm beginning to think we should've taken our losses and suffered the impending crush of student loans instead," Nora complains as she gets into the passenger side of his car. She rubs her hands together as if she's trying to start a fire.

"I think the universe is telling us something if we all were given full rides to the same university near the best Ivy's. Particularly, I don't really care for Yale, but if I get my Law degree there, I'll be set for life. I'll buy you a car so you and June don't have to share one," Alex pats her head.

"Thank god. Your usefulness in this friendship has been near nonexistent, Alejandro. It's time to pay up," Nora teases. She grabs his phone, opening his Spotify app to pick a song for the car ride. Alex flinches and prays that Henry doesn't reply to his last text about George Orwell's essay. He may have proposed a thank you kiss to him next time they see each other if Henry continues to recommend him life-changing pieces of literature. He keeps his eyes on the road, resisting the urge to snatch his phone from her hands. If he did, he would be forced to reveal what he's hiding from her.

"Do you want to walk the rest of the way?" Alex threatens half-heartedly.

"No, because then it wouldn't give me the chance to talk to you about why you're about to shit yourself over me holding your phone. You make it so *obvious*," Nora casually says, then places his phone back in the clip holder.

Alex stills and grips his steering wheel. "Make what obvious?"

"I'm not going to drag it out of you, Alex. If you don't want to tell me, I won't force you. This whole act of playing dumb may work on June, but it doesn't work on me. So, when you are ready, let me know." Nora's hands are folded in her lap, and she's looking at him with expectant eyes.

Alex thinks of the NDA and tries to recall the terms. Then, he remembers his conversation with Henry, where he told Alex to essentially be vague when confiding in Nora and June about him. Of course, he isn't one to kiss and tell but... Nora is his best friend. And not telling the person he trusts the most in this world about the biggest thing that's ever happened to him almost feels like lying. But betraying Henry's trust and possibly violating his NDA in the process also felt wrong.

He decides to keep it brief, the words tingling on the tip of his tongue. "I kissed a guy."

His breath hitches in his throat, his heartbeat exploding in his chest simultaneously. Alex just told someone he's kissed another man—his biggest secret, his most transformative, life-

changing secret, is finally out. The world is still spinning, snow is still falling and they're parked at an agonizingly long red light in front of a Dunkin' Donuts. Nora is silent for a beat too long, her face turned out towards the window, hiding the expression on her face.

"No shit, huh? Is that all?" she finally asks, cracking a shit-eating grin.

"Nora!"

"What! Hey—was that the wrong response? Should I have said 'welcome to the club'? Sorry, I didn't think you wanted a big, warm coming out cheer for kissing a guy," Nora says with a sneer. Her response almost disappoints him.

The light turns green. Alex thinks it's now or never.

"I kissed Henry Fox, my TA," he says quietly, accelerating forward lightly.

"WHAT?! I fucking *knew* it!" Nora screeches, snapping towards him in her seat. The look on her face is something between pure elation and astounded.

Alex slams on the brakes, alarmed by Nora's loud and sudden outburst. He thinks his eardrum is probably ruptured, since he can faintly hear the sound of honking behind him. He steps off the brake and slowly drives forward, still a bit shell-shocked.

"Sorry—you kissed Henry. Your TA. Dude, you're kissing the Prince of England and you're sleeping on *telling* me. Dude... I knew you were a little gay, but like I didn't think the first person you'd have a gay experience with would be famous," she says, eyes big.

"Yeah, well, I did and I signed a fucking NDA, Nora, so can you *please* lower your voice?" Alex begs. "You can't fucking tell anyone. I'd be so fucked."

While part of him is relieved to finally tell someone, another part of him is thinking how *screwed* he would be if Henry finds out he violated his NDA already. Then, as if he's in court presenting a case, he remembers the kiss and hook-up happening before he signed the NDA. Alex has his own legal loophole—due to Henry's inability to keep his hands to himself pre-NDA, he was completely within his rights to talk to Nora without repercussions. Part of him feels guilty for finding excuses to talk—but another part of him needs his friend more than anything to *listen*.

"Alex, babes, first of all, we are in an enclosed vehicle. I highly doubt anyone can hear me. Second of all, I would *never* tell anyone. Not even June—unless you wanted me to," Nora assures him, reaching a small hand over the center console to squeeze his knee. "God. Is this you coming out to me? Hi, hello. Sorry, I wasn't prepared for the coming of age of Alex Claremont-Diaz."

"Don't make it a big deal. I just. I needed someone to talk to. I wasn't even going to say anything. Your tendency to think you know everything brought it out of me," he groans, hitting his head against the headrest.

"So, what, you used the fact you're secretly hooking up with a Prince to gag me?"

“Did it work?”

She looks forward, tapping her chin a few times as if she were in deep thought. “Nah. I mean, Henry’s super gay and you’re super hot, so it sort of makes sense that this was bound to happen.”

“Nora!” Alex sternly says again in disbelief.

“Oh, come on, Alex! He’s never gone to parties except the one you were at, apparently he never has a girlfriend and he practically was looking at you with bedroom eyes the entire night of the party! Plus, he chased after you when you went MIA. Very gay. Not very discreet—you should tell him to work on that,” Nora advises him in a chirpy voice.

Alex pulls up to the parking lot of her and June’s residence hall. He wonders how they made it home in one piece without him crashing his car into a snow drift.

“You can’t tell anyone,” Alex reiterates. “Not even June. I want to be the one who tells her. I didn’t realize I was... bi. Shit, Henry’s like the first guy I have been really interested in. I didn’t even fucking know it until he kissed me.” It’s partially the truth—though he doesn’t think Nora wants to hear the details about him getting off to Henry on day one of meeting him.

“I would never. I’m happy for you—even though I totally called something going on between you two,” Nora brags.

“Oh, shut up, Nora. You did not.”

“Hey, it’s *my job* to analyze data. I consider this to be very validating information. You, bi. Henry, gay. Me, always right,” Nora pats his shoulder as she opens the car door and swings her legs out. She takes a deep breath, then exhales, small exasperated puffs of mist escaping her mouth. “He’s also your TA, Alex. I love you and all, but be careful. The optics would not look good for anyone if this got out.”

That’s the thing—Alex hasn’t been able to stop thinking about optics and the consequences *if* this were to get out. Between the texts and kisses, his mind wanders to the night June and Alex sat their mother down and told them of their plan of moving to Connecticut. They paced back and forth in the attic of their craftsman-style home, the smell of grits and eggs seeping through the rafters and threatening their well-rehearsed proposal. Dropping the bomb over breakfast was traumatic—Alex will never forget the sound of a cast iron skillet being dropped into the sink and the look of devastation coming from the ‘Lometa Longshot.’ It was the first time they had ever seen her cry. After that, Alex promised himself that he would do whatever it takes to never see that look on her face again.

But then that first day of class happened and he was gone. Suddenly, the expectations upon his shoulders were lifted, now replaced with the well-manicured hands of a Prince. The only weight he felt upon them now was attached to Henry’s pinky finger, the gold signet ring symbolizing centuries of tradition. Alex thought he wouldn’t be able to handle the pressure that came with the NDA and Henry—he was wrong. He’s never been more wrong... and yet, in contrast, being with Henry felt so right.

“He’s barely my TA. And we aren’t dating. Goodbye, Nora,” Alex waves her off.

“Whatever you say. Drive safe, and thanks for the ride. Bye,” she waves back, shutting the door behind her. Alex waits for Nora to go into the building before releasing the breath he’s been holding. The drive home is quiet, the low hum of Frank Ocean keeping his thoughts dull until he pulls into his driveway. He stays for a moment and watches the snow fall from his car.

Before he can stop himself, he’s pulling up his messages with Henry. He smiles reading back his text about how George Orwell was an idiot and genius.

ACD

can I come over this weekend?

The reply is instant.

Prince Dickhead

Can’t. I’m going over Bea’s for the weekend. It’s her birthday this Sunday. Sorry, love.

He sighs. Then, another text.

Prince Dickhead

I’m glad you liked the essay. Shall I send over the one about the atomic bomb? Or would that be too radicalizing for you?

ACD

send it over, baby. you’re looking at the future of politics, i can use all the help I can get

Prince Dickhead

I thought you were going to be a lawyer?

ACD

politics is my birthright

Prince Dickhead

Yeah, but would you choose that over being a lawyer?

Henry’s sudden serious question causes his heart rate to pick up. Alex hates this question; it forces him to look into a future he’s fallen out of love with over time.

ACD

i don't know. my plan is to get my bachelors in political science, and then go to law school. if I work hard as a lawyer, then I can go into politics afterwards once I make connections beyond the typical "your mom and dad are politicians" nepotism bullshit. figured i can have both careers on my own terms.

Prince Dickhead

So, you're following in their footsteps. Is that something you want?

Alex types out his message, then deletes it several times. It's not a long message—but one of those messages where if you say it out loud it becomes true. Alex doesn't know if he wants this to be true yet. He settles for an *idk*, and hits reply. Then:

ACD

since when did you become my therapist?

Prince Dickhead

Since now. I'm always here to listen. I have to go now. I'm gonna lose service on the car ride.

ACD

okay, see you next week?

Prince Dickhead

Always. x

Alex is the first one to turn in his midterm, along with his midterm paper. Several students eye him curiously, likely concerned that he finished so quickly. Part of him wants to inform them he's taken the class already to ease their anxious stares, but another part of him kind of enjoys feeling like the smartest student in the class. It wasn't unusual for him to be at the top, no. But to not have to push himself to his limit to be there was a nice change of scenery.

Henry wasn't in class Monday and didn't need to be in class for the midterm today. The many benefits of being a TA—showing up is optional. He hasn't texted him much besides a good morning once today. Ever since he told Nora, part of him feels guilty. Texting Henry as if he hasn't already spilled the beans about their kiss to his best friend feels like lying. Part of him feels like he doesn't deserve to kiss him again. Then the other part of him, the louder Alex, wants to kiss him until he drowns in his lips and dies. Fuck.

It's only been a week since their date, the last time they properly touched and kissed. It feels like forever, and Alex finds himself fantasizing about getting the fucking *princess treatment* from Henry. Getting his dinners paid for, a chauffeur ready to drive him around, a spot always available for him in Henry's lap and the way he talks to Alex as if he's his only concern. But there's no label—no clarification of exclusivity. Henry could date other guys

and Alex wouldn't be entitled to know that because they're in this weird place of being together and *not* being together.

For fucks sake. He's not even two months through his semester and he's in a *situationship*. The type of relationship Alex loathes and avoids because there's always one-sided unrequited feelings, and then, well, he was usually the recipient of those feelings. Now, the shoe is on the other foot, and addressing it under these circumstances seems unfathomable. Henry would probably run for the hills if he knew—and Alex couldn't even be mad. It would be his karma for keeping his relationships strictly physical.

He gives in and texts first.

ACD

hi

An instant reply; something that Alex has come to expect.

Prince Dickhead

Hi.

ACD

where are you

Prince Dickhead

My office, grading the midterm exams from Gupta's Tuesday class.

ACD

cool

Prince Dickhead

And you?

ACD

at school. i finished my midterm. i kind of miss you.

He regrets it as soon as he sends it. But then:

Prince Dickhead

Just kind of? I miss you too. Pez is having a Halloween party this Saturday. Do you want to come? He says you can bring June and Nora.

ACD

okay, i will ask them. don't tell me your costume I want to be surprised. and i wont tell you mine.

Prince Dickhead

Can I have a hint?

The smile on his face must look so fucking stupid right now.

ACD

yeehaw

Prince Dickhead

Balls.

ACD

what lmao

Prince Dickhead

That's my hint for you: balls.

Alex laughs aloud, warranting a few looks from students passing by him. The thing is, Henry isn't even trying to be funny here. He knows Henry so well that he knows he's dead serious about his hint being "balls."

It's one of the most endearing things Alex likes about Henry; his tendency to be unintentionally funny. Yet another thing to add to his growing list about what he likes about Henry.

Nora and June immediately agree to go to Pez's Halloween party—they were invited to a different party this weekend but immediately decided to go to this one instead.

Alex is patiently waiting on their dorm couch, covering his eyes every so often at their demands. In the same minute, they're calling him over because June is begging him to help zip up the back of her bodysuit and Nora's struggling to lace up her new thigh-high boots.

When the dust settles and Alex is given permission to uncover his eyes, his girls are dolled up in their costumes. Nora is Batman, suited in a gold and black bodysuit, a utility belt snug around her hips. Her boots are tightly laced up, giving her several inches of a well-needed height boost. Her curls are pinned up behind a cut-off catwoman-esque mask.

And June is Wonder Woman. The image of his older sister in her red and blue bodysuit, gold armor wrist plates, and a matching headpiece is enough to make him grin. Her usually straight hair is curled and tucked over her shoulders, and her superhero stance is practiced

thoroughly for Instagram photos with Nora. He sneaks a photo of them when they're not looking, wanting to capture the moment of his two favorite people looking like bad bitches before they inevitably get drunk and mascara starts running and lipstick gets smudgy.

Alex is. Well. He's dressed as a cowboy, but not just any cowboy. He's wearing tight, black flare jeans, a black button-down vest with gold buttons, and a matching Stetson cowboy hat. He even bought a lasso and tied a black bandana around his neck. Most of his chest is showing, and he can't deny he's been flexing his bare arms all night. Alex is living his sexy Texas cowboy dream in Connecticut tonight.

When they arrive at Pez's frat house, it's already littered with more than a hundred drunk people. Everybody turns to look at Nora and June, of course, but he thinks he gets a few stares from a couple of girls, and even a guy or two.

An immaculately dressed Joker waves them over, dawned in a royal purple suit, face painted white and what he presumes is red lipstick smeared around his mouth. Despite the facepaint, Alex instantly recognizes Pez in this get-up—except his once-pink hair is dyed bright green, and the suit is literally covered in purple glitter. It's also hard to miss him as well when he's waving frantically at them from across the house.

"My favorite Americans! Welcome to mi casa," Pez says drunkenly. "Alexander, dear, thank god you've come. Henry looks properly bored without you."

Alex freezes and can feel June's eyes on him. Nora is grinning, clearly amused. It becomes apparent that Henry has told Pez. His guilt about telling Nora eases. "Ha. Yeah, well, where is he?"

Pez points at a corner behind them. Alex turns and spots Henry after a moment of looking. He's in a black baseball cap, striped pants, a matching button-down jersey with black socks pulled up to his knees. He looks fucking *ridiculous*. And yet, it does something to him to see Henry's ass clad in tight baseball pants.

Alex downs a drink that is passed to him on his way over. It's whiskey and lemonade; a Hemingway drink. It's ridiculous—him pursuing an English lit major while consuming a drink named after one of the literary world's most famous alcoholics.

He pulls up to Henry's side where, to his surprise, he's talking to a very pretty girl who was hidden by Henry's broad shoulders. Alex watches her play with her hair, flirting very obviously with Henry. Something he could never fault anyone for, especially considering how good Henry looks. He nudges Henry in his side and gives him a quiet "hi", then sticks his hand out to her.

"Hi, I'm Alex."

She shakes his hand then bluntly replies, "Alice." He almost bursts out laughing at how similar their names are.

"Is Henry keeping you entertained?" Alex asks with a grin. Henry's giving him a curious side-eye. He may have been drinking a bit before the party, so his inhibitions are down.

“More like I’m keeping him entertained; he’s a pretty good listener,” Alice says, sipping from a red cup.

“Oh, he’s an amazing listener.” Alex reaches down and pinches Henry’s ass. A gasp escapes Henry’s mouth, making Alex follow up with a gentle pat. “Very well-skilled with his oral abilities too, though.”

Alice, completely oblivious, smirks at Alex’s remark. Her bedroom eyes go right through Henry—his polite tendencies are such a turn-on for Alex. Seeing a girl flirt with Henry didn’t make him jealous; it amused him because no matter what, the person ending up in Henry’s bed tonight would more than likely be Alex.

“I am going to steal him for a bit though. Promise I’ll bring him back in one piece.”

Alice finally raises an eyebrow at his quip. He must be tipsier than he thought. Alex throws an arm around Henry and whisks him away towards Pez and the girls.

“You just saved me from a very one-sided conversation,” Henry says when they’re out of earshot of Alice.

Alex puts his lips to Henry’s ear and murmurs softly, “Well, I saw your ass in those pants across the room and thought you might want some better company.”

“Noted.” he laughs.

“You’re a baseball player... so this is what you meant by ‘balls,’ huh?”

“Yes. And you’re a cowboy,” he pokes the part of Alex’s skin showing beneath his vest. “Howdy?”

“Mhm. You told Pez.”

Henry’s face falls a little.

“He may have seen a text from you on my phone and I may have had to confirm it for him.”

“Which means you can’t be mad when I tell you that I told Nora,” Alex casually says. Henry stops.

For a moment, he looks a little disappointed. Then his expression softens. “No, I can’t be mad since I told someone as well. What did she say?”

“She basically ships us,” Alex shrugs.

“What does that even mean?”

“It means she likes us together,” he smirks.

“What about June?”

“She doesn’t know.”

June and Nora are taking photos with Pez, bubbling with excitement over their unintentional matching Marvel theme. He doesn’t know much about Pez, but from the way he hypes them up and insists on different poses, Alex thinks he might just belong in their little friend group. He should apologize for acting like such a prick at the party two weeks ago. Jealousy isn’t a good look on him; he acted like a dick for no reason.

Suddenly, Pez waves Alex and Henry over. “Come here, lovelies. We need to commemorate all of us being under one roof looking *this* good.”

Henry rolls his eyes and stands next to Nora. June sticks to Nora’s side and Pez slips beside June. They look adorable; happy, even. Alex holds up his phone to take the photo before Pez steps forward, wagging a finger at him.

“Uh-uh. Get your arse over here, Alexander,” Pez orders.

“Someone has to take the photo,” Alex says and attempts to take the photo again.

“Wow, has Alex finally fallen out of love with his appearance?” Nora sticks her tongue out.

“You know what—fine. Hey?” he taps the shoulder of a person dressed as a red crayon. “Can you take a photo of us please?”

The crayon agrees and takes his phone. Alex looks at Henry, who gives him the slightest nod as if to give him the “okay” to come to his side. He pulls up to Henry’s side, leans in just a bit, and smiles at his best golden boy. Then, he feels Henry’s arm around his waist, pulling him close. Alex feels cocky—Henry really shouldn’t be stroking his ego with these subtle gestures. It’s getting to his head that the Prince of England is *his*. Exclusively, too.

They take a few photos and Alex eagerly takes his phone back so he can examine the images. Henry’s hand is clearly visible on his waist—and to his disbelief, so is their height difference. He zooms in, seeing Henry’s edge over him by no more than an inch. Henry is usually sitting next to him, or he’s too distracted by his gorgeousness, so Alex completely misses the fact that Henry is, indeed, taller than him. Secretly, the fact makes his stupid heart thud. Everything he learns about Henry makes him feel *insane*.

The music is loud, and the alcohol in his system is stirring. He excuses himself to the bathroom, worried for a moment that he might be sick. He pushes through the crowd of dressed-up bodies, squinting through the red and green lights flashing in his eyes. Upon closing the door, Alex braces himself against the sink and takes a somber breath. *This is casual*. He can’t develop feelings for Henry now.

But why can’t I? he wonders.

Because he’s a fucking Prince and Alex is some dude from Texas. *Fuck*. He shakes it off and stares back at the mirror until he sees someone somewhat put together. He heads back out to the group and finds them dancing together. June and Nora are being carefree as he would

expect, and Pez is trying to get Henry to dance to the upbeat tempo of the song. Alex bumps his hip to Pez's as an introduction back into the circle.

"Alexander, please help me get this one to move a little. He just asked me what he should do with his *arms*." Pez frowns through his joker makeup.

"Haven't you taken dance classes?" Alex teases.

"Ballroom lessons didn't exactly cover this," Henry informs him.

"Loosen up; it's all in the hips. I've seen what you can do with them so why not show it off?" He then grabs Henry's hips and shakes them left to right, bursting into a fit of drunken giggles with Pez when Henry awkwardly allows himself to be moved around.

"Right. Er, gonna hit it to the loo. Can you show me where it is, Alex? Since you were just there," Henry asks with narrowed eyes.

Alex's hands slip from Henry's hips. Pez luckily has joined Nora and June in their small dance bubble, so he misses Henry's demeanor change. He nods and starts moving away from the dancing bodies and leads Henry to the bathroom he was in minutes ago. It was about time they made it to a room with a door anyway; the image of baseball player Henry just enticed him even more to kiss that perfect, smart mouth.

When they make it to the bathroom, Henry doesn't go inside; instead, he grabs Alex's wrist and pulls him into a nearby adjacent bedroom. He locks the door and sighs heavily as if he's happy to finally be alone with Alex.

So, Alex goes to kiss Henry, tilting his head so his hat doesn't bump against Henry's forehead. But Henry turns his head so his lips are out of reach of Alex's mouth. It's the first time he's ever not let Alex kiss him. It takes a few seconds for the rejection to register, the alcohol slowing his response. Alex steps back and swallows. For a moment, he thinks he made a terrible miscalculation; that Henry didn't get him alone to kiss, but to tell him to back off.

Alex opens his mouth to apologize but Henry's already pulling him back in by his waist; he tilts Alex's chin up with a finger and smiles coyly.

"You're a bit handsy tonight, love," Henry drops his hand and plays with a button on Alex's vest. "You're going to get me in trouble, looking like that, *touching* me like that... Perhaps subtlety isn't your strongest suit?"

"I was subtle. You put your arm around my waist; I thought that meant you were okay with being a little lax with the terms of the NDA. It seemed like a little PDA was okay, no?" Alex points out.

"And before that? Your hand on my arse was a risky move."

"Tons of guy friends play grab-ass and don't want to kiss each other," Alex deadpans.

Henry smiles, his eyes crinkling up like crescent moons in the corner. “That’s true. But I want to kiss you.”

“Then kiss me, *sweetheart*.”

And he does; Henry’s smiling against his lips, making Alex laugh at the same time, their teeth gently clacking together. The relief that Henry isn’t cross with him settles through his body, and his arms wrap around Henry’s neck, his cowboy hat clattering to the floor when the brims of their hats collide.

“You’re so bad—I ought to get some handcuffs for you, just to make sure you don’t misbehave,” Henry grins.

“Don’t threaten me with a good time,” Alex says and shifts, losing his footing a bit. “Oopsie.”

“Wait, have you been drinking?” Henry grabs him by the shoulders to steady him and looks at his face.

Alex thinks for a moment. “Maybe a little.”

Henry’s eyes widened in disbelief.

“You’re making advances on me while drunk, dear? Well. I expected more from you,” Henry says and playfully narrows his eyes, biting back a smile. “This explains your... debauchery.”

Alex puts on his best British accent to mimic Henry. “To be quite transparent, I would have made ‘advances’ on you while *sober* too, *dear*.”

“I would never take advantage of you while you’re drunk, love,” Henry says in a concerned tone. “Do you need to go home? Can I trust you to not start filibustering me if I cut you off from dr—“

Alex pushes Henry against the door and quickly steals a few kisses, one after the other. Henry’s mouth falls slack against his kisses, but the more Alex kisses him, Henry starts to kiss him back. When Henry’s baseball cap gets in the way, Alex flicks it off, his hair now free to be explored and pulled on by Alex’s fingers. This causes Henry to grab his face and pull him back, preventing any more kissing from happening. They’re breathing softly together, foreheads resting against each other, not speaking. It’s even more intoxicating than any drink Alex has had that night.

There’s music playing loudly in the house, yet all Alex can hear or feel is his heartbeat in his ears, his throat, the tips of his fingers.

“D’you have any idea what you’re doing to me?” Henry finally whispers, his eyes still shut.

“Tell me,” Alex leans in, their noses brushing lightly together, centuries of Henry’s Royal genetics just at the tip of his own nose.

Henry opens his mouth to answer but gets disrupted by a knocking noise next to his head. *Of course*, once they have a moment alone to finally talk, someone interrupts.

Pez's velvety British accent muffles through the door. "Hazza, Alexander, I know you two are in there! Open up."

Henry steps to his side and opens the door. Pez is standing there with sheepish eyes. His Joker makeup is smudged and hiding his true expression—but Alex imagines it's a mixture of disappointment and a bit of judgment.

"What are you two doing in 'ere? Have you lost it? Do you have any idea whose room this is?" Pez asks.

"How did you know we were here?" Henry asks, ignoring all of Pez's questions.

Pez holds up a phone, showing them what looks to be ring camera footage. In the video, Alex can see Henry pulling him by the wrist into the bedroom. It's not damning, but the image of them going into the room together leaves enough to the imagination to make Alex's heart drop to his stomach.

"Delete that. Now. I'm so bloody serious, Percy." The look on Henry's face almost makes Alex feel like he did something wrong. Or even worse, the feeling that yet again, Henry didn't want to be seen with him. He knows logically it's *not* that. But for some fucking reason, Henry's shame seeps into his subconscious—and makes Alex feel ashamed too.

"Yeah, of course, I am deleting it," Pez obliges and holds his phone up, showing Henry that he deleted the video. "You're lucky my housemates didn't get to it before I bloody did. Don't go slagging off in bedrooms here—*especially* here. The bloke who stays here is mad."

Alex looks around them and spots a thin blue line flag pinned on the wall above the bed. Several stickers from CCDL are stuck to the dresser mirror. In the corner on a pile of clothes is an ominous red hat—he doesn't need to be up close to see what the white letters spell out. Alex realizes they're in the bedroom of a person who clearly loves right-wing paraphernalia.

"Since when did we end up in Donald Trump Jr's bedr—"

Henry cuts him off. "We were just leaving. I'm taking Alex home."

"You are?"

He nods and walks past Alex and Pez. Alex picks up their hats and follows Henry out of the room, leaving Pez confused. He mouths a soft "sorry" to Pez, and as they make their way back into the party, June waves at him to get his attention.

He quickly goes up to her and whispers into her ear. "We are leaving."

June eyes him and then looks over his shoulder at Henry, who is patiently waiting by the door.

"Together."

It's not a question.

"Together," Alex says slowly.

June stares at him dumbstruck. He pats her shoulder soothingly, then turns and leaves with his Prince Charming.

That's a different crisis for a different day.

Henry is quiet the entire drive back to Alex's house. When his driver pulls up to his house, Alex turns towards Henry, expecting a goodbye kiss. Instead, Henry gets out and walks to the rear passenger door, and opens it for Alex.

Alex smirks. "So chivalrous. What ever did I do to deserve the princess treatment? Can I expect to be escorted to a ball and get courted by you all night?"

"You're a tosser. Get out of the car, Alex."

Alex obliges with a grin. They sneak into the dark house, tip-toeing into Alex's bedroom, which is pitch black as well. He goes to turn the light on but Henry's grabbing him and pulls him to his chest. It takes a second for Alex to find his lips, but when he does, Henry is laughing against his mouth.

"What's so funny?"

"You are..." he trails off.

"I'm what?" Alex asks impatiently.

"You are the absolute worst idea I've ever had."

"How flattering," he says and flicks the light on.

Henry is looking at him with a slightly pained expression, locked on Alex's. His laughter isn't genuine—it's detached, sharpened with agony of what is clearly bothering Henry. Alex reaches up and brushes his thumb along Henry's bottom lip, stopping on the corner of his mouth where his mole is.

"Hey. Baby, what's wrong?"

It's become their thing—baby. Ever since that night at Henry's apartment, it slipped from the confines of a bed and into their casual text conversation. Alex knew the second he said it, it would become habitual. He's used it in several texts, and each time, Henry is positively smitten.

"Um," Henry steps back, sitting on Alex's bed. "I don't want to go back to England."

Alex's heart nearly stops but maintains his composure. "Oh. Why?"

“You know why.”

Yes, he thinks. But I want you to say it.

“I don’t.”

“It feels like... er, something is starting here. I don’t feel quite finished, and I don’t think that will change when I get my degree. Life here is so *ordinary*. Sure, we have to hand out NDAs like a door-to-door salesperson, but I have more freedom here than I’ve ever had. Bea told me last weekend that she isn’t going home anytime soon. And I started thinking, ‘*can’t I choose to not go home too?*’ And I feel like, *maybe*, I can stay until I feel ready. I would just need my Gran’s approval and my Mum would probably support me too,” Henry takes a shaky breath. “Putting a deadline on when I’m going to go home seems rather... hasty.”

Alex’s head is spinning. “Yeah, I think that would be a bad idea. To go home. If you didn’t want to.”

His words are careful, brief, but on the inside he’s bursting with relief. It’s taking all his restraint to not jump with joy at the idea of Henry staying in America longer than a few more months. It gives them time.

“Mhm... so, maybe I could just defer going home until—“

Alex can’t contain himself any further. He pushes Henry back onto his bed and climbs on top of him. Henry doesn’t turn his head, push him back, or laugh. He just pulls Alex down by his neck and kisses him, understanding that they both *need* this right now. That talking would only lead to things they aren’t ready to say yet. Henry knows it, and Alex knows it too.

Their costumes come off, a cowboy and a ball player lying next to each other on Alex’s bedroom floor. Two staunchly different types of people coming together on one surface, yet unable to *be* together. But Henry’s here, underneath him, and nothing can beat the way that feels. Even if he can’t be out in the open with Henry, he can have him this way—and it’s enough.

For now.

Alex, much less drunk than before, presses his lips below the spot where Henry’s earlobe meets his jaw.

“So, are you ever going to tell me what I am ‘doing to you’?” Alex whispers breathlessly against his skin.

Henry stills beneath him. Alex pushes himself back to look into his glassy blue eyes.

“I think you’re changing me,” he says, rapt by his own words. “For the better.”

Alex says nothing and just kisses Henry all along his jaw, his lips, and even his forehead. Their arms and legs entangled under a warm duvet, eventually ending with Alex rolling over and Henry following, his broad shoulders encasing Alex.

Me too, he thinks before he falls asleep.

Cruel Summer

Chapter Summary

He has never felt his way about anyone. Not even close. The mere idea of expanding their relationship beyond what it is now terrifies Alex. The possibility of rejection, the potential for a catastrophic ending that blows up in his face keeps him from pursuing anything beyond physicality. It keeps him safe; it puts him in a bubble where only he can pop it from the inside. Alex would never get hurt that way. He'd never lose anything if he kept just himself within the parameters of that bubble.

Yet, here he is, actually considering what June says. Maybe it's selfish and crazy, but when she puts it so simply... it makes him think maybe he and Henry could have more.

or

Breakfast, mario party, 20 questions, maybe Alex preparing to bottom for Henry one day and a very boyfriend-esque move where Henry reads Romeo and Juliet to Alex.

Chapter Notes

so sorry for this late update--I appreciate all the love the last chapter has gotten. 5,000 views and almost 200 kudos; you guys are AMAZING. this chapter is fluffy, filthy and gives you the alex and henry banter we all love so much <3

thank you once again to my beta phee strwbrryfox

chapter nine soon to come! x

Alex doesn't wake up alone.

It's Saturday morning. An arm is slung over Alex's body, holding him close to an unknown bare chest pressed against his back; his ass is settled firmly against what he recognizes to be morning wood.

Henry never went home.

He can't remember much of last night, except getting into bed naked with Henry and kissing a little. His head hurts a bit, suffering from the effects of drinking so much on an empty stomach. Groggily, he sits up and yawns, the acrid taste of the night before bitter inside his

mouth. He groans as he realizes he also slept in his contacts; a dangerous mistake that he hasn't made since moving to Connecticut.

Alex tiptoes to his bathroom, slipping on a pair of sweatpants lying on the floor. He pops his contacts out and tosses them out, cursing himself for falling asleep with them in. To ease the irritation, he soothes his eyes with a few drops of artificial tears, blinking rapidly up at his ceiling as he does so. Since his eyes are suffering from his blunder, he slips his glasses on; he'll have to go without contacts for a few days.

Fuck. What happened last night?

Alex sneaks back into bed, being as quiet as possible. Henry's still asleep, peaks of sunshine coming from his window and defining the natural blonde highlights in his impeccable hair. He can't roll over without moving too much, so he faces Henry and tries to rack his brain for the last events that happened before he fell asleep.

"Hello, you."

Henry's eyes are still shut. His face is squished against one of Alex's pillows, his mouth parted open slightly and showing off his two incredibly British front teeth.

"Hi," he says back softly.

Despite the greeting, Henry doesn't say anything further; Alex suspects him to be a sleep-talker, which causes him to grin. *This could be interesting.*

"Did you have a nice night in my bed, Your Majesty?"

"Uh huh," escapes Henry's mouth, his lips barely moving.

"Is Alex the best writer and most handsome guy you have ever laid eyes on?"

Silence. So, Henry's a bad communicator in his sleep as well. Alex decides to test his communication skills—even if it's on an incapacitated individual.

"We really need to work on your tendency to ghost me," Alex whispers, tucking his hand underneath his face. "Especially since I know I'm a catch and you *want* me. It's a shit situation but I think we could make it work."

Still nothing.

"Also, I have done my research and there are still things I want to try that we haven't done yet. Like I want to," Alex hesitates. Even if Henry isn't hearing him, saying it out loud is still hard. He decides to go with the version of what he wants that leaves something up to imagination: "I want you bent on all fours in bed so I could put my fingers and mouth to good fucking use."

"Is that so?"

Alex snaps up. Henry's eyes have opened now, and they're trained on Alex's face. He's not angry; but looks amused at Alex's confession of wanting to do foul things to him. It's not a lie either; Alex knows little about the ins and outs of pleasuring another man, but he would let Henry talk him into doing just about *anything*. The need to be convinced would probably be unnecessary.

Henry must've pretended to be asleep to hear his proclamation from his filthy mouth. They're still staring at each other, Henry's heavy-lidded eyes fighting the urge to drift back to sleep. Despite this, he props himself up on his elbow, looking more and more like a Greek God every day. Alex has to think of a way out of this before his mouth gets him into even more trouble.

"As per usual, you're unable to properly respond and I have left you—what's the word you love to use—'gagged'? By the way," Henry says, reaching up to finger Alex's glasses. "I told you I really like these, correct? You should wear them more."

Alex shoves Henry's hand away playfully. "You did. Were you seriously pretending to be asleep?"

Henry yawns. "Nope. Your tendency to never stop talking woke me up," he continues, "Although, I think my subconscious heard you admitting to *research*... please tell me you haven't been bloody indulging in gay erotica when you could have just asked me."

Alex rolls over to his back. The thought of Henry seeing the plethora of questions he googled the past few weeks... he would rather die on the spot than let him see it. One's Google search history is not for the faint of heart—the search engine is designed to be used without decorum and a moral compass.

"I'll pass," Alex says, looking up at his ceiling.

Henry scoots over, stretching a long arm across his chest, a singular finger tracing lines across one of his pecs. He rests his head on Alex's shoulder and takes a long, drawn-out sigh. Physical touch is his love language—not that Henry knows that.

"I would never make you do anything you didn't want to do. But, if you don't tell me what you want, then we are at an impasse," he says with a small smile.

This is all so new to Alex. He's not used to talking about these things *before* they happen; everything comes so naturally to him in the heat of the moment. Sitting down and telling partners what he wants has never been necessary—being willing to please and give at the expense of his own pleasure is what Alex knows best. Henry is just a deviation from his usual hook-ups; a feat he fucking loves and a type of partner Alex can't believe he ever went without.

"I want..." Alex trails off.

"You want...?" Henry repeats.

"I don't know!" he groans. "What do you want?"

Henry stiffens a little, his voice caught in his throat. “Maybe breakfast? I’d fancy a cup of tea.”

“No tea, but I can give you breakfast,” Alex says and turns his head to look at him, relieved at the subject change.

“Also, erm. Maybe some clothes? I’d rather not dress in a costume from the night before.”

Alex huffs and rolls away from Henry and heads to his dresser. He gives Henry a once-over, looking at his broad shoulders, calculating if one of his tops and bottoms would fit someone of his stature. Alex settles on an oversized hoodie and loose sweatpants—he knows he could easily give Henry back the UNH sweatshirt he borrowed from last time. Deliberately, he justifies keeping the loaned sweatshirt far in the back of his dresser and his mind.

While Alex gathers their discarded costumes from his bedroom floor—to Henry’s amusement, Alex insists on turning around while he dresses to respect his privacy—he hears, “Oh my goodness. What’s this?”

Curiously, Alex peers over his shoulder. To his horror, Henry’s holding the copy of *Romeo & Juliet* Alex stored on his bedside table. The shape of the grin on his face matches the upturned crescents that his eyes have turned into. Alex didn’t plan for Henry to stay over; he would’ve tidied his room and hidden the copy of the book in a drawer. Unfortunately, spontaneity is becoming their newfound specialty.

“That is. That is,” Alex repeats, unsure of what proper response he should give. “That is... my copy of the book for our project.” He keeps it simple and indisputable.

“Yeah, but I texted you after our date a few weeks ago and asked if you needed to borrow my copy for research. You said no, that you already read it and didn’t need a copy,” Henry says with a knowing smile.

“Yeah, because I already had the book,” he crosses his arms, lying through his teeth.

The unfortunate reality is that Alex didn’t really remember much about the book. Despite reading it his freshman year of high school for his English class, his memory of its contents dissipated with time. He chalked it up to being 14 and having a nonchalant attitude towards things he didn’t immediately understand; one of those things being classic literature. It’s not that Alex thought he was too good for vintage books—more that, for some unknown reason, he struggled to read them.

Henry seems to muse upon the possibility that Alex already owned the book. He’s looking down at Alex’s copy, a perfect blonde eyebrow quirked above silvery blue eyes. Alex knows he should be defending himself better, but *fuck*, everything about Henry is so distracting. Even in Alex’s oversized clothes, Henry looks immaculate; just completely *fuckable*—

Much to Alex’s relief, Henry finally says, “We should read it together sometime. It would help us develop a good volley for the presentation.”

Alex nods reluctantly in agreement. He tried reading it on his own but grappled with Shakespeare's prose, constantly rereading lines of dialogue yet retaining so little. He wouldn't mind an English lit major's help. The benefits of having his TA at his expense any time he needed is better than what he could have imagined—the physical aspect is also a bonus.

They pad down to the kitchen, with Alex going in first to check to see if Hunter is home. His car is missing from the driveway, meaning they could eat in peace without the judgment of his roommate. Alex grabs two bowls and sets one down in front of Henry. Without a word, he grabs his box of fruit loops and pours some into each of their bowls, topping them off with milk. Henry eyes him curiously and even seems embarrassed at Alex waiting on him.

Alex sits down and immediately starts eating, but pauses once he notices Henry not eating.

"Oh shit," he mumbles through a mouth of loops. "What, do you not like cereal? Are you lactose intolerant? Do you want—"

Henry places a hand on Alex's knee. "No. None of that. Thank you, love, though. I just, er, found it... endearing." His pale cheeks are bright pink. "I'm just not used to people assuming things I want and being *right*. I've not had cereal in *years*. It's not typically included in a full English breakfast."

"Uh, yeah? Does England not have cereal? That's fucking weird," Alex snorts.

"No, we do. Just not the sugary kind bound to cause diabetic shock," Henry says and spoons a mouthful of fruit loops into his mouth. "Spectacular."

Alex bites back a laugh. "Okay, dude, we need to get you the full American experience. No more of this British shit—eat a corn dog for breakfast. Commit tax fraud. Maybe do a little illegal gun purchasing."

"Dude?" Henry says with an American accent.

"Sorry, *sir*."

Henry looks at him with a bit of darkness in his eyes. Alex just gulps down his bite of cereal and awaits Henry's response.

"You're a miscreant," Henry declares with his chin jutting out.

"You like it," Alex points out.

He half-expects Henry to diss him again.

"You're right," he admits. "I do."

It's been over a day since Alex and Henry left together at the party, and June hasn't said anything in the group chat, nor has she texted him individually. The silence is deafening for

him; in lieu of her texts, his thoughts replace them. Which, to no surprise, sends him into an hours-long spiral over whether or not his only sister hates him for keeping a secret from her.

June's been his rock ever since he could remember; he's always gone to her for advice, venting, or just plain friendship. Wherever she is, anyone should expect to find Alex nearby. Nora may be his partner in crime, but June is his other half. Keeping secrets goes against the very foundation their relationship was built upon: trust.

After mulling over whether or not to reach out first, Alex decides to invite Nora and June over to hang out via a text in their group chat.

ACD

Mario party at mine? i miss y'all

Nora 😈

are you gonna actually stick around or can we expect to be abandoned part way thru? 🤪

Ouch. He deserved that one.

June 💕

We are coming. See you soon dipshit

Alex cracks a smile—the first time he's felt a semblance of happiness since Henry left the day before. Maybe he will come out of the get-together unscathed.

Or maybe not.

"Hello, my baby brother, who tells Nora of his relationships now and not me," June grimaces at him as she steps through his front door and walks right past him.

"Which is because you didn't pick her up from work that one day and I needed someone to talk to," Alex concedes.

Nora pats his shoulder. "I wouldn't deflect responsibility here. She's in a bit of a bad mood."

"Is Hunter home?" June asks.

"No. He's at his father's house for the time being. Something about 'helping him garner support from undecided *urban* voters in the state'—whatever that fucking means," he scoffs.

"Pandering to the voters who will never vote for a guy who hates them and wants to run their state like a Bass Pro Shop?" June offers.

"Probably," Alex agrees.

June and Nora plop themselves on the couch after moving the coffee table to the side. He notices they are wearing matching red and black plaid pajama bottoms—likely from the set of pajamas that was given to all of them by Alex and June’s mother last Christmas. They were all so relieved to receive socks and pjs as gifts, legitimately relieved to be alleviated from going out and buying these small necessities. The memory makes him a bit homesick.

“So, I take it you hate me now, Bug,” he states as he kneels in front of the TV and his Nintendo Switch. He absentmindedly gathers two sets of joycons and a controller for Nora.

June says nothing.

“I think it’s good you met someone, Alex. We were worried for a bit that the move here was... a detriment to your social life,” Nora says, breaking the silence.

Alex keeps his back to them, setting up *Mario Party Superstars*.

Nora continues, “So, it’s in both of your best interests to—“

June cuts in. “Did you think I’d love you any less? Or—or that I’d disapprove of your choices? Is that why you kept it from me?”

“Or maybe I wanted privacy? Or the fact that I signed a fucking NDA, June. I can’t just tell you these things on the fly. He’s a *prince*. I’m nobody—this *thing*? It’s not what you think,” Alex replies a little harshly.

“Okay, well I didn’t know you signed an NDA because you didn’t tell me. So, can you explain it to me because ever since you’ve met him you’re changing, and I’m worried that you’re going to get hurt,” June says.

Alex makes it a point not to look at her. He can’t look her in the eye and play into the concept that he and Henry are heading towards disaster, not for one second.

“It’s just... he’s not my boyfriend.”

“But you want him to be,” Nora interrupts.

“No.”

“Alex—“

“He’s my friend, June. He’s my TA, he’s... he’s leaving next year. Probably after graduation. Or eventually. This is all so fucking new, we’ve barely been a thing for a few weeks and I feel like I’m thinking six steps ahead instead of focusing on putting one foot in front of the other,” Alex admits, falling back into the space between Nora and June’s knees. “I don’t think he wants a boyfriend, and I’ve never been that type either so we are just having fun, and that’s okay. It’s a physical thing.”

June observes him with a look of pity but also tenderness. She reaches her hand out and strokes the back of his hair. Then, with no warning, she smacks the back of his head.

“Ow!” he cries out.

“Are you stupid? *Do you hear yourself?* You’re clearly crazy about him! I mean, for god sake, Alex. Let yourself have something more than just surface-level relationships!” June waves her arms out in front of her.

“Okay, you’re just confusing me now; do you want me to leave things with him so I don’t get hurt, or do you want me to indulge with him so I can experience better relationships?” Alex asks, rubbing the back of his head.

“I’m saying—I don’t know what you guys have talked about. But you should lay everything out on the table. And, for once, it’s okay to not play things safe. I think the possibility of losing him would hurt you less than if you just maintained a physical relationship,” she states as if it’s the easiest thing in the world.

And Alex wants to so fucking bad; he has never felt his way about anyone. Not even close. The mere idea of expanding their relationship beyond what it is now *terrifies* Alex. The possibility of rejection, the potential for a catastrophic ending that blows up in his face keeps him from pursuing anything beyond physicality. It keeps him safe; it puts him in a bubble where only he can pop it from the inside. Alex would never get hurt that way. He’d never lose anything if he kept just himself within the parameters of that bubble.

Yet, here he is, actually considering what June says. Maybe it’s selfish and crazy, but when she puts it so simply... it makes him think maybe he and Henry could have more.

“Can we *please* play *Mario Party*?” Nora whines. “I love y’all both. But I want to steal some stars and play mini-games and cause June to hate me for the rest of the night. I miss that. Please can we forget Alex’s gayness for just a little?”

“I am bisexual, thank you.” Alex prays for self-implosion on the spot.

“Let’s not pretend you’re completely obsessed with Henry and will ever be over his dick,” Nora shrugs, picking up her controller.

“Nora!” June and Alex cry out in unison.

“Remember—I analyze data. 89% chance these bisexual tendencies will result in Alex chasing dick for many years after Henry.”

Alex smacks her with a pillow and starts their game of *Mario Party*. While they insult each other and bicker over the minigames, Alex makes a mental list of questions and topics he wants to discuss with Henry. The list has existed in the back of his mind since they first met; it was just a matter of time before the list got too long, and then Henry would be gone.

June is right. It was time to lay everything out on the table with Henry.

“Hey, when is your birthday?” Alex asks the next night.

Alex came over to Henry's apartment Sunday night under the guise of another date entailing food and a back-and-forth reading of R&J. They argued over what to eat during their phone call with Alex insisting on picking up Acapulco's and bringing it over. After promising Henry he would like their food, he caves and lets Alex bring several containers of his favorite foods over: tamales, an order of carne asada, and two arroz con pollo plates.

"Twelfth of March, 1997," Henry answers with a mouthful of beans, which his British ass ended up loving to no surprise. "Why?"

"I dunno. I just know you're twenty-two, and wanted to know you a little better," Alex replies honestly. "I was born in March too."

"When is your birthday?"

"March 27th, 1998."

Henry nods and slowly chews as if he's expecting Alex to drop another question. They're both sitting cross-legged on Henry's obnoxiously fancy couch, feeding bits of chicken and steak to David, who has been begging and whining nonstop.

Alex thinks it's now or never.

"Hey. Wanna play a game?"

"Isn't that what the little *Saw* doll asks before slaughtering everyone in the place?"

"What? No. Though I kind of love that you, a Brit, have seen those movies," Alex teases him playfully.

Henry wacks his thigh. "Piss off. We do have a television and cinema in England, you know. But what game, love?"

Alex fucking loves when Henry calls him these pet names like "love" or "dear." He isn't sure if there are motives behind the terms of endearment, but the nicknames are more welcome than his own name.

"Twenty questions."

"Pardon?"

"Twenty Questions," Alex repeats. "Like, the game you play when you want to get to know somebody?"

Henry stares at him, his lips parted as if he's trying to find the words to say. Alex adores the mole above the corner of the right side of his mouth and actively isn't thinking about leaning in to kiss it. The look of complete confusion is adorable, to say the least.

"Why not just ask me what you need to ask? It's a bit redundant to turn this into a game, no?" Henry asks.

The realization hits Alex. “It’s just a game—oh. You don’t know how to play, do you? I can teach you.” It makes sense a Prince wouldn’t be at hand to play a game commonly used by horny teenagers. But still, Alex had already compiled a list of questions in his head even before they hooked up. He wonders if Henry has done the same.

After a moment of hesitation, Henry says, “Erm, alright. Teach me.”

Alex grins, his heart thudding in his chest. “Okay. It’s easy; we take turns asking each other questions and we have to answer truthfully. It’s over after we’ve each answered 20 questions, back and forth, got it?”

“What’s the purpose of the quantity of 20 questions?”

“What? There is none. It’s an arbitrary number, don’t look too closely at it.”

“Also, shouldn’t it be ‘40 questions’ instead?” Henry says, biting his bottom lip to suppress a laugh. What a little shit.

“Fuck off and stop stalling. I’ll go first—what is... your favorite movie?”

“*In The Mood For Love*,” he answers quickly.

Alex makes a mental note to see it.

“I’ve never seen it,” he admits. Henry’s eyes widen and he shakes his head in disappointment.

“You Americans are so uncultured. It is only the swooniest movie of all time.”

“Swooniest? Is that even a word?”

“Yes, of course it is,” Henry grins.

“Right. Your turn.”

“Hmm... What’s your favorite book?”

“*Children of Blood and Bone* by Tomi Adeyemi.”

“Why?”

“You can’t ask follow-up questions in succession. You gotta wait your turn and by then, you probably want to ask something else anyway,” Alex says and takes a bite of a pork tamale.

Henry furrows his eyebrows. “That’s ridiculous.”

“Uh-huh. Have you ever been on Grindr?”

“I tried it once... it wasn’t a very successful venture,” he says, blushing a little. “So, why is that book your favorite?”

Of course Henry wants to know about his favorite book and why he loves the damn thing. The genuine interest in the book Alex loves—he has no idea why it makes him swallow his food slowly and think of an answer that is both true and will impress Henry.

“I like it because it’s a fantasy story about the reality of what people face every day; I don’t like when we create fantasy worlds where we can just escape, and run away from the real problems. The story addresses political issues, power, racism... the duties we have to ourselves over our family,” Alex says his last reason with a thick voice that he knows only Henry understands.

Henry’s eyes soften. “I’d sure like to read it sometime.” He reaches over and squeezes Alex’s hand.

“Ha, maybe. My turn,” Alex urges on, slipping his hand from Henry’s and tapping his chin as if he was thinking. He thinks about asking Henry his favorite color to break the tension but chokes it down. For once, he decides to not choke on his own goals. “What political party do you support back home in the UK?”

“Mm, I don’t know if I should tell you that. The Royal family isn’t allowed to vote, and because I’m here on a student visa, I don’t vote here either. It’s considered ‘unbecoming’ to favor one party over the other,” Henry explains. “The goal is to not influence political leanings to the public.”

“Okay, but it’s just me,” Alex assures him, looking around. “I’m legally sworn to secrecy, remember?”

He stares at Alex for a beat.

“Okay... if I could vote, I would vote Labour,” Henry says with an edge of hesitation.

“God, I probably would have guessed that. I can’t believe I wasted a question on that,” he groans. Of course, Henry is left-leaning—he wouldn’t expect anything different from someone as caring and well-informed as Henry is.

“That’s your fault. Tell anyone and I’ll have your head,” Henry casually threatens.

Henry asks Alex what his favorite TV show is—Love Island or Drag Race, but he can’t decide. He asks who his favorite gay icon is—Freddie Mercury, what his worst subject was in school—science, specifically physics, and when was the last time he cried. Alex is honest; he confesses the last time he cried was at the end of *La La Land*. He was alone in his dorm room without witnesses, sobbing over his laptop and microwaved popcorn kernels. Unsurprisingly, Henry is positively smitten by this answer.

Alex goes personal: he asks Henry when he lost his virginity, which earns him a slight side eye. Henry replies seventeen with a soft voice, one that lets Alex know not to ask any follow-up questions. To lighten the mood, he asks why Henry named his dog David, who was his gay awakening, and if he ever wants to get married. His replies make Alex feel valid in his choice of liking Henry; he says David is named after Bowie, that Colin Firth from the lake scene in the cinematic version of *Pride and Prejudice* was his gay awakening, and that he

hasn't thought of what he wants regarding marriage because he isn't sure he will ever get married. The last answer makes Alex squirm a little.

When it gets to Henry's next turn, he stares at Alex with a questioning look. "Now, my turn. How about... why do you *really* want to play this game?"

Alex freezes. "I..." A million excuses flick through his head, but none are good. He settles on the truth. "I want to know where this is going. I want to know what your expectations are for us."

Henry avoids his eyes. There's a tense silence for a minute, but it feels like forever. Finally, he looks up and scoots to Alex, his mouth seemingly considering his words over and over before he lets out an exasperated sigh.

"I don't want to mislead you. I don't know where '*this*' is going. I've not a damn clue what is in the cards for us, but I know I—I can't stop thinking about you. I have not had a moment of bloody peace since you first spoke to me," Henry admits. "The way you never seem to stop talking, the way you talk back to me, the way you tell me you miss me... the way you looked the first night we..."

"The way I looked the first night we..."

"The way you looked when I touched you the first time. Just you staring at me, the way you sounded, it was... unforgettable," he shakes his head with a soft laugh.

Alex feels crazy. How could an answer of such uncertainty make him fall even harder for Henry? Maybe the admittance of Henry's equally undisturbed thoughts of Alex, the mutual infatuation just furthering his delusion that they could be something *more*. It's painful, but gratifying all at once.

Without thinking, he leans in and kisses Henry square on the mouth. He tastes like rice and beans, but Alex doesn't care. When he goes to pull back, Henry grabs the back of his neck and pulls him back in. It's intense, and Alex is no longer able to be coy about what he wants.

"It's your turn for a question, love," Henry whispers once they break apart.

"What do you want to do to me?" Alex inquires with a smirk.

"What *don't* I want to do to you? You surprised me last time, and ever since then I haven't stopped thinking about doing the same to your arse," he says in a low voice.

Alex feels every pulse of blood going through his veins and into his heart. "Really?"

Henry's cute smile and crescent eyes appear across his face. "Yes, of course, which is why," he turns Alex around then says, "I'd like to try something with you. Can you do that for me?"

"Try what? You're not going to murder me and then cannibalize me to David, are you?"

Henry stares at him unmoved. "Do you usually crack jokes at the mention of any form of intimacy? Count that as my eighth question, by the way."

Alex has never had intimate encounters with anyone but Henry.

“Not usually. Fuck—I’m sure whatever you are about to suggest I’ve never...” Henry cuts him off with a kiss.

“I don’t care; I’m happy to be the first if you’ll let me. I promise I’ll stop at any time, love.”

Alex blinks and then nods slowly. *Oh*, he thinks, *we are really doing this*. He sees the look on Alex’s face and gives him a reassuring peck on the mouth. Alex isn’t sure if he’s in over his head, or if planning sexual encounters is too much, but he wants this. Any way Henry wants him, Alex wants him too.

They quietly trod into Henry’s bedroom, where he closes the door behind them. June’s voice is in his head telling him he can have more blends into the background of his already loud thoughts—because right now *enough* is more palpable than *more*.

Henry comes up behind him, feeling even taller than usual when he tilts Alex’s head up and gives him a deep kiss.

“You still owe me twelve questions,” Henry informs him with a small smile. He briskly lifts Alex’s shirt over his head, and Alex turns around and copies him, undoing sturdy buttons until he finds the soft dip of his waist and slides his hand up to it.

“Are we going to fuck tonight?” Alex asks, seriously.

“No,” he replies. Oddly, his answer stings a bit. When he sees Alex looking a little insecure, he adds, “Not tonight.”

“Right. We gotta figure out the dynamics first,” Alex says with a shrug.

“By seeing what you like—which is what we are doing.” Henry grabs Alex’s pants and boxers and pulls them off. Alex reaches for him, but instead, Henry stops his hands and guides him to sit down on the bed. “Turn over.”

Alex complies; Henry’s hand slips down Alex’s front and finds his cock, giving it a stroke and a squeeze before taking his hand back. With the sound of a bottle being opened behind him, Henry pushes him down onto his hands and knees and spreads his thighs a bit.

“I’m going to finger you, love,” Henry says delicately despite the filthiness of the act. “Tell me if it’s too much, okay?”

“Right—got it.”

Before Alex could say anything else, he feels Henry delicately circling his rim, then slipping the tip of his finger inside him. Alex lets out a soft moan then sucks in a breath. It’s so fucking new, but hot all at once.

“Breathe,” Henry instructs softly.

And he does, letting out the air inside him, to which Henry, in response, slides his whole finger into his ass. Alex grips the comforter, closing his eyes shut. He's so fucking hard that he can't resist reaching down and touching himself to alleviate the throbbing sensation in his cock. When he does this, Henry chuckles and pulls his finger out, causing Alex to make a sound he's never made before.

"Don't stop." His voice almost sounds whiney. Alex clears his throat. "Don't fucking stop doing that," he orders Henry.

"Doing what?"

"*That.*"

"Say it."

Henry isn't letting him get off easily.

Alex can't believe his next words would ever come out of his mouth. "Don't stop fingering me."

And Henry doesn't; it's quick and at times he feels a bit self-conscious, but Henry makes him come with the curl of one, then two fingers inside him. It's the most erotic moment of his life when he looks over his shoulder and sees Henry fisting his cock while looking down at his digits deep inside Alex. Nothing prepares him for the moment when Henry finds his sweet spot, his fingertips brushing against the center of what every nerve-ending in his body is connected to.

"Come for me, love."

That's all it takes—one authoritative but coaxing sentence is all it takes to send him over the edge. Alex passes out for a moment; considering how much his body jolted and trembled through his orgasm, consciousness is unattainable. When he comes to, Henry's wiping down his lower back and squeezing his shoulder tenderly.

"You did so good," Henry showers him with praise and kisses along his shoulder blades and the back of his neck.

Alex still hasn't said a word. He may have lost his voice while moaning the entire time. His dreams of being a lawyer are shattering at the hands of a prince giving him prostate orgasms. Americans truly do fall at the command of the English in the end.

"You still owe eleven more questions."

Eleven more questions? Alex can hardly process a thought right now. Two minutes go by in a comfortable silence. Henry's tracing lines down Alex's back, not pushing him to answer or talk.

Finally, Alex manages to breathe out, "I asked the last one—so technically *you owe me* twelve questions."

“I’ll go first then,” Henry says, running his fingers through Alex’s curls. “Did you like that?”

“It was alright.”

Henry shoves his shoulder and lets out a delighted laugh at Alex’s clear discount of the obvious. It was the most powerful orgasm Henry had given him yet—nothing he’d ever experienced before could compare.

When Alex finally regains his strength, they both redress and make their way out to the living room. David is patiently waiting on the couch with a peculiar look on his face, one that says “I know what you were doing in there.” As a reward, Alex feeds him a lukewarm piece of chicken. The beagle licks his chops and gratefully accepts it; he adds a few scratches behind his ears to make up for the sudden abandonment.

Henry’s standing behind him with his arms tucked behind his back, watching the interaction wordlessly. Then, his broad shoulders relax and his arms fall to his side, revealing the red and gold cover of his pristine copy of *Romeo & Juliet*. Alex narrows his eyes at the sight, remembering Henry’s offer to read the book with him days prior.

“So, since you’ve clearly lost your tongue and communication abilities tonight, I figured I can... read with you,” Henry suggests, a charming twinkle in his eyes matching the sincerity in his baritone accent.

Despite the charm and allure, Alex is struck with a familiar feeling of worthlessness he hasn’t felt in a long while. Suddenly, he’s stark back to day one when he first met Henry; feelings of insecurity invade Alex’s ego and demeanor. “Maybe another time? I don’t think I’d be a good listener right now and—“

“I don’t mind if you passively listen—“

“Mm, not really sure I can do even that,” Alex cuts Henry off with a clipped tone. Why can’t he just leave it be for tonight?

Henry tries to start again. “I just think—“

“I said no, Henry.”

“And I’m saying we are reading this damned book whether you bloody like it or not,” Henry firmly states, with no waver in his voice. It sounds like his voice raised up an octave, but Alex isn’t too sure.

Alex swallows and looks up at Henry; they stare at each other like a couple who’s just gotten into their first fight and are unsure things will work out. Usually, when someone gets short with him, he matches the energy and gives it back, but not with Henry. He never wants to cross that line with him—he’s seen it before with his parents. Once you cross it, there’s no going back. The simmering frustration that was building up in him flickers out, and his eyes soften at the Brit glaring down at him with a clenched jaw.

“Alright.”

“Alright?”

“Isn’t that what I said?” Alex rolls his eyes.

“Don’t get smart-mouthed with me, Alex,” Henry says, the irritation clear in his voice. He sits next to Alex, leaning back against the armrest on the couch. “You knew we would have to read it eventually.”

“I could’ve read it on my own,” Alex pulls at his fingers.

“But you haven’t so now we are deduced to paired readings,” Henry says and flips the book open.

Alex slumps back and frowns. Before he can argue further with him, Henry starts to read without a moment of hesitation.

“Prologue: *Two households, both alike in dignity,*

In fair Verona, where we lay our scene,

From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,

Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.

From forth the fatal loins of these two foes

A pair of star-cross’d lovers take their life;

Whose misadventured piteous overthrows

Do with their death bury their parents’ strife.

The fearful passage of their death-mark’d love,

And the continuance of their parents’ rage,

Which, but their children’s end, nought could remove,

Is now the two hours’ traffic of our stage;

The which if you with patient ears attend,

What here shall miss, our toil shall strive to mend.”

Alex stops him once he turns the page. “Isn’t that the whole story right there? Can’t we call it a day?”

“No—are you going to be disruptive the entire time?” Henry rubs his temples.

“...no.”

“Good. Now where w—oh, hello.”

Alex scoots over, spreads Henry’s legs, and sits back between his thighs. He rests his back against Henry’s chest and looks up at a very puzzled Henry. Alex gestures for him to continue as if the closeness is not something to be distracted by. In response, Henry kisses his cheek and bumps his glasses a bit, which makes both of them laugh.

The entire time he holds the book in one hand and then uses his free arm to hold Alex against his body. It’s impressive how well he continues to read, changing his voice to signify the change of characters. His British accent becomes more posh, proper, and polished as he reads on. At some points, they both start laughing at the ridiculousness of the dialogue, since Henry is speaking every line for every character in the book. The play, so far, is much more entertaining than he remembers; or maybe, it’s the enchanting narrator keeping Alex engrossed. But Alex smiles and enjoys the brief introduction of the book.

As Alex starts to doze off, Henry nudges him softly and Alex replies lazily with a “hmm?”

“You’re falling asleep,” he whispers against Alex’s curls. “Do you want my driver to take you home?”

He shakes his head.

“We have class tomorrow, none of your clothes or schoolwork are here. So, we will have to get up really early. Is that alright with you, love?” Alex turns so he’s facing Henry, who is looking down at him with similarly sleepy eyes. If they hadn’t been intimate earlier, Alex would have jumped him on the couch. There’s absolutely no way Henry doesn’t know he’s acting the role of a boyfriend, and Alex is unsure what he’s done to deserve such affection from him.

“Yeah, that’s okay with me, Hen,” he yawns, sitting up to stretch his long arms out.

“Alright, then, let’s get to bed. Or, are you going to argue with me about that, too?” Henry laughs, his face glowing with amusement.

Alex playfully shoves a hand against his chest and lets Henry help him up off the couch and to the bedroom. He places his copy of the book on his nightstand and heads into the bathroom. Alex hears the sound of the water running and flops onto the bed, sleep creeping up on him like a thief. When Henry comes out, Alex is barely conscious, breathing softly from his mouth as he tries to fight rest.

There’s some movement around the room, but Alex is too tired to even see what it is. The last thing he remembers is someone tugging his pants down his legs and covering him with the luxurious duvet, which has a slight wet spot on it from earlier. He hears a scoff when Henry gets into bed, then the shuffling of the duvet so the spot is away from them.

Finally, when Alex thinks he’s going to be taken by sleep, Henry reaches over and plucks his glasses from the bridge of his nose, folding them, and delicately places them on the nightstand next to the book.

“Goodnight, Alex,” Henry says before he snuggles underneath the covers.

“Goodnight, baby,” Alex murmurs. Then, “thanks for readin’ t’me.”

“Always.”

The Archer

Chapter Summary

“I’m always going to be there to catch you when you fall, then. Look at me.” Henry peers back at him, looking younger and more scared than ever. “You are going to be okay. Because I...”

He wants to say it; he’s probably felt it since the first day they sat down in the cafe. But it just won’t fucking come out.

“You..?”

Chapter Notes

Henry Fox... you are so loved. Thank you for your patience on this one. This chapter was so special for me to write.

TW: canon parent death brief mention.

It takes Henry all of 5 seconds to convince Alex to get on his knees in the spacious backseat of his car. The privacy partition is rolling up and Henry’s belt buckle is already open before it hits the roof of the car.

The muffled moans that come from Henry are entrancing, and each time Henry’s shoe nudges the bulge in Alex’s chinos, he grinds softly back against it. It’s become their routine to suck each other off on the way to class; there’s no mess, and it’s the fastest way for both of them to cum.

He barely has time to swallow before Henry pulls him up by a fistful of curls, hungrily flicking his tongue against the saltiness dripping on Alex’s lips. Henry manhandles him and switches their spots, sliding down to the floor and tugging Alex’s pants down past his ass. Because Alex knows the driver, Jerry, signed an NDA, he is *loud*. His back arches against smooth black leather and he thrusts his hips upwards towards Henry’s mouth. Nobody can see them—but Alex makes sure anyone who walks by the car hears he’s getting the best head of his life.

“You’re *so* loud, I ought to punish you for subjecting my driver to your antics,” Henry says, placing a kiss on Alex’s hip. “With how loud you are, people are probably assuming I’m killing you back here.”

“Is it wrong to say it *feels* like I’m dying when you do that thing with your tongue? I’m just letting you know,” Alex says and grabs his collar to pull him up. When he’s settled Henry in his lap, his hands squeeze the toned muscle of Henry’s thighs through the fabric until Henry is practically panting against his mouth. “—that I feel so fucking good when I’m with you. So I show it. Vocally.”

“I just... want you so badly,” Henry’s voice suddenly comes out strangled.

Henry’s face is bright pink but also flushed with a hint of something else he can’t put his finger on. Alex’s hands go to Henry’s waist, holding his Prince firmly on his lap.

“Is that so? You know you have me right now, yeah? Baby, you’re gonna have to be specific ___“

Jerry must have gone over a pothole because the car violently jolts and bounces off into aftershocks of rumbles. Henry’s forehead bangs into Alex’s nose, making a small “smack” sound from the collision.

“Ow! Fuck—okay, okay. Maybe it’s time to retire hooking up in the car. One of us might lose an eye eventually. Are you okay? Let me see.” Alex demands nasally as he pinches his nose.

Henry’s clenching his jaw and palming his forehead. He lets out a pissy “ow” and removes his hand to show Alex the damage. Through squinted eyes, he can see a red mark above Henry’s brow, which will definitely become a bruise in the coming days. Poor alabaster baby. Alex brushes his thumb against the mark and Henry winces.

“I’m fine—though I think your nose smashing the last bit of sense out of my head is a sign I ought to shut up,” Henry waves his hand away and gets off Alex’s lap.

“Don’t be greedy now. I want to hear what you have to say,” Alex says, rubbing his nose. “Remember: NDA protected. I’m practically bound by loyalty, Your Majesty.”

The car pulls into the student parking lot. Henry just shakes his head, rolls his eyes, and grabs his messenger bag, exiting the car first. They’ve developed a routine for this: Henry leaves first, then Jerry drives around the building to the more empty lot and drops Alex off. Alex doesn’t mind, he’s aware they can’t just get out of the same vehicle in front of an entire student body. But one day he thinks he’s gonna slip out behind Henry, a shit-eating grin plastered across his face, and the whole world will speculate if he’s exclusive with the Prince of Wales.

Definitely a fantasy.

Right?

Professor Gupta is his second favorite thing about English 102, besides Henry. She’s always animated, always enthralled by the hidden messages scrawled between the lines throughout

literary history. Today is no exception; the satisfied yet morbid smile on her face as she presents a few themes in *Frankenstein* is charming, albeit unnerving.

“This book is one of the most controversial works of literature from its time—it’s misunderstood, often resulting in debates of *nature* vs. *nurture* : does our biology tell us who we are going to be? Do our surroundings and upbringing influence us more?” Gupta clicks a button on her remote and the prompter generates a slide of bullet points:

- *Nature: Victor Frankenstein desires power. He was educated, privileged, and loved—but these positives couldn’t change who he was. He was always corrupted at heart.*
- Nurture: The Creature desires acceptance. He wants to read, to be loved, to be accepted within society. But Victor doesn’t provide him with that nurture so he becomes corrupt.
- Are our biological parents responsible for who we will ultimately become?
- Do the choices we make define who we are?

“When contrasting your two positions with your partner, it is important to agree on an overall truth. With *Frankenstein* , the overall truth is that: it depends. We will never know who Victor Frankenstein could have become if his mother did not die. Just as we will never know who The Creature could have become if it was loved by its creator,” Professor Gupta says with a wistful smile.

Alex finishes writing in his notebook and glances over at Henry. His mouth is mashed into a line so thin that his usually plump and pink lips look small and pale. He almost looks as annoyed as he did the first day when they first met. The only difference now is Alex knows for certain, he’s done nothing wrong. These cloudy moods are something Alex has become accommodated to. Sometimes he finds it’s best not to pry, and to simply wait for the storm to pass until Henry’s ready to come back to him. Regardless, whatever is bothering Henry, he will ask about it later.

Henry’s gone before class is even over. It doesn’t worry Alex too much; he’s used to him bailing before class ends to catch up on his own “coursework,” as Henry calls it.

So, Alex texts him.

ACD at 10:34 AM

you kind of ran off after class today, is everything ok?

ACD at 10:58 AM

did something happen with bea?

ACD at 1:13 PM

i got a 94 on my math midterm btw. Gupta posted my essay grade but not the midterm, she gave the essay an A. fuck yeah

ACD at 6:47 PM

baby?

Alex only sends four texts on Monday. On Tuesday, he sends two more.

ACD at 9:41 AM

can we call?

ACD at 10:29 PM

Hen, I'm worried. At least reply and let me know you're okay.

Alex doesn't send any more texts after that—he's been around long enough to know when someone doesn't want to talk to him. It's the longest they've gone without speaking since before they first kissed, which is, to no surprise, agonizing. As he sifts through his memory from Sunday night and Monday morning, he thinks maybe he offended Henry by staying over or snapping at him for trying to read the book to him.

All their interactions were cordial—loving, even. They made the early trip to Alex's apartment where he quickly showered, dressed, and was met with a big hug upon seeing Henry had waited the entire time to come back outside. They happily went down on each other as Jerry drove them to school, and they were on time for class—despite being incredibly tired from waking up early. But nothing happened in that time frame between Sunday and Monday morning that indicated something had gone wrong.

In the dark, Alex stares up at his ceiling, the pitch blackness somehow keeping him from having a breakdown. It holds him down and prevents him from trekking the long drive to Henry's apartment and making a fool of himself. One and a half days of not speaking isn't enough to warrant panic; it's bad enough that he's already made a fucking fool of himself with his desperate texts.

Since when did he become the type to chase and grovel overnight?

Alex justifies Henry's silence by making a list of reasons why they haven't spoken:

1. His phone is broken.
2. He is going on an international trip and doesn't have phone service.
3. Maybe he is needing space to figure things out after Sunday night.
4. Kidnapped??
5. Gupta is swamping him with past-due midterm papers and exams.

And then, the worst thought comes into his head:

1. Henry simply does not want to talk to Alex.

It's the most logical; they are not boyfriends, they're nothing beyond two friends, a TA and a student, who are hooking up. Henry has no obligation to reply to Alex, so why is he so hellbent on speaking to Henry as if he does?

Still, when Wednesday morning comes and he has no new texts or emails, Alex's concern grows exponentially. Something is wrong, and there's nothing he can do to reach Henry. When his second call goes unanswered, he considers smashing his phone in the student parking lot.

Entering class to see the chair next to his usual spot empty doesn't surprise him. Still, he sits down and hopes the missing blonde makes an appearance—apart from that first day, Henry is *never* late. It's 8:58, still plenty of time for him to show up.

But class starts and the seat beside him remains empty. Alex is pissed but tries to focus on the lecture to make the time pass. Professor Gupta continues her PowerPoint from last time, where she left off on an analysis of *Frankenstein*. Another classic book Alex gave up on in high school, Mary Shelley's 1800s-style prose proved too complex to keep his attention. Maybe if Henry stops being MIA, they can read that together too.

Class ends early without so much of a text message or appearance of Henry. As Alex gets up to leave, he overhears the pierced girl who sits on his left say to her project partner, "shit. The TA canceled office hours again this week. The one time I need him and he isn't fucking here. Of course." She holds her phone up to show the email with a sour look on her face. Alex wants to flick her septum piercing on her stuck-up nose.

Alex wants to turn to her and say she shouldn't complain about him canceling office hours to defend Henry's honor but then hears his name being called.

"Alex," Professor Gupta calls out softly. "Alex, can you come see me?"

Fuck—not now. Whatever bad grade he got or assignment discussion can wait; Henry needs him more right now. Still, he strolls over to her, finally seeing the wear and tear of the semester on her face up close.

"I know Henry is your project partner, but I also know you two have become friendly over the semester. I haven't heard from him since Monday, he's canceled office hours twice this week," she pauses. "If you get a hold of him, can you please tell him to contact me? I still have many midterms and papers to grade, and I could use my TA's help."

Alex swallows. Now he's in a worse position than before; if he doesn't find Henry, the more trouble he gets in with Gupta. The look on her tired face gives away a small hint of knowing that he can't quite place his finger on. He nods with an unconvincing smile, then takes off with a determination he's never felt before. Whatever fucking happens, Henry is *going* to speak to him. He refused to accept any other occurrence.

Alex decides to check Henry's TA office first, his heart thumping in his chest as the elevator hits the fourth floor. He races down the corridor to the mini offices, stopping at the one with

Henry's name. He sees no light from beneath the door, but still tries the door handle just in case. It jiggles but doesn't open. Locked. Fuck.

Where the fuck is Henry?

After calling out of his shift at his internship, he is likely going to be granted bottom-of-the-barrel paperwork for the next week as punishment. Alex decides Henry is no longer privy to his isolation; missing work for a boy who won't even pick up the phone helps Alex accept that he's going to make himself a problem for Henry.

The drive to New Britain is somehow longer than expected; Alex passes unsuspecting drivers at a highly illegal speed, motivated by a fervent passion to kick down that dickhead's door and knock some sense into him. Being ghosted will never sit right with Alex; he's used to being the *ghoster*, but never the *ghosted*. Karma is swiftly being served on a platter to him right now.

As Alex pulls up to the gated community, he leans out of his window and hits the intercom. A polite voice greets him.

"Hi, who are you here to see?"

"Henry Fox."

"And you are?"

Alex almost laughs. Of course, someone of Henry's stature would be in a gated community where showing up unannounced is not permitted. He'd been driven by Henry's driver and not noticed there is a particular way of entry each time.

Still, despite losing hope of gaining entry, he grumbles out, "Alex Claremont-Diaz."

A beat of silence. Then, a click, followed by the mechanical hum of the gate sliding open for him. Fate is definitely on his side. Apollo is granting his wishes on account that he was late to his bisexual awakening. Either way, he's not going to question why he had been given access so easily.

Alex steps into the lobby, and waves politely at the receptionist, who seems to recognize him and greets him with a cheerful smile. Shaan is nowhere in sight this time, which Alex lets out a breath of relief about. He doesn't want an audience to witness the potential groveling he is about to do for a man who isn't even his.

After pacing in the elevator the entire ride up, he steps onto the floor and up to Henry's apartment door. It's so fucking quiet, and when all the potential scenarios of rejection flood his psyche, his fist falls an inch short of the door.

It's just a wellness check, he thinks. Just a friend checking up on another friend.

Before he could knock, the door opens up. In front of him stands a beautiful girl, pale-faced and red-haired. Freckles sprinkle across her nose and cheeks, and a set of gorgeous blue eyes stare back at him. Alex knows who she is just by the color of her eyes and the familiar sharpness of her high cheekbones—Bea.

She's wearing an old, black Dropkick Murphys t-shirt and flannel pajama bottoms, her dyed-red hair hangs loose in soft waves down her shoulders, and her smile is coy but inviting. There's one small beauty mark near her jawline, making her all the more similar to Henry. Alex can't believe he's staring into the eyes of the Princess of Wales in a Celtic punk tee. Bea's beauty still shines through the most casual of attire. Just like Henry.

Before he can utter a word, she reaches up to hug him tight and then pulls him into Henry's apartment. It's the warmest, sisterly hug a stranger can give.

"You. Alex," Bea breathes out. Her accent is even more prominent than Henry's. Charming tendencies seem to run rampant in the Fox family.

"Yes?" He raises an eyebrow. "You know me?"

"Henry's not stopped gabbing about you since the beginning of the term. *Of course* I know you, doll," she smiles warmly. "Well—I know *of* you; the way Henry's described you doesn't do you much justice, though. I must say, he made you seem a wee bit shorter."

'Wee bit shorter?' *Oh, that little shit ...*

"Bea. Right. I'm sorry we are meeting like this. I've wanted to meet you, Henry really adores you and looks up to you... You're an amazing sister," Alex gnaws on his nails impatiently. Knowing Henry was in the apartment but out of his reach drove him insane. "But... Why are you here? I thought you lived in New York?"

She taps her fingers along the edge of the marble counter, her manicured nails lightly clinking against the surface. She avoids Alex's eyes until she closes them and lets out a defeated sigh.

"Yes, well, I try, thank you," Bea runs a hand through her gorgeous red hair. "I'm... visiting. I would have rung you if Henry hadn't kept his phone stored under his pillow. I figure that's why you're here? To help?"

"Help with what? Henry and I haven't spoken since Monday morning," Alex says, his concern growing.

What could Henry possibly need help with if he didn't ask Alex for anything in the first place? If he couldn't even reply to a text, what semblance of help can Alex provide him?

"I think Henry should tell you himself. I've not been able to get much out of him."

David trots up to him, his big puppy eyes sad and full of intuition that something is wrong. Alex kneels and strokes his hard little head. "Where's your dad?" Alex asks the beagle and seemingly Bea.

“Locked away in his bedroom,” she replies for David. “We’ve not been able to get him to leave it in days.”

Alex nods and heads towards Henry’s closed bedroom door. He knocks once, then twice. When he gets no reply, he lets himself in. After all, he’s seen Henry naked so much; at this point, nothing can surprise him.

The atmosphere in Henry’s room is moody, dark, and mute. The curtains are shut, and no light besides the sunlight from the living room can be found inside. On the bed, there’s a curled-up lump of a person with their back to the door. Alex waits a beat and opens his mouth, but his voice is caught in his throat. Whatever is upsetting Henry isn’t his business, and there’s been no indication that he actually *wants* Alex here.

But Alex stands in the doorway, stepping forward and closing the door quietly behind him. *Don’t be a coward*, he thinks. *He needs you right now*.

Alex walks around the side of the bed, his heart slow and steady as he approaches Henry’s curled-up body. From what he can say of his face in the dark, his hair is sticking up in different directions, and a slight stubble is growing along his jaw. Even in the dark and ungroomed, Henry still looks as handsome as ever.

When he sits on the edge of the bed, Henry’s eyes lazily blink open. He stares at Alex after his eyes adjust, and then they soften, almost as if the walls around him weaken at Alex’s entity.

“Alex?” Henry whispers.

“Hi, sweetheart,” he whispers back.

Alex reaches over and delicately caresses Henry’s cheekbone with his thumb. Henry leans into it, his skin cold and supple with a dampness he suspects is from earlier.

In the dark, he can see the opaque bruise on his forehead that formed where Alex’s nose collided. He resists pointing it out. Somehow, Alex knows any physical pain or mark is irrelevant to what Henry is going through currently.

“I just met Bea; she’s very pretty. Did you tell her about us?”

Henry nods. “She knows everything... Shaan called her Tuesday and she came. She’s been bugging me to call you.”

“A wise idea, yet not implemented, huh?”

Henry half-smiles. It fades fast and back into the somber frown he was touting. “I guess.”

Alex nudges his arm hidden underneath the duvet. “Let me in.”

“No. I’m rotting here until I feel better. Just go home, Alex,” Henry says and recoils tighter into a ball under the blankets.

“Correct me if I’m wrong, but don’t people feel worse when they ‘rot’ in bed? So, I think you should let me under the covers—no, I *am* coming underneath there,” Alex declares. He kicks his shoes off and climbs over Henry, who is groaning and protesting. It doesn’t deter Alex one bit; something tells him he knows he has to be here.

After some adjusting, Alex pulls back the covers over them and slides up behind Henry, who has gone silent once Alex runs his fingers through his tousled golden locks. When he was a kid, June or his mom would play with his hair, trace lines down his arm, or lightly scratch his back. It always made him feel better, the slightest of physical touches making him feel loved and valued. And now, without a forethought, his fingertips find Henry’s soft skin in the darkness, dragging out soft sighs from deep inside him.

With one hand, he plays with Henry’s hair and the other he uses to trace circles along and between his shoulder blades under his t-shirt. Henry shivers a little, letting Alex deliver the softest of touches until he unfolds a little bit. It’s the closest they’ve been since they’ve become physical, the gap between two very different people closing even more with each touch of Alex’s fingertips.

“Tell me what’s wrong, baby,” Alex says with a cautious tone. He knows what can happen if he pushes Henry too far, so he decides to approach the matter with patience.

“If I tell you, then I have to face it.”

“Then we’ll face it, together.”

Henry finally turns around and faces Alex. “It’s so ridiculous. *I’m* ridiculous.”

“And?” He raises a brow. “I’ve known that about you since the day I met you. You practically went from ‘fuck you, I hate you’ to ‘fuck me, I want you’ within a day. You’ve never been the most rational—and I adore that,” Alex teases.

“You’re not making me feel better.”

Alex reaches down and brings Henry’s hand up to his lips. He kisses the back of his hand and squeezes it tight.

“Can you help me understand, so I can make you feel better?”

Henry stares at him. Even in the dark, Alex can tell from his red-rimmed eyes and deep circles that Henry was going through something he likely couldn’t understand. Henry doesn’t have to say it; but maybe, if he told Alex, the burden of what was hurting him would be just one percent less painful.

“In class... on Monday, I knew what lecture was happening but I, um, thought you being there would distract me enough to not notice it,” Henry confesses disjointedly, his voice breaking through it. “Like a bloody idiot.”

Alex tries to remember the lecture, but all he can remember is that the analysis slides were on *Frankenstein*, and that Gupta wore a pretty shade of red lipstick that day. And that Alex was

going to beg Henry to let him go down on him in his stupid little office later in the week. Not many productive thoughts were happening during the class.

“Okay, go on.”

“God, Alex, it really is stupid.”

“Well, I don’t care. I mean, *I do* . But I don’t care if it’s something you’re ashamed about—whatever happened is clearly bothering you. So, you can tell me or not, but I think in order to get you out of this bed we are going to have to talk about it,” Alex attempts a smile.

Henry attempts the same smile, then says, “I... avoid anything regarding that book.”

“Oh. No shit, huh? I get it, that book is difficult to read. We start with letters and then we are on a fucking ocean or a bobsled in the winter and I can’t tell what perspective we are viewing the story from,” Alex props himself up on his elbow. “I don’t think I finished it though—I feel I can probably watch *Pet Sematary* and get the same message but not told in ye olde English.”

Henry laughs genuinely. His sad disposition is already weakening at Alex’s foolish attempts to make him feel better. Alex may not be the best for talking about his emotions, but he sure knew how to make someone laugh to overcome what was bothering them.

“It’s not that, though we do have to get you to finish the book. It’s, erm, this one passage,” his lips purse, as if he’s considering his next words carefully.

“How come?”

Henry rolls onto his back and stares up at the ceiling. It’s a position Alex is all too familiar with when he finds himself deep in his own thoughts.

Then without hesitation, Henry begins: “In the book after Victor’s mum dies, he says, ‘I need not describe the feelings of those whose dearest ties are rent by that most irreparable evil, the void that presents itself to the soul, and the despair that is exhibited on the countenance.’” He pauses and then continues, “‘Yet from whom has not that rude hand rent away some dear connection; and why *should* I describe a sorrow which all have felt, and must feel? The time at length arrives when grief is rather an indulgence than a necessity...’”

Alex is quiet, his eyes trained on Henry’s lips, which are pressed together in a thin line. Henry’s grief was louder than ever, and while Alex may not understand the uniqueness of his pain, he knew immediately that he was speaking of his father’s death. The parallels between the book and Henry’s life became apparent to Alex at that moment. He wanted to kick himself for not putting the pieces together during the lecture.

Henry misses his father.

“I don’t expect you to understand. I don’t *want* you to understand. I just,” Henry finally looks at Alex again. “I just would rather not be reminded of things I can’t change, and how they’ve

gotten me to a place where I can't even have a conversation with my own family without being an inconsolable mess."

"You're not an inconsolable mess. From where I'm standing, you're doing okay," Alex says.

"From where I'm standing, I feel like I'm constantly falling. I mean, look at me: I've been bedridden for more than a few bloody days over... *fictional literature*," he counters with a groan.

Alex isn't sure what to say. Showering Henry with compliments isn't going to be effective, so he cups Henry's face in his hands and closes his eyes. The emotion he always feels in his chest is yet again bubbling up, and at this point, Alex isn't sure if he can shove it down.

"I'm always going to be there to catch you when you fall, then. Look at me." Henry peers back at him, looking younger and more scared than ever. "You are going to be okay. Because I..."

He wants to say it; he's probably felt it since the first day they sat down in the cafe. But it just won't fucking come out.

"You..?"

The feeling is not fleeting; but the courage to declare it is. Alex settles on a longer, but still authentic and honest version of it instead.

"Because I care about you and know that spending a few days in bed doesn't make you weak. It just means this has been a long time coming. You think a *book* put you in this bed? No. All the things in your life that make you feel like shit put you here and that's *okay* for now, Henry. I don't think grieving has a specific time frame," Alex says while tucking a blonde lock that's fallen across Henry's forehead behind his ear. He actually might need a haircut now.

They both go quiet, Alex's words settling deep between them. Then, to break the thickness of the tension, Alex says: "But I can't lie to you. You need a shower."

"Get out, you cretin."

Alex laughs and kisses Henry on his nose. "I'm gonna go talk to Bea, and you're going to let me know when you're ready to leave this room and be a person. And whatever comes after that... we'll figure it out."

Henry nods and sits up in bed as Alex hops out. He knows forcing someone out of bed isn't going to magically improve their mood; giving them the time and option to do so will. Back when his parents divorced, his mother allowed him and June each one day to stay home in bed. They didn't have to go to school, or do chores, or participate in any activities if they didn't want to. She said it was okay to be sad, and that she couldn't change the divorce, but she could try and change the way her children felt about it eventually.

Alex has never had the heart to tell her she wasn't quite successful.

As Alex is about to leave, Henry softly calls out to him. “Alex.”

“Hm?”

A beat.

“Thank you for coming. For being there.”

“Yeah, of course.”

Okay, maybe, he shouldn’t have called off work to go see Henry based on how pissed Attorney Luna is right now. He has three texts and one voicemail from Luna asking where he is. The texts are all in English, professional, and promptly inquiring about Alex’s lack of attendance. The voicemail, however, is in Spanish, ridden with expletives about how Alex is in deep shit for not showing up for his shift.

He pinches the bridge of his nose and tries to remember who was working the phones when he called. It’s a Thursday in the afternoon, so that can only mean...

Fucking Hunter Richards.

That piece of shit. Ever since he brought Henry over to talk about the NDA, he’s been acting weirder and weirder. Hunter is never home, and when he is, he basically holds Alex hostage to talk about his xenophobic father’s political campaign. Maybe it was Alex’s disinterested disposition that gave him the hint to fuck off, or maybe it was when he politely informed Hunter that his father can’t campaign on banning policies that are protected by the Supreme Court, their relationship had gone from non-existent to awkward so fast.

But it isn’t a roommate’s or coworker’s business to know Alex is involved with—but from their frigid interactions, Hunter has assumed something’s going on in Alex’s personal life, and has a grudge against him. Otherwise, he would’ve relayed the message to their boss over the phone that Alex wouldn’t be at work today. A decent person would’ve done so.

After calling Luna and leaving a voicemail eating crow, Alex comes back into Henry’s apartment to a curious-looking red-haired Princess staring at him over a bowl of cereal.

“Everything okay? You came back from the hallway looking more stressed than when you left Henry’s room,” Bea says with a mouthful of cornflakes.

“No. My fucking roommate/coworker is giving me problems. He didn’t relay the message to our boss that I wasn’t coming in. Now I look like an ungrateful flake for an internship that I absolutely love and want,” Alex groans.

“Oh. I’m sorry, love. Maybe explain to him that your coworker is giving you problems?”

If only it were that easy. Hunter can easily just claim he forgot because he was actually busy at work. Besides, there’s no proof it was an intentional slight.

Alex shakes his head. “I’d rather take the punishment, you know? I’ll deal with it when I get home since I live with the little shit too.”

“Oh? Does he know about you and Henry?” Bea rests her chin in the palms of her hands. “Because if so, Henry can make him sign an NDA. Since you’re Henry’s boyfriend, he’d protect you—“

Boyfriend?

“Bea, what?”

She raises her brow at Alex’s interruption.

“Henry would protect you—“

“No, I mean, he’s not my boyfriend.”

Bea stares at him with a slight smug smile. “Oh, love. You two are so sweet, but you’re both rather... daft,” she says politely. “I’ve seen Henry like this many times in the last few years. Not once has another bloke called out of work, and shown up at his flat unannounced, just to what? Make sure he’s okay? Alex, you’re a paralegal so I am assuming you’re quite intelligent. Don’t sit across from me and tell me you don’t fancy Henry. Older sisters *always* know.”

Alex is floored. Speechless. Stunned stupid. If there was a British reincarnation of a polite June Claremont-Diaz, she was sitting across from him, cordially calling him a fucking idiot for not acknowledging his feelings.

“I honestly don’t know what to say,” Alex whispers in defeat. He runs his hands through his curls and tugs them in exasperation. “I don’t think he likes me back.”

Bea’s smile fades, and her eyes roll at this. Somehow, Alex thinks he’s about to get another tongue-lashing.

“You really are foolish then. I’ve barely been able to step foot in that room since I’ve been there. You show up and have a whole chat with him? Oh, darling. Men really *are* clueless.”

“Can you ask him then? If he likes me like that,” Alex swallows. He feels so pathetic asking.

“I don’t think that’s what you actually want me to ask him, love. We both know the connection is there,” she pauses and then rests her hand on his. The sadness in her eyes is more prominent than what he saw in Henry’s. “Being apart of the royal family means you’ll never go without, but you’ll have to sacrifice pieces of yourself to maintain staying within the family. Henry’s unlucky; the biggest piece of himself is something our family would want him to sacrifice so he can maintain royal traditions. Do you understand?”

Alex nods. Of course, he understands; Henry’s gay, and from what he knows, there are no openly queer people in the royal family. Shit, there are no damn people who even *look* like Alex in the royal family. If they were to date beyond hooking up, the consequences Henry

would face are astronomical compared to the ones Alex *might* face. Even if Henry had reciprocated feelings for him, he had so much more to lose.

But it didn't change the way Alex felt at all.

He's always been an all-or-nothing type of guy—it's why he never got involved in relationships unless he felt everything with his heart. Henry brings out the best in Alex. Everything he hates about himself, Henry seems to like or turn into some sort of positive on the flip side. His stupid glasses, his difficulty reading, his neediness, the fact that he can't focus very well. The way Alex slides to the floor of the car on Monday and Wednesday mornings and swallows Henry down until he cums so hard he's kicking the back of the seat that it causes Jerry to roll down the privacy barrier to check that Alex hasn't killed Henry.

It's too much, yet, it's not enough at the same time. It's so fucking all-consuming and Alex wants to break Henry's door down and shake him and ask him, "What the fuck are we doing anymore?"

From the kitchen, they hear the shower turn on. Bea sighs in relief and continues munching through her cereal. Alex feels relief as well—his mother taught him that one of the first steps to getting out of a slump is to remove yourself from the "lair" you've holed up in. One of the upsides of having a divorced mother is she's relinquished the benefits of *Get Over Him Fast!* magazine headlines.

As the night goes by, Henry finally eats and replies to emails from a concerned Professor Gupta and several entitled students. He's quiet, but productive on his laptop while Bea and Alex chat quietly over a few episodes of *Love Island*. Alex quickly realizes how funny and permanent feeling in his life she is—so he sneaks her number before she leaves to go home to New York.

"Text me if you need anything, love. Remember what we talked about," Bea whispers in his ear as she kisses his cheek and squeezes his bicep. Alex just nods. "And *you*, don't hesitate to call me if you need me again. Just because we are in different states doesn't mean I won't be here for you. Cheers."

With that, Bea is gone. Alex almost wishes she stayed because older sisters are so much better at these things than they ever will be. His heart is beating so fucking loud out of his chest, he turns to look at Henry, who, despite being bedridden for days, looks worn down.

Alex opens his mouth but Henry beats him to it.

"Will you stay with me tonight?"

The question takes him by surprise—not because Henry asked him—but because Alex never even considered leaving in the first place.

"Yeah. Yeah, I'll stay," Alex pulls Henry into a hug and kisses him tenderly on his lips. It's been so long since they last kissed, so it's no surprise when they both steal a few more pecks.

Alex knows he shouldn't ask. But after a stressful few days, he can't think of any way better to end this shitty situation than in bed listening to the sound of Henry's voice—something he worried he might not get to hear again.

"So... Do you want to read with me before bed? We have some catching up to do—not that it's a big deal or that I blame you. I wouldn't want to deal w—," Alex babbles but Henry grabs his face and kisses him to shut him up.

"I would love that. Just shut up, my goodness. Haven't you figured out I adore reading with you?" Henry says with a small laugh, his forehead resting against Alex's. Alex closes his eyes and leans in, inhaling deeply. Everything about this man drives him fucking insane.

They end up tangled on blankets still marked from the weekend before—Alex teases him relentlessly about not cleaning the bed up which makes Henry laugh so hard his face turns a concerning shade of red.

After finishing Act 2, Henry whispers against his curls that it's his turn to read. Alex obliges without protest. There was no point in arguing against someone as stubborn as Henry; besides, he knew he was in good hands. When they slotted together, Alex felt able to focus on the words he was hearing, even nudging Henry's hands to tilt the spine forward so he could read along in case he missed something.

Alex reads aloud and finishes Act 3 with Henry snoring lightly on the back of his head. Even when he realizes Henry's fallen asleep, he lowers his voice to a barely audible whisper and practices his reading and speaking. Alex wriggles his way out of Henry's arms, places the book on his nightstand, and flicks the light off.

As he adjusts next to a very passed-out Henry, he accidentally moves the mattress too much, which causes Henry to turn over and start mumbling.

"Sorry," Alex whispers. He curses his clumsiness and restless limbs.

"Mm. Okay. Did you learn anything?"

"Huh?"

"You. Learn anything?"

Ah. Henry's sleep-talking returns.

"About?"

Silence. Alex resists the urge to shake him awake. He closes his eyes.

"The book."

Alex sighs but doesn't open his eyes. "I did."

"Go on."

He thinks hard but doesn't open his eyes. Alex knows the ceiling above him doesn't have the answers Henry's asking about tonight. The answers are deep inside him, beneath the surface of a bisexual half-Mexican kid on the verge of discovering who he thinks he might be. The reality of what the past few days did to him and how seeing Henry so low was... so painful.

In the blackness, Alex fingers a single lock of golden hair that's fallen onto Henry's forehead. So beautiful.

"I think I understood Romeo... not seeing Juliet... death was a more sufficient punishment than banishment to him. It's... intense. But I think of how I didn't see you for a few days and how..." Alex trails off.

Henry's quiet.

How I think I might be falling in love with you.

Alex turns over on his side and falls asleep.

Wildest Dreams

Chapter Summary

Alex thinks Henry is too far gone to ask for what he wants, so he reaches down and begins to undo Henry's belt but then stops dead in his tracks when he hears him say the most ridiculous, most romantic thing someone has ever said to him.

"I want you to make love to me tonight," Henry breathes out.

Alex freezes. His heart is pounding so fucking hard, it feels like every ounce of blood is flooding into his chest cavity and his brain is shutting down. This is where Alex Claremont-Diaz would run, should run. But he's slowly looking up, and his eyes meet Henry's, and Alex realizes he doesn't want to just fuck Henry. He wants to make love to him, too.

or

two idiots play Mario party, make love, and then Alex is confronted with his private relationship with Henry.

Chapter Notes

thank you so much for the love on Chapter 9. We are getting so close to the end, I can taste it. your patience, comments and kudos are very much appreciated.

"Mario Party," Alex repeats for the fifth time.

"I don't know what that is. What is that?" Henry asks disinterestedly as he sorts through a stack of midterms. It's been two days since Alex came over to check on him and he's barely separated himself from his work. It's understandable; Henry's job is important and he gave little to no notice of his absence. It made sense that now he would do everything to make up for his lack of communication.

“It’s like a digital board game for the Nintendo Switch. I play it with Nora and June, and one bot, usually. But, we have you now, so we can actually play properly as a group,” Alex grins, leaning into Henry’s arm playfully.

It’s hard to see him recovering from being hollowed out, still devoid of any desire to rest. Alex does what he can to help—sometimes he takes David for a walk outside or prepares Henry’s tea (water boiled, not microwaved. “We aren’t savages,” Henry said.) Since he can’t face Hunter, he goes home, gathers several changes of clothes including his favorite work blazer, a range of toiletries, and his school work. Henry doesn’t question it—he just clears a spot on his bathroom vanity, empties a drawer, and hangs Alex’s blazer neatly in the closet. They don’t talk about the nuance of it all.

“So, you say you *can* play this game without me?” he deadpans.

“Hen. Baby. One fucking game, please, it’s all I’m asking. If you hate it we never have to play it again. Or we can do whatever you want to do next time—I won’t even complain, no matter how boring.”

“You always complain.”

“Yeah, well, I won’t do it out loud.”

Henry rolls his eyes. Alex grabs Henry’s laptop, closes it, and neatly places it on the stack of papers next to him. He ignores his protests and straddles his lap, firmly gripping his shoulders.

“Please?”

“Tempting, but no, love. I’ll let you guys play out here and I’ll take my work into the bedroom,” Henry kisses his cheek and playfully shoves him back onto the couch.

Alex sighs and fishes his phone from his pocket and taps his group chat with Nora and June.

ACD

he said we can play without him basically

Nora 🐱

Lame. idk if my ego can handle losing to a bot again

June 💖

Losing to the Prince of England is much more honorable.

Nora 🐱

Alex if you dont start using sexual favors to convince henry to play mario party with us im gonna end up reporting your moms gross misuse of campaign funds the night she paid for my dinner at chilis with texas tax dollars. Im so serious asgfgkjh

ACD

do it

June 💖

Let me talk to him, it's like you guys don't think he can be convinced. He can't be THAT stubborn

Nora 😼

weeeeee

ACD

you have no fucking clue lmao

When June and Nora appear at Henry's door escorted by a faintly amused Shaan, Alex feels like a parent receiving his misbehaved children from a police officer.

"These two seemed to have struggled to find His Royal—er, Mr. Fox's apartment without my assistance. I found them chatting with Mr. Garfield on the seventh floor, asking for his autograph. They are quite the laugh, Mr. Claremont-Diaz," Shaan says with a raised eyebrow. "But I must ask you to make sure your guests have better directions for next time."

Alex's eyes widen. "Garfield? As in Andrew Garfield?"

The fanboy in him nearly breaches the surface at the idea of sleeping in the same building as *the* Andrew Garfield.

Shaan rolls his eyes and sighs. "Goodnight, Mr. Claremont-Diaz. Enjoy your time as well, Ms. Holleran and Ms. Claremont-Diaz."

Shaan hesitantly pats their shoulders and disappears to the right of them. Nora bursts into giggles and June elbows her, effectively stifling her laughter. Alex isn't sure whether to be embarrassed or envious that his sister and best friend met Andrew Garfield and he didn't. Or, if he was pissed Henry didn't tell him Andrew Garfield lived in the same building as him. An apology introduction might be warranted now.

"So, you met one of my celebrity crushes without me and you didn't think to call me?" Alex whines, shutting the door behind them. They kick their shoes off by the door and follow him into the living area.

"Hey, it's not our fault you're bad at giving directions and also that you are apparently the most oblivious person in the world," June snorts and plops down onto Henry's couch. Nora follows and curls up next to her. "He has a nice place. And—oh! Is that David?!"

June springs up and tiptoes up to David—who is currently in a deep sleep, snoring away in his baby blue dog bed by the window. She kneels silently a foot away and watches his jowls flap a little with each snore. Since their mom never let them have any animals, June has always been fascinated by any type of animal. She understood their mom’s life was busy, and between Alex and June’s extracurriculars, there would be no time for a pet. But still, she loved stopping to pet dogs straying on leashes during their walks or playing with Nora’s family cat during weekend sleepovers.

“You can pet him, you know.”

They all jump at the sudden entrance of Henry’s voice in the room. He’s leaning against the bedroom door, looking handsome as ever in his typical TA fit—usually a pair of black slacks and one of his blue pullover sweaters that is way too expensive to wear as casual clothes. Alex wonders when this was the type of fashion he became attracted to, and if he will spend the rest of his life hunting for love in the men’s section of a Macy’s.

June leans forward and pets David on the head, waking him up from his slumber. He huffs but welcomes the affection, leaning into her pets and eventual scratches.

“He’s cute... thanks for having us over,” Nora finally says. It’s her first time being around Henry without the influence of alcohol, and she seems to have forgotten how to be herself.

“You’re welcome. I should let you get to it,” Henry says and gives Alex his best ‘I’m out of here’ smile.

“Wait—just. I know Alex asked you to play with us and you said no. But *I’m* asking you—to merely consider sitting down and playing this silly game with us because I want to get to know you beyond being Alex’s...” June trails off and panic spreads across her face as she searches for a proper label.

“English TA,” Alex offers with a smirk. “Friend. Occasional person I make out with. British pretty boy who I—”

Henry cuts him off with an exasperated groan, slapping his hand over his eyes. “Okay, okay! Christ—yes, I will play with you guys. One game. Just don’t ever finish that sentence, Alex. I beg you to not.”

Alex and June exchange winning smiles.

From behind them, Nora breathes out a sigh of relief. “Thank god. I really could not handle losing to the bot again.”

—————

It turns out Henry is a competitive little shithead. And Alex will forever be obsessed with how insane he becomes when he plays any type of game.

The first green flag is when Henry sits on the couch, pats the spot between his legs, and beckons for Alex to come sit between them. Instantly, he does, which elicits giddy smiles

from Nora and June.

The second green flag? He picks Princess Peach, of all the fucking characters. When June picks Princess Daisy and Nora settles on Birdo, Alex's face burns hot at their roars of laughter when he picks his usual go-to character, Mario. Henry looks at them with confusion, the joke going clear over his clueless head.

"What's so funny?" Henry asks and squints at them.

"You picked Princess Peach, who happens to be—" Nora breaks off in a giggle.

"The girlfriend of Mario, who Alex picked. Y'all so cute, coordinating characters like a couple," June finishes.

"And you guys chose to be *immature* because of a fucking game," Alex gives the finger, eliciting even louder reactions from them.

Henry just pats his head and kisses the back of his fingers as if to say he's not ashamed or embarrassed. Alex pointedly feels the heat in his face go to his chest and stomach and linger there the entire night.

It goes, surprisingly, well. Henry and June get up together to prepare snacks. Alex swoons when he hears Henry say he made sure all the snacks he had Shaan send up were peanut allergy-friendly for June. When Nora asks if she can go get herself some water, Henry gets it for her and then makes sure everyone has something to drink.

After a few fumbles at the practice minigames, Henry, who claims he has never played these types of games before, starts getting really good. He asks questions, hangs on every word Alex says, and even demands Alex "show him" the tricks of mastering the minigames. And he obliges, patiently demonstrating each time, guiding Henry with great care as if he's passing down sacred *Mario Party* knowledge. Henry steals stars from Alex and drives him up the wall by asking the girls if they want to make a "pact" to take him down, but in the end, it just makes Alex happy to see Henry care about a game he loves so much.

So, when Alex wins, Henry places a close second, Nora comes third and June comes last, the triumphant look on his face is irresistible. Alex swiftly tilts his chin back and Henry, who pumped his fist in the air at June and Nora's screams, gives him a soft, rewarding kiss. Moments like this are when Bea's voice is in his head—posh, invasive, and referring to Alex as Henry's boyfriend. It's hard not to feel like there's some truth to the label when everyone who knows about them is rooting for them to be official.

Nora and June get quiet, the sound of gummy worms smacking in their mouths as Henry breaks the kiss. Alex almost forgets they were in the room.

"Alright. Well, it's time for us to go," June stands, taking Nora's hand in hers. Nora is starstruck, one hand crossed over her chest, mouth slightly parted as if she's witnessed a magical moment. Alex is going to kill her for being so obvious.

"But can't we—"

“No, we have to go do that thing, remember?” June exchanges a look with her, then smiles down at Alex and Henry, who are completely lost.

“Ohh. Right, yeah. The thing.”

They follow them to the door, June hugging Alex tight and whispering in his ear that she loves him. Nora kisses his cheek and slaps his ass, which makes Henry cock his head. When they both lock their arms around Henry in a group hug, Alex can’t help but smile to himself.

“You lot are welcome over any time, alright?” Henry says to the tops of their heads. He loves how tall he is.

June and Nora wave goodbye, the second they disappear around the corner, June says, “You know I let you come in third, right?” and Nora just cackles. Alex thinks of how much better these game nights would be if they included Pez and Bea. Hanging out with actual friends, for once in his life.

When the door closes, they both head back into the living room and quietly clean up. Alex packs up his controllers and Switch, and Henry gathers half-empty snack bowls and a few fallen gummy worms that David surely would’ve snatched up if he found them first. After the living area is clean, they both find themselves in the kitchen, deep in their thoughts based on the silence around them.

Henry leans against the kitchen island, the light above hitting his face, highlighting his strong royal nose and giving brightness to his previously tired eyes. Everything about Henry turns him on. From the way he rolls his sleeves up, to the way his face flushes so pink it lets Alex know if his jokes are funny or if his touches feel good.

Alex starts to wash dishes, the sound of the water hitting stainless steel filling the room. He can feel Henry’s eyes on his shoulders, his back, even his ass. Knowing this, he leans forward to give him a better show, but still, Henry does *nothing*, says *nothing*.

The silence is maddening to him as he finishes washing the last snack bowl. Alex doesn’t want to pretend anymore. Everything about being in the same room and not touching Henry is exhausting; he’s never been so far gone before. If he doesn’t do anything about it, he might lose his fucking mind.

“What?” Henry asks and he cracks a smile when Alex turns around to stare back at him.

And there are no words.

So.

Alex takes two big strides, his mouth meeting Henry’s mouth first before his arms loop around his waist and pull him impossibly close to his body. There’s no hesitation from Henry—his arms are snaking around Alex’s neck, fingers slipping into his curls, already moaning into Alex’s mouth.

When they pull apart, Alex can’t help but cockily smirk at Henry’s desperate reciprocation.

“You missed me, huh? How long has it been? Just a week? Just a week and you’re like this for me?” Alex pins Henry’s hips against the counter with his own and kisses along his throat.

“B-barely a bloody week. I missed you so f-fucking bad,” Henry curses, which makes Alex snap his head back and examine his face.

Flushed already. From the tips of his ears to his cheeks and nose, already burning in his face. Alex can practically feel Henry’s eagerness emanating from him. There’s a hardness pressed against his thigh and Alex keeps feeling Henry grinding down on him. His breath is hot on Alex’s face as he softly kisses the mole next to the corner of his mouth.

“What do you want?”

“You, always,” Henry says.

“You have me,” Alex murmurs against Henry’s cheek.

“Not what I meant, love,” he says, then looks at Alex in a way he’s never seen before.

Not quite desperate or horny. *Needy*. But needy in a way that can flip a switch inside Alex if the right words were said to him.

“Yeah? Then you’re going to have to be a bit more specific with me,” he says, working his mouth back down to Henry’s neck, then his collarbone.

All Alex can hear is the sound of Henry’s soft, breathy pants and moans, the small smack of his lips against his clammy skin. For a moment, Alex thinks Henry is *too* far gone to ask for what he wants, so he reaches down and begins to undo Henry’s belt but then stops dead in his tracks when he hears him say the most ridiculous, most romantic thing someone has ever said to him.

“I want you to make love to me tonight,” Henry breathes out.

Alex freezes. His heart is pounding so fucking hard, it feels like every ounce of blood is flooding into his chest cavity and his brain is shutting down. This is where Alex Claremont-Diaz would run, *should* run. But he’s slowly looking up, and his eyes meet Henry’s, and Alex realizes he doesn’t want to just fuck Henry. He wants to make love to him, too.

But his voice is fucking caught—or his brain has short-circuited and lacks all functionality.

“Say something, please.”

“I…”

“You..?”

Say anything, you fucking idiot.

“I… want that, too. To make love. To you,” Alex finally says brokenly. His knees are weak and his fingers are still frozen on Henry’s belt.

Henry takes Alex's hands in his, prying them from his belt. He strokes the back of his hands soothingly. "Okay. Your mouth says yes, but you're practically gobsmailed, Alex. So, what's actually on your mind?"

Everything. The way he's never been intimate with someone like that. The way he's never had penetrative sex with a man before. Alex knows it's not particularly sexy to ask questions mid-fuck or pre-fuck, and he knows there's no time for a Google search session. He felt completely anxious about something he's imagined himself doing so many times before because Henry used the words "make love"—it changed any nonchalant tendencies he had towards fucking him.

"Okay—fine, fuck," Alex groans and looks up at the ceiling. "You're... *you*. And I'm... *me*. I've never... Henry, I've never slept with a guy before and you know that."

Henry looks like he wants to laugh. But he swallows it down and nods somberly.

"I know you haven't, love. But you trust me, right? You know I'd never laugh at you or reject you. I think you're in particularly good hands, honestly," he says.

"Okay, but who's gonna do what?"

"Sorry?"

Alex grimaces. "Who's going to be..." he gestures between them. Henry's eyes widen and his laughter ripples through them, and even Alex can't help but laugh along with him. "You said you wouldn't laugh at me!"

"I couldn't help it, dear, I'm so sorry, truly. Alright, alright," Henry grips Alex's shoulders and looks him in the eye, serious. "Forgive me for being crass, darling. I want *you* to fuck *me*. It's what I want; if you want to try doing it the other way, eventually, we can try... Alright?"

Alex nods. "Alright."

Henry laughs, but it doesn't make Alex feel insecure in the slightest. If anything, Henry radiates confidence and security that makes Alex feel free of doubt. He trusts Henry more than anyone with his body, his heart, and his mind. There's no one else in the world he'd rather be doing this with.

They're just two people—not a law student and a Prince. Just two people being together under their own terms and nobody else's.

"Come here," Alex says, grabbing Henry's arm and slinging it over his shoulder.

"What are you doing *oh*—"

Alex scoops underneath Henry's legs and lifts him off the ground, bending his knees a little to support Henry's weight. The startled look on Henry's face is priceless as he holds on to Alex for dear life.

"I figured I could sweep you off your feet first before we get down to business, hm?"

“If you drop me, you’re sleeping on the couch for the night, and you’re going back home tomorrow,” Henry threatens aimlessly. Even with his head pressed slightly against Alex’s neck, he can still see Henry’s coy smile at being picked up princess-style.

Alex holds his breath the entire time he carries Henry to the bedroom, counting his steps in twos to keep himself level-headed. In his arms is the most important person in the world, and he’s clinging on to him like he feels the same about Alex. When he sets Henry down on the bed, he wastes little time; he’s already on top of him, their clothes shedding quickly. With every popped-off button and undone zipper, Alex explores Henry’s body with his mouth and hands, touching and tasting every inch of skin that his fingers and tongue can reach.

Just when Alex starts kissing Henry’s thighs, he can feel him stretching over to the bedside table and fumbling through the drawer for lube. He keeps his mouth on Henry’s skin and gently bites his upper thigh, causing him to squirm. Alex knows he’s leaving marks and relishes in the fact he’s marking up perfect, royal skin.

“Okay, okay, easy, darling,” Henry laughs, running his fingers through Alex’s curls. He places the bottle between his legs and lays back, eyes never leaving Alex’s. “Can you do to me what I did to you last time, love?”

“What did you do last time?” Alex places sloppy kisses along Henry’s thighs, grinning as he writhes around with each kiss.

“Why are you always such a tease?”

“This isn’t teasing, sweetheart. There’s this thing called patience. Some of us have to learn it and actually practice it in reality,” he attempts at a smart-ass reply. “Use your words.”

“God, Alex, finger me, *please*,” Henry begs.

“Okay, since you said please, I can oblige just for now,” Alex whispers. He sits up, slicking up two fingers. Henry is aching, legs spread, knees bent, longing for any stimulation. Alex loves it, loves the look on his face when he slips his fingers inside Henry, the moans he makes when he pulls them out momentarily to tease him. Seeing Henry like this is the hottest thing Alex has ever witnessed, completely wrecked just by two digits deep inside him.

After a few minutes, Henry says he’s ready in a small voice, but Alex is far gone. His fingers slip out easily, and Henry takes a deep breath, cupping underneath his thighs to hold his legs up. Henry is *his*. Exposed, begging to be fucked, to be *loved*. Alex wants Henry to know that he isn’t a transient participant in this act.

So, he gets on his stomach and wordlessly begins to kiss along the folds where Henry’s ass and thighs meet. Before Henry can utter a single word, Alex’s tongue finds the space where his fingers once were, lapping and tracing along Henry’s hole.

“Alex…”

“Hmm?”

Alex feels one of Henry's legs hook over his shoulder, his body tensing with each flick of Alex's tongue. He knows if he keeps this up, he could probably make Henry cum just by eating his ass before he even fucks him.

Alex pulls back, eliciting a low and breathy whine from Henry. Seeing Henry like this makes him feel possessive—the thought that anyone else could ever lay their eyes upon him makes his jaw clench with envy.

“You're all mine, aren't you?”

“*What?*”

His eyes darken, and he repeats himself in a lower voice. “I said, you're all mine, aren't you?”

This time, the answer is instant and clear.

“Yes, god, *yes*, m'yours, only yours. Please, Alex,” Henry says with an impure groan and the tiniest arch in his lower back.

Satisfied by Henry's pleas, he gives his inner knee a swift kiss and leans over him to the nightstand to grab protection. Henry's eyes follow him eagerly as his chest rises and deflates with anticipation. Alex *does* have experience with sex, but nothing prepares him for the moment when he's slicking his cock up, positioning himself over Henry, just for him to come face to face with the first and only man he's ever fallen for.

Alex stares down at Henry, his skin dewy and eyes glossy as he stares back up at Alex. Each time they come apart after a kiss, they look at each other awestruck, as if they can't believe this is really happening.

Alex knows he shouldn't fuck Henry without discussing these types of feelings beforehand, but he's so feverishly in love that he can't stand one more moment not being with Henry this way. If he can't say it, he will damn sure show it.

The instant Henry guides him inside, Alex is watching every muscle of his face react, witnessing every moment of bliss and agony all at once. Henry's breathing deeply and focusing, so Alex leans in and gives him a reassuring kiss on his forehead. After a minute of adjusting, Henry gives him a slight nod. Alex responds with a few bleary-eyed blinks, unable to find his words.

Alex takes his time fucking Henry, gently thrusting into him and taking in every single gasp, giggle and moan. He doesn't want to miss a single second of this. The way Henry jolts up at a particular thrust sending his mouth crashing into Alex's for a needy, appealing kiss. The way Henry's cock is grazing against Alex's stomach, so he stops, reaches between them every so often, and strokes Henry, causing him to writhe around and get even louder.

It's clumsy, messy, passionate sex; Alex fucks Henry steadily, stopping to ask every so often if he's okay. Henry just nods every time, until the last time Alex asks. This time, he hesitates.

“What’s wrong? Do you need me to stop?” Alex begins to pull his hips back but Henry lets go of his thighs, allowing his legs to slip around his waist and relax his calves onto Alex’s lower back.

“Mm—no. Don’t stop,” he says unconvincingly with a wince at the end of his plea.

“Tell me what’s wrong?”

Henry bites his lip.

“My legs—er, they’re cramping a little.”

Oh. Of course. They talked about what positions Henry liked and to Alex’s surprise, Henry said his favorite was missionary because he enjoyed the intimacy of it. But holding your legs up for several minutes at a time isn’t an easy feat, especially when Alex is taking his time.

“Right. Come here,” he says with a smirk. Alex pulls back and hooks his arms underneath Henry’s knees and holds them up for him, effectively pinning him in place on the bed. “I’ve got you, sweetheart. Or should I call you princess? Since you seem to love being waited on hand and foot in bed.”

“Oh, piss off, and fuck me,” he laughs, but the starstruck look in his eyes says he loves being manhandled like this. Alex loves it too.

It takes only a few minutes before Henry is clawing his nails down Alex’s shoulder blades. His legs are sweaty and shaking against his arms, so Alex knows he’s close.

“Look at you... you’re making a mess all over me,” Alex whispers against his neck. Henry lifts his arms over his head, arching his body to prepare for what’s about to happen. Alex lets one hand follow, his fingers weaving through Henry’s, pinning his hands in place. “You know, you’re always going to be mine, right? God, Henry... Do you know what you do to me? Fuck, do you know that I am in lo—“

That’s all it takes for Henry to cum; he finishes with a faint laugh on his lips, eyes pinched shut tightly as he loses control of his body. Alex has to hold him down firmly until his orgasm subsides, but then he quickly falls over the edge too, thinking of how he is so recklessly balls deep inside Henry he was about to profess his love to him. Alex’s knees are dug deep into the mattress, and he feels Henry’s lips pressed against his sweaty curls as he trembles through his own orgasm.

For the first time in his stupid, idiot life, he feels tethered to someone. To Henry.

It’s ecstasy if Alex knew what it felt like; Henry is quiet, but not in a bad way. He’s holding on to Alex for dear life, stroking his hair and tilting his chin up every few seconds to give him pecks on the mouth. He hopes Henry didn’t hear his almost-love confession, and that his body took over so his brain and hearing shut down.

Before Alex falls asleep, the words “I do know” are whispered against the back of his head and lost in his curls.

They fall asleep tangled together, but Alex wakes up alone.

His head hurts a little from sleeping too long, but also probably from eating a ton of junk food while staring at a screen for hours while June and Nora shouted expletives at each other. Mario Party is a hazard when those two go up against each other; he reckons their near fist fight over Nora stealing a star from June, who was suffering in last place, is the source of his headache. Perhaps her tiny fights got a few swings too close to him.

But then he remembers.

Henry asking Alex to make love to him, the taste of Henry on his tongue, the smell of sweat and sex, and the damp spot covered by an expensive-looking hand towel. They did exactly what Henry asked last night—*they made love*.

He waits for the feelings of regret to fill his chest, but the feelings never come. Instead, his body feels loose, satisfied in all the best ways. Alex almost expects himself to fall apart when he rolls out of bed and finds Henry on the couch, golden hair smoothed over and dressed in a cream button-down and khakis, sipping on a cup of tea. Instead, his heart simply skips a beat, and Alex is in disbelief that he is fucking the Prince of England his first semester of university. He truly is the luckiest guy ever.

“Hey,” Alex says, his voice still raspy from sleep.

“Hello.”

“You’re up early, aren’t you?”

Henry’s eyes crinkle and he smiles. “No—I had to finish my work from last night. I didn’t want to wake you, so...”

“Fuck, sorry. Our bad habits of procrastination are rubbing off on you, huh? Sooner or later you’re going to end up in the tabloids for being a flakey TA.”

“Trust me, I’d rather have spent last night with you guys than grading papers where I end up feeling patronized by the longest words from the Oxford dictionary used in the most improper of ways,” Henry laughs, then opens his arms expectantly for Alex. “Come here, you.”

Alex plops down in Henry’s lap, touching their foreheads together.

“I have to go to work today and save my job, Luna told me to come in early for a meeting. I don’t think I’ll get fired, but if I do, at least it means I’ll be free of that douchebag Hunter. I mean, not passing on the message that I called out? What is he, five? Dick,” Alex mutters.

Henry brushes a curl from Alex’s forehead and kisses him with meaning. When he pulls back, his eyes are serious.

“You shouldn’t have called out to come see me. We haven’t talked about last week but... I can’t promise it won’t happen again, but I will promise I’ll never shut you out like that. I won’t have you risking your career for my *feelings*. When you go to the meeting today, eat crow. Don’t try to deflect any blame, because we both know what’s more important here. Don’t go pissing away your life for anyone, Alex.”

Alex swallows hard. He knows Henry is objectively right. The thing is when you’re sitting in Prince Charming’s lap, and he’s using his royal authority on you, and the memory of his ass is still fresh in your mind, it’s hard to focus on the bigger picture. But then, he clenches his fists, digs his fingernails into his palms, and reality comes back to him. An idealistic life was nice in theory but in practice? Losing his job would be one of the worst things that could happen to him right now.

“Okay, yeah. I’ll grovel, or whatever. I’m gonna get ready, get my shit together, and get my priorities back in order,” he hops up, walking back to Henry’s bedroom.

“Alex.”

He turns around.

“Last night was—”

“The best night of your life?”

“Well, that’s, er, quite a sensationalist way to put it,” Henry says, turning red. “It was... it was good. Most things are awful most of the time, but you are good. I want you to know that.”

Alex pauses, lost.

“Are you saying I’m good in bed or that I’m a good person?” he asks.

“Um, both?”

“But, like, how good?” he presses.

Henry throws a couch pillow at him in retaliation. “You are a delinquent and a plague. Go get ready.”

It takes everything in Alex to not jump across the sleek pine conference table and punch Hunter Richard’s right in his WASPy and annoying mouth. The smugness on his face says everything; he loves that Alex is in more trouble than him, and he gets to witness it.

“So, Mr. Richard’s, can you offer me any explanation as to why you did not pass along Mr. Claremont-Diaz’s message to me?” Attorney Luna asks with a disinterested, yet disdainful tone.

“I forgot to pass the message on. I was working the phones and it slipped my mind. There was nothing malicious behind it, sir,” Hunter answers, making sure not to catch Alex’s death glare.

“Hm. Mr. Claremont-Diaz, can you offer me any explanation as to why you are calling out of a shift right before it starts on a Thursday evening?”

He opens his mouth, which is dry, but closes it. Henry’s voice plays in his head, telling him to eat crow. So, he does.

“No. I had a personal emergency, but I take responsibility for my absence. This won’t happen again, I assure you.”

“Good. I don’t want anything like this to ever happen again at this firm or you two will be answering phones for the rest of your time here. Have a good night.”

Luna gets up, the look of disappointment stamped on his face. Alex looks away to avoid the further embarrassment of ending up in a disciplinary meeting so early at the firm for something so trivial as attendance.

When he gets up to exit, Hunter follows quietly, a sniveling smile plastered across his face. Alex isn’t going to bother entertaining Hunter; his father running for office should keep him preoccupied enough to leave him alone until he can find a new place to live for the next semester. Then, he could live his life without worrying about someone who ironically has the spine of Joe Manchin but the mouth of Matt Gaetz.

The night goes by uneventfully, catching up on piles of neglected paperwork and research he’s been putting off the past week. Luckily, Alex can bulldoze through it, surviving off of half a peanut butter and jelly and two burnt cups of coffee. He’s exhausted but relishes the ache in his neck that makes him feel powerful over the mountain of work he’s overcome. He knows it’s not particularly healthy to enjoy feeling so worn out after a long night at work—but Alex just feels pride.

As Alex is about to leave, he checks his email one last time. There’s one unread message sitting unopened, from Henry.

Romeo and Juliet: Act 5, scene 1

Henry <hwales@gmail.com> 11/15/20 6:46 pm

to Alex

Alex,

If I may trust the flattering truth of sleep,

My dreams presage some joyful news at hand.

*My bosom's lord sits lightly in his throne,
And all this day an unaccustomed spirit
Lifts me above the ground with cheerful thoughts.*

*I dreamt my lady came and found me dead
(Strange dream that gives a dead man leave to
think!)*

*And breathed such life with kisses in my lips
That I revived and was an emperor.*

*Ah me, how sweet is love itself possessed
When but love's shadows are so rich in joy!*

You left your copy of the book at my flat and I noticed you stopped on this page—it made me think of you, your body, the way it's come back to me all day... Tell me what you think of this scene? Maybe on your knees? Or would you prefer I read it to you since you might be a tad preoccupied with your mouth full?

Best regards,

Henry x

P.S. I hope work went well today.

By the end of Henry's email, Alex is wheezing, a breath caught in his throat from how foul and clueless the Prince of Wales is at sexting via Shakespeare excerpts sent through Gmail. He's gotta teach Henry how to dirty talk in more efficient ways.

He packs up his desk, hollowed out from the longest Monday he's had in a while. On the way to his car, he hears faint footsteps catching up to him from behind.

"Alex," Hunter breathes out once he catches up, that same smug smile still on his face. "Sorry about today—though, you should be thanking me, honestly."

Alex finally snaps.

"You're fucking with me, right? Because on what planet would *I* ever be thanking *you* for making me look like an ass in front of our boss?"

"Hm. Maybe because I decided not to tell him one of his employees is involved with his English TA, who happens to be the Prince of England? You know, most legal documents are kept in a safe place, so other people can't find them... You left your folder with the NDA on the table a few weeks ago. Thought I'd keep it to myself, you know? Since I'm such a nice

guy. Until you decided to ditch work, and I realized it was for him. Because you've got no family in the area minus your sister and that other girl. You also left your email logged in, and I saw the things you emailed him. I'm a law student, Alex. It wasn't hard for me to do the math," Hunter says with a cruel smile.

Alex is silent, the blood in his body has run cold.

He continues, "You do realize becoming a lawyer means you have a reputation to care about, right? I mean, what would people think if they found out Alex Claremont-Diaz fucked a Prince quid pro quo for general English credits?"

The world is spinning, and the next thing he knows, Alex has Hunter by the collar of his overpriced blazer, slammed into his car. Red is the only color he can see.

"I think it's so funny that you care about who I fuck, which by the way, Henry is my *friend*, you piece of shit. You're so stupid, threatening me in the parking lot of our own job as if you've never read a law book before," Alex spits. "Look at you, threatening me because you're so fucking insecure. You think you have anything on *me*? Honey. Your dad is a washed-up Rush Limbaugh impersonator running for office. Do you really think I wouldn't call my dad in Washington and make sure he never works again?"

Hunter stares over his shoulder, finally not smiling.

"Yeah, I didn't think so. So, next time you decide to approach me like this, think twice. Don't fuck with me again."

Alex lets go of his collar, gets into his car, and drives away. He knows he should go back to their apartment, but somehow he finds himself yet again at Henry's doorstep, standing there in silence for several minutes. He isn't even sure how he got there without crashing his car.

Finally, the door opens, Henry standing there with David's leash in his hand. David immediately trots out and snuffles at Alex's dress shoes.

"Oh, hello. I didn't realize you were here, why didn't you call?" Henry says, eyes bright. "Alex?"

"I fucked up. And I have nowhere to go now," he says slowly.

A beat.

"What happened, love?"

Alex crashes into Henry, hugging him tightly and not letting go until the ache subsides in his chest.

right where you left me

Chapter Summary

“You are so self-centered, so unwilling to *listen* that you see my title as just figurative. I have centuries of history bearing down on my shoulders, and you see it as just this metaphorical circumstance instead of reality. And then, you dare to question if I *love* you. As if it were so simple?”

Alex can't help himself. Even if he's gobsmacked right now, he has to know. “Well—I. Do you?”

Henry throws his arms up and lets out an exasperated groan.

“Oh, for Christ's sake, Alex. *Of course*, I do. Of course, I bloody love you. That's not the damned point of it all!”

or

imagine if firstprince broke up... help, I'm still at the restaurant

Chapter Notes

sorry for this one... I will make up for it by writing the next chapter as soon as possible. It is probably going to be the most important chapter in the story. I hope you guys enjoy, and if you are hurting, know you are so loved and not alone. Thank you for reading. x

TWO WEEKS PRIOR

“We never finished our game,” Henry had said to him the morning after they first started reading together.

“What game?”

“40 questions.”

“We already went over this. It's 20 questions,” Alex corrected him but smiled to himself at Henry's tendency to be earnest at even the smallest of matters.

“Okay, well, I want to finish that game—20 questions.”

Alex looked up at him over his laptop where he was listening to an audiobook of a law textbook he had borrowed from the library to research a case Luna had been on for months. His glasses were sliding off his nose, a highlighter was tucked behind his messy curls and there were ink stains deep in the crevices of his fingerprints from where his pen leaked every time he accidentally smudged his fingers against his notepad. He was a mess, but Sundays were his lockdown day.

But this was Henry—anything could wait for Henry.

With one swift movement, he cleared his lap of all work, intently turning to Henry and providing him his full, undivided attention. “Well, alright. What can I answer for you, sweetheart?” he said with his best charming smile, the one that can make anyone within a ten-mile radius melt.

Henry stammered a bit, affected by Alex’s classic charm. “Erm, well. Why don’t you wear your, um, glasses at school? Wouldn’t it be more efficient for your eyes especially since you’re staring at PowerPoint of notes and writing all day long?”

It took him by surprise; Alex lifted his hand to his face, pushing his glasses up his nose on instinct after Henry mentioned them.

“I don’t know. I guess I don’t like the way I look in glasses. Are contacts annoying and inconvenient? Yes. But would I rather feel confident than comfortable? Also yes. Let’s chalk it up to personal choice and priorities,” Alex said and shifted around, a little self-conscious at admitting his insecurities to someone as perfect as Henry.

From the corner of his eye, he saw Henry staring intently at him, observing his face as if he was trying to consider Alex’s words with sincerity, but also disapproved of his answer.

Finally, after a few seconds of dumbfounded observation, Henry shook his head. He brought his hand up to Alex’s face and tapped one finger against the frame of his glasses. Then, Henry dragged his thumb along the sharpness of his cheekbone, his other fingers cradling Alex’s jaw in the most delicate touch.

“Did you know glasses are much safer than contacts? I think you should wear these more often, truly. Wouldn’t want those eyes of yours to get damaged,” Henry genuinely told him, blinking a few times as if to say your eyesight is valuable. Don’t risk damaging it.

“Didn’t know you’re an eye doctor,” Alex muttered, shoving Henry’s hand away from his face. “Besides, it doesn’t matter. I wouldn’t be able to focus without feeling ugly.”

“God, Alex. You’re so fucking beautiful,” Henry had blurted in response. The second the words spilled from his perfect, plump mouth, Alex could tell he regretted them. But, hearing them was like being on a concoction of drugs that was so addicting, one taste and Alex couldn’t imagine how he had lived life forgoing hearing these words every day.

Alex had been called many things—hot, sexy, handsome. But never beautiful. It did things to him; it made his stomach flutter and spine liquefy into mush. Henry Fox was the epitome of

Prince Charming if he ever existed. And Alex Claremont-Diaz might be stupid enough to fall even further for him.

“Um, right... My turn for a question,” he changed the subject, eager to get the attention off himself for once. “If you could choose between being a Prince and being a normal person, who would you choose to be?”

Henry opened his mouth to answer but then closed it shut, repeating this action a few more times until he let out a bit of nervous and restrained laughter. It was full of pain, and uncertainty, but more of an emotion that Alex couldn’t quite put his finger on.

After some thoughtful consideration, Henry put his arm around Alex and looked away from him, out the window of his apartment.

Then he said:

“*If* I could have my way, I would be a normal person somewhere in Paris, and you would be there with me. We’d be sitting together in public, probably at Le Relais du Louvre, eating a real croque monsieur. If we are going to be robbed for a sandwich, it should probably taste good,” Henry smiles, still not looking at him. “I’d have my Literature degree, I’d be teaching and you would have your, erm—”

Henry looked down at him, who was nestled in the curve of his armpit, and held up his hand as if he was waiting for Alex to supplement him with an answer.

Alex didn’t even need to think. “My Law degree. I’d be a lawyer, involved in international relations, specializing in defending immigration cases.”

“Perfect. There would be no NDAs, no life-changing decisions, nor any obligations to the throne breathing down my neck. We’d just be two people, having lunch in Paris. And that would be that.” Henry declared as if it was the simplest thing in the world.

In that moment, everything he imagined for them felt palpable because Henry himself had said it aloud without the implications of a timeline or confinements of unrealistic expectations. Alex had asked him whether he would choose to be a Prince or a normal person, and then, without hesitation, painted a picture of a future that had not only included Alex but envisioned him in the career he always wanted.

To be involved in this imaginary scenario felt special, and Alex sat there contently, wondering how a game used to get into the pants of someone ended up becoming a way for them to share a sincere moment about their desires for the future.

Alex broke the comfortable silence first.

“That sounds nice. If you could have your way.”

“Yeah. If only I could,” Henry said and then pressed a kiss into Alex’s temple.

“What else did he say, Alex?”

“I’ve told you everything, I wouldn’t leave anything out,” Alex huffs with exasperation. “He said he read the NDA and the emails we sent each other last month, some other stuff…”

Alex’s pacing back and forth at the foot of his bed while Henry sits on the bed, watching him take the same 7 steps in each direction. Hunter threatened him, yes, but upon reflection, Alex felt confident he had handled it well. There’s no way that douche risks any further blackmail knowing the consequences he would face.

At least that’s what Alex is trying to convince Henry.

“What other stuff, Alex?”

There’s a tinge of disappointment in his eyes, his jaw clenching tighter at every sentence Alex spoke. He knew he fucked up badly; the stony anger Henry expressed made that quite clear.

“Like, he fucking knows you’re my TA and that you’re the Prince of England,” Alex admits, the words sounding so foreign on his tongue. No matter how true the fact is, Alex just couldn’t see Henry as a Prince. He’d seen him in his most vulnerable, raw state—Christ, he’d seen everything of Henry. The concept that he was repeatedly falling into the bed of a member of the royal family just didn’t dawn on him. Neither did the concept that he had fallen in love with Henry, too. Long, long ago, probably.

“Also, he thinks I’m fucking you in exchange for a good grade,” he adds, throwing his head back in a crude laugh.

Henry’s face breaks at that.

“Well, that makes no modicum of sense. You’re extremely well-written, competent, at times a little chaotic and disorganized when you are feeling, er, rather passionate about the topic, but that’s neither here nor there—”

Alex stops in his tracks and swoons over Henry’s high praise of him. If they weren’t in such a serious conversation, Alex probably would have dropped to his knees and given him the best head of his life, all while he’d continue to sing Alex’s praises between moans. But there were more pressing matters than Alex’s developing praise kink.

“Baby. *Focus*,” he says, turning away to hide the smile he was biting back.

“I am focused. I would never compromise my integrity for a grade, and the fact that blimey idiot insinuated I would is rather insulting. What did you say back to him? Did you tell him I am a fair grader?” Henry presses.

“Oh, absolutely. I hyped you up and declared someone of your stature would never disgrace the Crown by exchanging grades for sex.”

“You did?”

Alex rolls his eyes and sits down next to Henry. “No. I said you’re my friend, warned him my parents could prevent his dad from working in Washington, and shoved him against my car while telling him he was a fucking moron for threatening me.”

Henry stays quiet, the corner of his pinkie finger gently brushing against Alex’s fist that is dug deep into the mattress. The gold signet ring felt cold against his hot skin. Alex closes his eyes at the touch.

“You shoved him?”

He should’ve done a lot more than just shove him.

“Yeah, I did,” Alex says and opens his eyes.

Henry’s facing him, looking at him with soft, sympathetic eyes. “I’m going to take care of this for us. Give me the key to your apartment, please. I’ll handle it.”

He narrows his eyes for a moment but eases them once he sees the sincere look on Henry’s face. Even if his threats did deter Hunter, the pull Henry had was much greater than any influence Alex had. He had to trust him. Alex fetched his house key off his set and placed it into Henry’s waiting palm.

When Henry’s hand closed around it, Alex felt better. It was as if he was transferring over the burden in that singular key. It seems that Henry felt the same; with a sigh, he leans in and kisses Alex very firmly.

“What are you going to do?”

“You don’t need to worry about that.”

He had been in trouble before, always saved by his parents’ money or pull. But nothing ever this serious has happened to him before—especially regarding a sexual relationship. Still, Alex isn’t ashamed of Henry; if anything, he wishes he could claim him and flaunt their almost relationship in front of the world. The only thing preventing him from doing so is the NDA, his respect for Henry, and well, his respect for his future and his parents’ careers.

Henry disappears into the other room, phone already at his ear. Alex lines his body up against the wall next to the door and tries to listen; he can hear Henry say Shaan’s name, but everything else is garbled British mumbling.

After failing to eavesdrop, Alex finds himself stressed, worn through to the bottom of his soul. To soothe himself, he hops in the shower. As his curls flatten and the tension in his neck eases, his mind can’t help but wander to the most obvious questions:

One, what are he and Henry in terms of their relationship to each other?

Two, what comes next? Do they just keep going until one of them gets bored?

Three, should Alex even share his feelings? If it’s just going to end up fizzling out or blowing up in their faces, what *is* the point?

Alex presses his forehead against the shower wall, the water cascading down his back. Even if he physically felt better, the emotional rollercoaster inside of him was never-ending. He didn't know how to get off of it; even so, if getting off meant leaving Henry behind, why would he ever want to get off it?

The bathroom door opens.

"Can I come in?" Henry asks.

"It's your shower; I don't think you have to ask," Alex calls over his shoulder. "But yeah, come in."

Alex hears the sound of clothes hitting the floor. "It's your privacy, so I do have to ask."

He shrugs and focuses on the wall in front of him. When Henry comes up behind him, his long arms immediately wrap around him. One of his favorite discoveries about himself is the feeling of being held, and despite being in denial before, Henry indeed is taller and broader in the shoulders than him—something he's become infatuated with. Already, Henry's pressing kisses into the back of his neck and it's too much for Alex.

"Even though today ended poorly, you know I missed you so much, right? Last night has been on my mind all bloody day," Henry says, a hand falling to Alex's hip and squeezing it lightly.

"*Baby*," he breathes out in a whiny moan.

"I know, I know," Henry whispers in his ear, his accent driving Alex mad. "When I said I was going to take care of *this*, I meant I was going to take care of *you* as well, love."

He tests the waters. "You can't say that to me and not mean it."

"Who says I don't mean it?" Henry asks, kissing along his jaw until he meets Alex's mouth.

They kiss with water trickling between their mouths, making each kiss even wetter. But Alex won't allow himself to get distracted; not this time. He pulls away from Henry's eager kisses and turns around, facing him.

"Say you won't leave, no matter how bad things get," Alex says over the sound of the shower water falling between them. "Even if it blows up in our faces. Don't leave me alone to deal with it. Because I... fuck, don't make me say it."

It's the most pathetic thing Alex has ever said; it feels like begging for someone not to leave when they haven't even left yet. And yet, Henry's cupping his face, looking deep into his eyes, and saying in the most firm, but gentle voice:

"I'm not sure where this is coming from, but I can assure you: I am not going anywhere. I'm afraid you're stuck with me, as far as I know."

Alex wants to believe him. But the nagging feeling that something terrible is about to rip them apart sits at the back of his mind, undermining everything Henry says to him.

Still, he just nods and surrenders himself to Henry; they shower, where Alex loses his mind over Henry's soapy touches and learns that showering with someone is one of the best intimate experiences one can have. Afterward, he watches the routine of a Prince with painstaking precision, losing count of how many skincare products he uses to maintain his perfection. They share the mirror as they get ready for bed—Alex catches Henry staring at him as he brushes his teeth and combs product through his damp curls. When their eyes meet, Alex gives him a grin filled with frothy toothpaste that makes his already red face flush even deeper.

That night, Alex lays back and listens to Henry read to him. They finish the final act, but none of it registers in his mind. He knows *Romeo & Juliet* inevitably ends in a tragedy, but he can't grasp how two people so meant for each other could be destroyed by such ironic, extraordinary circumstances. Alex knows how it'll end; but oddly, he finds himself still rooting for these two people to overcome what's set and written in stone.

Henry places the book on his stand. The ending seems to have an impact on him too based on his lack of inquiry into Alex's thoughts. Usually, after finishing an act, they engage in some type of discussion of what they'd read together. Instead, he throws an arm over Alex, covering him completely with his broad shoulders.

They both fall asleep, completely oblivious of what's to come.

Tuesday night is when Alex finally goes home after some well-needed encouragement from June. She tells him not to let Hunter dictate his comfort, and that if anything were to persist, he has every opportunity next semester to apply for a dorm. He hates that she's right; spending his money on a place he wasn't even staying at and letting Hunter think he was running away isn't the way to go.

Alex's first night back goes fine. Hunter can barely look him in the eye as they pass each other in the kitchen. It's amusing that he scurries back to his room like the rat he is. Alex considers raising his hand and pretending to hit him just to see him flinch but ultimately decides the threat of legal ruin should be enough of a warning for now.

Hopefully, Shaan served Hunter with an NDA so daunting and filled to the brim with legal jargon, that no misunderstanding would be fathomable. Alex didn't particularly want to know what Henry meant when he said he would take care of it, but by the way, Hunter leaves him be, he assumes it must have been handled with an iron fist.

Wednesday morning comes and Alex already misses Henry. He hates himself for getting so attached—a likely result of having so many sleepovers. As he drives to class alone for the first time in a while, he tries not to think of their times in the backseat every Monday and Wednesday morning, or the sound of Henry's teapot waking him up at 7 AM sharp. It's lonely, but he knows the distance will make their next encounter worth it.

As he approaches his English class, someone grabs him by the elbow, nearly knocking his thermos out of his hand.

“What the fu—“

“Shush. Come with me.”

Henry.

The grin that spreads across his face is instantaneous. Alex can’t help it; even when Henry isn’t around, just the mere concept that eventually he *will* be around brings Alex to cloud nine.

Henry’s wearing his long, dark blue peacoat, a black turtleneck, and his dark gray dress pants that hug his thighs in a way that makes Alex absolutely drool. He eyes him up and down as he ushers him towards the elevator, observing how *good* he looks.

“Where are we going?”

Henry jams his thumb against the going-up button on the elevator and shuffles his feet impatiently. “I forgot something in my office.”

“And you need me for that?”

“Yes.”

“Okay.”

Alex doesn’t question it and follows Henry into the elevator. There’s an odd urgency in the way he stares at the floor indicator as if he’s trying to make it move faster with his mind. Alex just takes another bitter swig of coffee from his thermos.

When the doors open, Henry grabs his arm again, nearly dragging him down the hall toward his office. Alex watches Henry fumble with his keys as they reach the door. It’s endearing but the unusual urgency makes him question why he’s in such a rush.

Henry finally opens the door and motions for Alex to go in first. He goes in, setting his thermos down on the desk and backpack down on the floor. Before he can say a word, Henry’s whipping him around and smashing his mouth against his fervently; Alex can barely register what’s happening, just that his belt is being undone, and that Henry is, well, attempting to undress them both with a determination that’s both concerning and arousing.

His brain finally catches up and wins the race against his groin—*shit*, they’re passionately making out in Henry’s fucking *office*. They’ve hooked up in the parking lot of their school, but never *inside* their school.

Alex lightly shoves Henry off him. “Hen, sweetheart, *stop*, wait. We can’t, you know we can’t.”

Henry groans and covers his eyes. “Yes, we can.”

“Uh, no. We can’t,” he counters with an awkward laugh. Henry’s surprising persistence makes him sweat beneath his leather jacket.

There's a heavy silence as Henry rubs a hand across his forehead and then looks up at Alex. He looks at him warily, eyes red and sunken in deep, as if he's lived a hundred years since seeing him the day before.

"Alex..."

"What's wrong?" Alex steps closer to him and pulls Henry to his chest. All he can do is inhale the scent of him to soothe his building anxiety.

"Please," he says into Alex's shoulder. It sounds like he's about to cry. "Please just fuck me, because I need this. I need you right now, Alex. Please."

Alex pulls back and examines Henry. His eyes are glossy, red and he's biting down on his bottom lip hard enough to draw blood. He can see the want and need all over his face. There's an innate desire to please Henry, but also something strange, unknown, about the way he was pleading for him at this moment.

"Fuck... okay, let's go home," he turns to grab his thermos.

"No—here."

"Hen..."

"Please?"

The continuous pleading does something to Alex because he's conceding and grabbing Henry by the back of his neck, pulling him back in for a kiss. At this point, he shouldn't care why Henry needs him. Alex should want to give Henry whatever he can to ease whatever is causing him to feel this way.

Alex helps Henry shed his coat and turtleneck until he's in nothing but his slacks. In one swooping motion, Henry clears his desk, sending several stacks of papers, Alex's thermos, and a mug holding pens crashing to the floor. There's an animalistic sound that comes from Henry as Alex lifts him back onto the now-cleared desk. Adrenaline pumps through him as their mouths slot together, their tongues moving against each other with inexplicable eagerness. They'd never kissed like this before; Alex didn't want it to end.

"You know I'm missing class to fuck you, right?" Alex pulls back with a wet gasp. "You're a bad influence."

"*We* are missing class," he corrects him. "Take your shirt off."

Alex does as he's told. Then, he shakes his head once he realizes. "I don't have anything—we should just go home. I don't have a condom, or—"

"My coat pocket: lube and a condom. Grab it," Henry orders.

Oh. He came prepared. Alex hears the voice telling him something is wrong in the back of his head and checks that the door is locked before digging into Henry's coat pocket. After

locating the tiny bottle of lube and condom, he can't help but think of how Henry came here knowing he was going to have sex with him.

"I don't think I can do this," he says, teetering back and forth on his heels. "It's only the second time, and uh, it just doesn't feel right."

Henry looks frustrated but offers a compromise. "Let me go down on you instead, then?"

Christ. Alex's suspicious concern transforms into cockiness, understanding Henry is likely just horny. Who knew gay British royals have such high libidos, even in less-than-ideal circumstances?

"Okay, on your knees, then, Your Majesty," Alex teases him. But he gets no reaction, no laugh or eye roll, which rocks his confidence. Still, Henry swaps places with him on the desk, and starts to sink to his knees, kissing Alex's stomach with each inch he descends.

It *should* be amazing. But as Henry goes down on him, Alex attempts to establish some semblance of connection—unsuccessfully. With every "*baby*" and bit of praise, he notices Henry recoiling into himself, becoming quiet and leaving Alex to babble into the space around them. Even if it feels good physically, it's the first time the act feels emotionally vacant and one-sided. Alex thinks he can finish; he *wants* to get it over with and go back to class. But when he reaches down to stroke his face and catches Henry staring at his bookshelf, empty-eyed and looking almost desolate with Alex's cock in his mouth, he loses it.

"Okay, I'm done," Alex says, pushing Henry's shoulders back. He turns his back and redresses quickly, and he can hear Henry doing the same. Admittedly, his ego is a bit wounded, and he wants to stomp out the door and leave Henry to his own devices, but his stupid mouth won't let him. "Don't ever do that again. I don't want to hook up with you if something is wrong and you're just going to use sex to feel better, or whatever. That's not me, and I don't want that to be us."

Henry's quiet, staring hard at Alex's shoes.

He continues, "So, you have nothing to say? After that, you really have nothing to say to me?"

"It won't happen again, ever," Henry runs his hand through his hair, his face red and twisted with something between remorse and anger. "Nothing like *this* will ever happen again, you have my word."

It's too finite for Alex's liking.

"What does that even mean, Henry?"

"It means—it means, *ha*, that I am going home to London at the end of the term, Alex. So, nothing like this can happen ever again."

He observes Henry's face and analyzes his words in one equal breath. And then, it hits him. The realization hits Alex like an 18-wheeler with no brakes on; even after more than a decade, he can recognize the look of someone about to break the news of two people who are no longer together. It once came from his mother, telling June and himself that their father's absence was the result of an impending divorce. And now, he sees it from Henry, who is getting ready to inform him that whatever they had between them is essentially over.

"You're leaving me." It's not a question.

"It's not entirely my choice—"

"You said you wouldn't leave, and you're leaving me," Alex says and backs into the door. The room feels like it's getting impossibly smaller.

"The Crown found out about Hunter and felt I was heading towards a privacy breach. Shaan had to report it when he had him sign the NDA. I have to go home. My family thinks I should do this before another potential breach can occur. I don't have another choice, Alex. You know that, don't you?" Henry steps towards him.

But he doesn't know that. Suddenly, the last almost three months of his life are meaningless. Every experience he had with Henry was just fodder for his self-discovery. Except—except he didn't want Henry to be just that to him. Alex wanted Henry to be his.

"You could say no. You're twenty-fucking-two, Henry. Don't tell me you have no say in *this*," Alex points out in a snappy tone, refusing to accept the circumstances Henry is presenting.

"Believe it or not, I am doing this to protect you. So, you can insult my age and insinuate I have no control over my own life. Or, you can accept that *you* can't always have your way."

That makes Alex lose it.

"*Protect me?! How are you protecting me by trying to have sex with me in your office at school? A privacy breach? Do you really think this was a private area to hook up? That's 'protecting' me?*"

"I was trying to say goodbye. I—"

Absurdly, that makes it even worse.

"What, you were going to get me to fuck you, then say goodbye to me without so much of a word as to what we were consummating?" Alex says with a hysterical laugh. "Did you even consider how it would make me feel if you ghosted me after that?"

"We would still talk in class, but I needed you, I—"

"Go fuck yourself."

Henry grimaces, and leans back onto his desk, arms crossed. It drives Alex insane because he has the audacity to be so composed as if they were nothing but a fleeting notch on his belt.

“Very mature, Alex. So glad we can have this conversation where you keep interrupting me and insulting me. Maybe if you stopped talking for more than one minute, we’d be able to—”

And it all comes bursting out at the seams.

“I fucking *love* you, okay?! I know you think we are nothing more than a fucking legal document, but I think I’ve been in love with you since, like, the moment you paid for my stupid coffee at the cafe. And, I need to know if you love me back. I need to know if you love me back because I refuse to believe the man I’ve gotten to know these last few months would just turn his back on me because of some figurative royal obligations—”

Henry cuts him off by slamming his fist down on the desk, startling them both. His face is red, his jaw is clenched tightly and he looks like he might lunge at Alex any moment.

“*Figurative royal obligations*,” he repeats slowly and seethingly as if he couldn’t believe Alex’s words. “You are so self-centered, so unwilling to *listen* that you see my title as just figurative. I have centuries of history bearing down on my shoulders, and you see it as just this metaphorical circumstance instead of reality. And then, you dare to question if I *love* you. As if it were so simple?”

Alex can’t help himself. Even if he’s gobsmacked right now, he has to know. “Well—I. Do you?”

Henry throws his arms up and lets out an exasperated groan.

“Oh, for Christ’s sake, Alex. *Of course*, I do. Of course, I bloody love you. That’s not the damned point of it all!”

The air in the room is so thick with emotion, relief, and huffy, annoyed breaths. What should be a special moment of rejoicing in the fact that his first love indeed loves him back is tainted by the probability that Henry is still going to leave. So, Alex does the only thing he knows how to do because talking about his feelings isn’t his strong suit.

It only takes him three strides to reach Henry, grab his face between his hands, and kiss him as hard as he can. And to no surprise, Henry reciprocates just as he did that first time they kissed by tangling his fingers into Alex’s overgrown curls and opening his mouth to deepen the kiss.

“I love you so much, Hen,” Alex pants against his mouth, his lips already hurting from how bruising their kisses are. In between kisses, the words from his stupid heart finally align a path with his throat and pour out of his mouth. “You’re everything to me; I love the way you read to me, how patient you are, the sound of your laugh and your accent, and the way you dress... God, who knew how sexy men’s librarian fashion could be?”

Alex peels back his turtleneck to expose the milky skin on his neck so he can plant permanent kisses along the hollow of his throat, eliciting sounds of relief and agony from Henry. He’s gripping Alex’s hair so hard it hurts, but he doesn’t dare think of telling him to let go lest it results in losing him.

He follows the path of kisses he left back up to Henry's mouth, and he tastes a salty wetness on his lips. Alex thinks his words would have had some type of impact, or would be integral in changing what was about to happen. But he realizes Henry's crying, and it likely isn't because he's smitten in the throes of love.

Something immensely awful switches inside Alex; he's holding Henry as he cries, swallowing the thick knot in his own throat and his knees are jelly. Even if they did everything they could to make it work, the rational part is telling him that he's been living a *lie*, a pathetic fantasy where he thought the Prince of England would ever forgo unlimited opportunities in the place of one mad infatuation with a bisexual disaster from Texas. It stings to admit he's wrong; but as he pries Henry's fingers from his curls and creates distance between their bodies, Alex knows the impending rejection will hurt so much less.

"I'm going to, uh, go home because I am a mess. And I cannot be seen like this, especially when I'm going back to London soon," Henry says with a deep breath, wiping his nose on his sleeve. "You can use my office to gather yourself."

"Alright."

"Alex, I—"

"Don't say anymore. Just don't. Because I don't want to hate you or have to over-analyze anything you say to me. You made your choice, and I respect that. Who wouldn't choose the Crown at the end of the day?"

Alex knows he shouldn't have said it the second the words left his mouth. Insinuating Henry left him to one day be King is the ultimate low blow, but he wants to make sure they both left that room wrecked, and feeling like less of a person than before they walked in together.

Henry blinks a few times then tilts his chin up with unsteady pride, and walks past him. When the door opens and closes, Alex stands in silence for minutes until his brain finally finds its way back to his nervous system. Every inch of his body is numb, and oddly, no new thoughts about what has just occurred have permeated his mind. He's just... existing.

Before he leaves, he tidies Henry's office. Every dropped paper is restacked, each pen is placed back into the mug and every desk trinket is neatly rearranged like the way it was before. He even tucks the bottle of lube and condom into a desk drawer so no one sees it sitting about. Then, Alex leaves for the day. There's no way he's attending a single class in this state, especially considering the saliva left on his groin inside his jeans. Right now, a shower is all he wants.

As he enters his car, he places his backpack on the passenger seat and thermos in the cupholder. When Alex closes the door behind him, he finally allows himself to cry.

Every night for the next few days, Alex has the same dream.

They're standing in Henry's office, clinging to each other for dear life. While he thinks his grip is secure, he fails to retain the love of his life every single time. Henry is falling through his fingers as he tries to speak, slipping from each attempted grasp. No words, no amount of begging could catch him, could keep him. Alex felt himself losing Henry—he felt every painful unstitching of him, as if Henry was once sewn into his heart, and is now being ripped out of his chest without anesthesia.

And yet, being awake and realizing he has lost Henry is still worse than reliving the process of losing him.

Every day becomes strictly planned out for Alex; if he follows the guidelines he has made for himself in his head, he can make it through the day.

Delete all social media and mute Henry's number. He's not calling or texting anyway.

Respond to June and Nora as normal to not raise concern.

Email professors that he can't make it to class because his internship is busy for the next week, but submit all assignments to avoid grading penalties.

Leave the house only to go to work.

Stay in bed.

Reread *Romeo and Juliet* until he can find a hidden deeper meaning between the lines.

Play "Self Control" by Frank Ocean on repeat.

Drink water.

Don't think about Henry.

Sleep.

If Alex follows these guidelines, the days go by quickly. The nights are the worst when he finally allows himself to curl up in his bed and succumb to the loss he's endured. Nobody knows what's happened, and it's for the best. If he were to tell someone, it would become more real. Part of Alex is still hoping he will wake up to the sound of a whistling teapot and the smell of Earl Gray tea, and the sound of Henry's ushered footsteps rushing to whisk the teapot off of the burner so it doesn't disturb Alex's sleep.

Sometimes Alex wears the navy blue UNH sweatshirt he stole from the first night he slept over. But he stops wearing it once the smell of Henry's cologne and detergent starts to become more muted, so he neatly folds it back up, tucking it back into the depths of his dresser drawer.

So, Alex reads, works, sleeps, listens to the fucking Frank Ocean song, and mourns by himself. Every night he lays in the bed where Henry first touched him, back to staring at the ceiling, but instead of therapy sessions, he's engraving a reminder to never fall for someone like Henry Fox again.

Guilty As Sin?

Chapter Summary

“Ironically you say that, because if Juliet had simply waited for Romeo, they would not be in that predicament of death, would they now?” Henry asks, and Alex can tell he’s sincerely asking about them.

“I think if two people truly loved each other, they wouldn’t use fate as an excuse. They’d make it work. And if it doesn’t work, it doesn’t work. But hiding behind some theory of uncontrollable cosmic forces doesn’t change the way I feel about you,” Alex says, the words slipping out of his mouth before he can stop them.

or

they fight over *Romeo & Juliet* in reference to their own relationship in front of their classmates. firstprince is so dramatic 😭♥

Chapter Notes

thank you all for the love and support ♥ the last chapter was heartbreaking and I wrote this as fast as I could to make up for it. Writing this was hard too but I think it’ll be easier to swallow than the last.

your comments are also so lovely and appreciate 😭♥

Knock, knock, knock.

“Alex?”

He hears his name being called in a muffled voice, but he can’t turn over. Alex is frozen in place, incapable of moving, responding, or formulating any thought process that would get him from point A to point B. It’s been like this for days. He thinks it’s Sunday, maybe Saturday, but it doesn’t matter. His throat is like sandpaper from being dehydrated—he probably cried every bit of moisture out of his body. Every inch of his body aches as his heart beats, his stomach caved in from not eating, and his legs are sore from staying stiffly tangled in his blankets. If he leaves his room, Alex is positive he will die.

“Alex?” Alex could hear his name, louder and more clear. He’s certain his door has been opened now.

His name. Again. Maybe he's lost his mind. In no circumstance is it Hunter, and there's no semblance of chance it's... *him*. Why does the voice sound so far away and why can't he just turn around to see who's calling him?

The bed shifts a bit as a person's weight sits next to him. Still, Alex can't move.

"Alex, it's June. Nora's here too. We're here. It's going to be okay."

June.

Alex can't remember if he texted June or Nora today. Or the day before.

"Is he awake?" *Nora.*

"I don't know," June says, the weight shifting off of the mattress suddenly. Hesitant footsteps tread lightly around his bed, stopping before him until he can see two legs in front of his face. June kneels, coming face to face with him. Her eyes are red and puffy, but her face remains caught between soft and restrained as she examines the shell of her brother before her. June's always been the best at keeping it together—for the both of them. "He's awake."

Unfortunately.

"Alex, we spoke to Pez. He asked if you were okay, and we had no clue you weren't okay in the first place. We know what happened, he said that you and Henry broke up l—"

Alex cuts her off. "We weren't together."

The sound of his voice surprises him because Alex is bringing a hand up to his throat and covering the hollow curves in his neck that Henry had kissed so many times before. Hearing himself say it burns just as badly as the coarse dryness in his throat as it comes out of his mouth.

Behind him, Alex can hear Nora shifting on her feet with uncertainty. June's eyes flicker up over his shoulder and he knows they're sharing a look—probably a look of pity. It's understandable; one semester at college away from home, Alex falls in love with the Prince of England and becomes bed-bound due to a broken heart. For a semester that was supposed to be uneventful, irony has made an example out of him.

"You should have told me, Alex," she whispers, resting her chin on the edge of the bed. "Nora and I would've been there for you—we knew how much he meant to you."

Alex says nothing, but his heart is pounding in uneven beats, and he is fighting back the urge to cry.

Suddenly, June reaches across and places a delicate, cold hand on his cheek. He doesn't want to be, but it's like Alex is simultaneously being brought back to life with a defibrillator while a knife is wedged between his ribs. Between choked gasps and sobs, Alex isn't sure if he wants to live through this or if he wants to succumb to the hemothorax that Henry Fox caused by walking into his life and leaving, just as soon as he shared his love for him. Part of Alex wants to resent him for making him this way, but he can't even do that.

Without hesitation, June leaps onto his bed and pulls him up into a tight hug. Nora piles on behind them, tightly squeezing as Alex allows himself to cry without shame. It's the first time either of them has seen him cry in a long while, and he knows by the sniffles and hiccups coming from both of them that they are crying too. Once June lets him go, Nora latches onto him just as she did at that first party back in September. This time, he doesn't push her away. Alex needs his friend right now—he's so tired of being alone in all of this.

"Why didn't you say something? You're such a dumbass! I can't stand you men and your tendency to crawl into caves and die. Is that what you're trying to do, Alejandro? Are you trying to die on me *over a man*?" Nora wipes her nose on her sleeve, then cocks her head at Alex in an attempt to make him laugh.

He tries to bite back a smile, but it slips through. "Henry isn't just any man. Fuck—I can't believe I am going to say this, but I have loved this dickhead since, for like ever. Y'all don't even know how much," Alex feels a painful squeeze in his chest and flops backward onto his bed.

"Hm... the dick really *was* that good, huh?" Nora teases.

Alex groans. "You have no idea. I miss him. I'm down bad."

"Clearly," June says, waving her hand at Alex. "You had us worried sick, Alex. While I understand privacy and needing space, you can't keep us in the dark, not when you're like this. If anything bad ever happened to you and I wasn't there..." Her voice trails off in a shaky breath and Nora reaches over to squeeze her hand.

She's right, and Alex is grateful, once again, for their intrusions. Everything in his body aches, physically and emotionally. Without his sister and best friend, Alex isn't sure he would have made it through the next day. He can't recall the last time he had a proper sip of water or a bite of food. A broken heart diminished any desire he had to care for himself even in the smallest of ways.

So, Nora leads him into the bathroom for a shower, and the person he sees looking back at him in the mirror is not the Alex Claremont-Diaz he's been all his life. His usual stubble has developed into a small beard, his curls are flat and oily, and the skin in the contours of his face looks lifeless and hollowed out. In other words, Alex looks like absolute shit.

Nora sees him scrutinizing himself and shoves a towel against his stomach. "Stop judging yourself for once in your life, Alejandro."

"It's my fault he left."

Nora hums in disapproval, distracted by the bottles of moisturizer and hair products scattered along the bathroom vanity. She plucks each bottle up and gathers them in her arms, neatly placing each one right side up one by one.

Alex continues, "You know, we were about to have sex in his office at school? That's how he was going to leave me."

She doesn't react; she pulls her curls back into a bun and begins gathering the dirty clothes and towels on the floor. Alex hugs his towel in confusion, waiting for her response.

"Did you hear me? He was gonna 'hit it and quit it' on me. Isn't that fucked up? For a Prince, don't you think that's so unclassy? Fuckboyish, even?" he goads on.

That seems to get Nora's attention, because she lets out a boisterous laugh, shaking her head in disbelief as she walks away with a heaping pile of dirty laundry. Alex follows her, awaiting her explanation of her sudden disinterest in his relationship drama. June is tidying his bedroom, stripping his bed, and placing the sheets in his laundry basket. On any other occasion, he'd be embarrassed at his older sister cleaning his room, but Alex is grateful for her help.

Nora plops the laundry into the basket and tracks back into the bathroom, Alex still hot on her heels. Her lack of communication is irritating him now.

"Are you really not going to say anything to that? Don't you think that's fucked up?" Alex says and narrows his eyes when he catches a glimpse of Nora's shifty eyes in his mirror.

Finally, she turns around and lays it on him: "Don't *you* think that's fucked up? I mean, isn't 'hit it and quit it' the Alex Claremont-Diaz special? *Do not interrupt me.* You've spent the first two years of college hooking up with girls and then the second they developed feelings you ran. While, yes, this scenario is different, you did hurt a lot of people because you couldn't handle the fact that you weren't ready to love anyone. And now, you're getting a taste of that. Henry isn't ready to accept this love from you. And you might need to accept that."

Alex stands there hugging the towel, mouth hung open in shock at Nora's bluntness.

"She's not entirely wrong, you know," June says behind him, causing him to jump. "Besides the fact that I doubt he would've left you after fucking you in his office. Insane place to choose to consummate, by the way. It's like he wanted to get caught—and lose his job. Both of you seem to forget that part all of the time—the implications of a student-teacher-student relationship. Very messy."

"You two aren't making me feel better now," Alex groans.

"Did you two even *talk*?" Nora squints at him.

Alex pauses and thinks back to that Wednesday morning in his office, Henry eager and on his knees, then distant and resigned after Alex rejected his attempt at a "goodbye." It's painful to reminisce about, it feels like a fresh wound as he recalls the moment he realized Henry was crying and the last words he said to him before he left the room.

And then Alex remembers the explicit joy he felt when Henry Fox in the most exasperated, annoyed tone claimed to love him back.

"Yeah... I told him I loved him."

“And?” June and Nora egg him on in synchrony.

Alex nervously shuffles his feet. “Henry said he loves me back.”

The girls exchange a look, ending with Nora facepalming and June rolling her eyes with an irritated sigh escaping her mouth. Both of them sandwich him in, pressing against him on each side.

“So, what’s the problem?”

“His family found out that Hunter, the Republican guy I intern with and live with, threatened to expose us because he’s an insecure shithead so we had him sign an NDA. But then the Crown—his grandmother and mom I’m assuming—said he has to come home early before graduation because he risks exposing himself. Being gay. I guess,” Alex explains in one long breath.

“That’s it? You’re dumbass—and he’s a dumbass too. Ugh, *men!* What is it with y’all and not talking to each other about your emotions? Yes, your situation is complicated, but it’s not impossible. Just because Henry has to leave doesn’t mean you have to break up!” June says in exasperation, then wrinkles her nose. “Also, you stink bad, Alex.”

Alex shoves her playfully, and Nora smacks his bicep. He wants to believe it truly is that simple, but it’s not. Henry is bound by duty and obligation to protect the image of the Crown. It’s something that’s gone over Alex’s head since day one, something he could not accept because all he’s ever known was Henry Fox, his TA. Prince Henry was an anomaly, and from the moment in the cafe he had assumed Alex looked him up, he swore to never treat Henry as more than a friend he shared a class with.

And maybe a bed, on more than several occasions.

As he showers away the last few days, Alex ponders if Henry is suffering as badly as he is. Would he truly have left Alex if he had just gone along with what Henry had wanted? Would he have been able to say goodbye? Could Henry end things on a physical note when they were so much more than that?

There is so much he wants to say, but Alex knows it won’t change their circumstances. Henry was going to leave next semester, whether he liked it or not. The only thing that’s changed is the timeline of him leaving has sped up serendipitously.

The process of showering and shaving is brutal, but when he finishes the final touches on his hair, there’s an overgrown loose curl coiled perfectly to rest on his forehead, and being the old, unbroken Alex Claremont-Diaz feels palpable to him. On his toilet are clean clothes, and he throws his head back and laughs when he spots the navy blue UNH sweatshirt. There’s no way Nora nor June knew about the importance of Henry’s stolen sweatshirt; still, it feels like the universe is telling him something. So, Alex pulls the sweatshirt over his head, inhaling Henry’s faded clean scent and exhaling shakily as he imagines his arms around him. *This will do for now*, he thinks.

After he dresses, he finds the girls patiently waiting for him on his bed, surrounded by bags of food that suspiciously smell like Acapulcos. Alex's room is clean, bed made, and his *Romeo & Juliet* book is neatly placed on his nightstand next to his phone. He truly has the best sister and best friend in the world.

"We got food—pork tamales and a side of tortilla soup. You need to eat, even if you feel like you can't," June says softly with a smile, patting the spot next to her.

He *is* hungry. Alex can't remember the last time he had a proper meal that wasn't coffee, water, and a bagel. On Friday, he ran out of bagels and decided that leaving his bed was too much of an effort, so he let his cloudy mood keep him bedridden and deprived of regular meals. He plops down next to June and takes a plate from Nora, peeling the husks off two tamales and placing them on his plate. Alex first takes a bite of his soup, and it's bliss but also difficult to swallow. There's an unpleasant sloshing in the pit of his stomach, angry at him for not eating in so long. He hates himself for allowing things to get this bad to the point where eating is difficult.

Nora places a hand on his knee and squeezes it, chewing her food thoughtfully. "Take your time, Alejandro. Go easy, one bite at a time."

So, he does. Each bite he takes slowly, and he cuts himself off if he starts to feel too full. June encourages him to drink a few glasses of water, running back to the kitchen each time he empties it. Despite their criticism of his handling of the breakup, they're delicate with Alex. It's unusual, but welcome. Alex doesn't think he could handle too much tough love right now.

After they finished eating, all three of them lay side by side on Alex's bed, staring up at his ceiling in silence. Nora is the first one to break the pact of quietness. "So, what's with the book? Since when did you read Shakespeare?"

Of course, Nora would be the one to intrude about him reading Shakespeare.

"It's the book I—we chose to do our oral presentation on for English class. Henry and I, I mean. We have to choose a theme that we disagree on and present both sides," Alex clarifies, his voice trembling as he remembers the fucking project. Would Henry still be around to do it with him or would he make Alex do it by himself like a fool?

June and Nora simultaneously turn over and face him, their faces twisted in disbelief at the bombshell Alex dropped on them.

"You two are doing a *presentation*? *Together*?! Oh, Alex!" Nora squeals and kicks her feet out.

"Um... yeah?"

June is grinning wide. "And when is this presentation?"

"Like, next Wednesday. Why?"

“Why not use the presentation as leeway to tell him how you feel?” June nudges his ribs.

Alex frowns, shaking his head. “We didn’t really iron out the details. I don’t even know what that dickhead is going to say. We read the book together, though. Well—yeah. That’s it, we read it together.”

Alex stops himself short of telling them that Henry read to him, and sometimes he would read to Henry. Some things felt too personal to share; this being one of them.

“So, what did you disagree on?” Nora asks.

He thinks back to that first night when he caught Henry reading *Romeo & Juliet*. How Alex teased him relentlessly, the banter flowed easily between them until Henry pointed out that they disagreed on the theme of “fate” and that they should do their project on the book. It makes his heart ache to think about it, and he swallows the memory back down.

“Fate,” Alex says, his fingers tracing over the letters “UNH” sprawled across his chest.

“Let me guess, he’s the hopeless romantic who believes if two people are meant to be together, they will find each other, and you’re the hater?” June says with a hint of humor.

“Well—“

Nora cuts him off. “No—I think it’s more that Henry is the one who believes that fate isn’t realistic, and Alex thinks fate is idealistic. I bet Henry liked the play because they both died and he enjoyed the idea of spiteful love. And you? You just enjoyed being right.”

“I don’t know what I think anymore, honestly. I mean, I’ve read that stupid book so many times in the last few days. There are no answers, but the more I read it, the more I understand why Henry loved it. Even if the ending never changes, I’m always rooting for Romeo and Juliet to beat the odds,” Alex shrugs, then laughs sadly. “While I *still* think they are horny and selfish kids in love, they’re always going to be subjected to the same fate—even if they try fighting it. Yet, they always, *always* pick each other. I think that’s beautiful, even if the world around them subjects them to the worst type of fate.”

Nora and June are quiet at the end of his ramblings. Alex looks between them curiously.

“What? Did I say something?”

“Are you serious, Alex? Do we have to spell it out for you? You two are so in love and willing to lose everything for each other, that you don’t even see that you’re going to be worse off in the end,” June shakes her head. “You two seriously need to talk. From what I’ve heard from you, it doesn’t sound like it’s over.”

“I’m not talking to him until he talks to me first.”

The girls once again exchange a look before groaning and rolling back over onto their backs.

“Men,” they say in agreement.

Thanksgiving in June and Nora's dorm room goes swell—they have an impromptu feast of Popeyes, and take turns calling their parents with apologies for missing Thanksgiving dinner. When June hands him the phone to talk to their mom, Alex puts on his best happy voice, but it takes Ellen Claremont all of 15 seconds to figure out something is amiss with her son.

“Hi, mom. Happy Thanksgiving—sorry we didn't make it home. Finals and all; no point flying back for such a short while, you know?”

“That's alright, darling. Now, you could give me all the excuses in the world as to why you can't come to see your mother for Thanksgiving, or you can use this phone call to tell me what's been bothering you,” Ellen points out, her tone soft and sturdy as always. He can hear her murking about in the kitchen, likely preparing Thanksgiving dinner for her friends and husband.

Alex stiffens, tucking the phone to his chest and stepping into the hallway as June and Nora fight over the last biscuit. Then, he lifts the phone to his ear and confidently says, “Nothing is bothering me.”

“Bullshit. Tell your mama what's wrong or I'm going to have to implement a state law that permits you to tell me what's wrong—heavy fines if you don't,” she jokes.

Alex cracks a smile—his mom's bad humor always made him feel better. When he and June were kids, Ellen would threaten to draft laws that said they'd lose TV privileges if they didn't keep up with their grades or chores. Reflecting upon it, it worked—although it may have been the source of June's disdain for politics.

“The semester has been... rough,” Alex says in a quiet voice, looking up and down the dorm hallway.

“How so, sugar? I thought you were just repeating classes you've already taken—is there a problem with the curriculum or your professors? Maybe you should come back home and finish—“

“Mom, I've met someone.”

“Oh. Why is that a problem? Has she been distracting you from your studies? Is it another intern at the law firm? You know how I feel about dating within the workplace. It never ends well; look at me and your father,” Ellen says disapprovingly.

Not workplace dating—more like international relations dating and also student-semi-faculty relations. Alex isn't sure which scenario is worse for him.

“None of that.”

“Well, then what? Are you going to keep me guessing? What's her name, at least?”

Alex decides not to lie.

“Henry.”

A beat.

“They really are taking gender-neutrality seriously down there in Connecticut, huh? I wish they were more like that up here; I’ve had a goddamn bill on my desk all week that I’ve been trying to get rid of but can’t seem to—“

“Mom, Henry is a man.”

Another beat.

“Oh. Well,” she pauses. Alex can hear her shuffling around the kitchen, the phone being flipped off speakerphone, and her heels clicking across pine floors until she enters a quieter room.

“Mom?”

“I’m here, darling. Just want to be somewhere more private. I love you, you know that? Nothing will ever change that. God, is this why you and June didn’t come home this year? Because you were hiding this?” Ellen asks.

“No—well. Maybe. I don’t know. It’s complicated right now. I’m just telling you because you asked and I don’t want to hide anymore,” Alex says, pinching his eyes shut and praying his phone malfunctions and dies.

She gets quiet. “Have I ever given you the impression that I wouldn’t accept you being with a man?”

“It’s not that.”

“Then what?”

He’s the Prince of fucking England.

“Look, it doesn’t even matter because we aren’t together anymore. I just wanted to let you know that I’ve changed a lot this semester. And I’m going to be okay. Okay?”

“Okay. Well, I love you no matter what Alexander Claremont-Diaz. Don’t you ever forget that you can come to me with anything. Nothing will ever change the way I see you.”

“I know, Ma. Thanks. Happy Thanksgiving.”

When December 2nd comes, Alex is nowhere near ready to face Henry. On November 30th, he waited patiently for Henry to come to class, anticipating for his Prince Charming to walk through the doors, sweep him off his feet, and apologize for ever thinking he could live without him. But he never came.

In the evening, he sends Henry several texts asking about the presentation and calls him twice. Each call immediately is sent to voicemail and Alex hangs up before he has to hear

Henry's voice play over a recording.

As he fills his thermos with coffee, Hunter enters the kitchen, completely ignoring Alex. He's dressed in his pajamas still and looks worn out from being cooped up in his room while studying for finals. He shoves any sympathy he has down for the prick as he grabs the coffee pot and pours himself a cup, doing whatever he can to avoid meeting Alex's glare.

Unbelievable. Part of him knows that the media has long misinterpreted law school culture as being cut-throat and hostile, but Hunter lives up to these stereotypes with ease.

What Hunter did was brazen; threatening Alex and Henry's relationship, endangering his job, and for *what*? Brownie points as an intern? Alex scoffs as he quickly heads back towards his room, his boldness diminished by the power of an NDA. He can't wait to go apartment hunting once the semester ends.

The drive to school is quiet, his *Romeo & Juliet* book tucked inside his backpack along with a neatly typed page of notes of what he plans to say in case he forgets how to speak during the presentation. It's been two weeks since Alex has seen or spoken to Henry, and he hasn't a clue if he's showing up to participate in their project today.

Nora and June helped him crawl out of the hole Alex dug himself into, and now, it's time to hurdle himself over this final obstacle—the presentation. Potentially fly solo and embarrass himself debating a theme without his partner—the man he loves.

Alex has accepted a failing grade on the project if Henry doesn't show, but he has on his favorite blazer and his most expensive chinos, so at least he will go down in style. He feels good; he even leaped and decided to wear his glasses to class as well. It's the first time in the last two weeks he feels like Alex Claremont-Diaz. So, even if Henry bails, Alex will still have shown up one last time and been the bigger person.

As he settles into his seat at 8:58 AM, the class is nearly full. To his dismay, but lack of surprise, Henry isn't there. Alex taps his fingers along the edge of the desk, checking his phone for a text, an email, or a call. There's nothing to indicate he's coming, but all he has in his inbox are good luck texts from Nora and June.

Professor Gupta enters the classroom, her smile enthusiastic but cautious as she scans the room. When her eyes land on Alex, her face falls on the empty spot next to him, taking in the possibility that one of her best students is about to make a fool of himself. She begins to say something, but then, miraculously, and almost absurdly timed, the classroom door opens.

Alex doesn't even have to look. He knows it's him.

His eyes are transfixed on Gupta and the room in front of him, and for once, his glasses have some use. Without good peripheral vision, he can't see the person sliding into the seat beside him. Alex doesn't want to; he doesn't think he can *look* at him without falling even more in love.

But Henry places his fucking collector's edition of the book next to his notes and book, and Alex can't help but turn his head and look into the eyes of the love of his life.

Henry's overgrown hair is gelled back, except for a single strand that's fallen loose over his forehead. He's shrugging off his coat to reveal he's wearing that stupid gray cashmere sweater he wore on that first day of class. It's déjà vu; he's taken back to that moment they locked eyes, except this time Alex knows and loves him.

He wishes so much that they could talk, but Gupta is calling up the first pairs to present. When the pair starts talking about *To Kill a Mockingbird* and the theme of "good versus evil", Alex nudges Henry's foot. Henry remains unfazed. He nudges it again, harder.

"Alex," he says through his teeth. "Not now."

"You're going to have to talk to me eventually," Alex whispers back.

"Yes, during our presentation."

Gupta shoots them a nasty look, effectively silencing them. Alex squirms in his chair as another pair goes up and presents *The Great Gatsby*, where both partners are woefully unprepared as they attempt to explain the theme of "class." He can see Henry frowning beside him as they fumble over the words "privilege" and "materialism."

The pierced girl and her friend go next, triumphantly presenting *The Iliad*, comparing and contrasting the theme of "war and glory." When both girls sit back in their seats after a successful presentation, Alex's heart begins pounding so loudly that he can barely hear his name being called out.

"Alex Claremont-Diaz and our TA, Henry Fox, you two are next," Professor Gupta repeats, her eyes narrowed and arms crossed as if she is worried about what the two are about to present.

Henry pulls him out of his trance by yanking on his sleeve and dragging him towards the front of the room, whispering "Shall we do this?" in an annoyed voice.

"Right. Um," Alex faces the room and scans over the curious faces of people waiting for them to start. "We chose—well, he chose *Romeo & Juliet*. I didn't see eye to eye with him on some of the subject matters of the book..."

"And the theme you picked out?" Professor Gupta presses.

"Fate," Henry says before Alex can. He's sitting on the edge of the small table in front of the whiteboard, hands in his pockets and he's *smiling* to himself.

Smiling. As if nothing has happened between them. As if they didn't spend time reading this book together after making love.

So, Alex places his notes on the table and decides to go rogue. Because *fuck it*.

"Right. Fate," Alex agrees with a pause. "We couldn't agree about the overarching theme of *fate*. It seems Henry thought that fate was inevitable, and that we should just let things 'be as they are.' I disagreed. See, I think Romeo and Juliet died because they let fate have the upper hand in their own narrative. They were so caught up with sneaking around that they made

things worse for themselves. It was their destiny to be *together*—not to *die*. Both of them had more autonomy than they knew.”

Henry’s smile fades quickly as Alex speaks, realizing that he was talking about them, and not the book.

“I reckon *I* disagree with that analysis, Alex. Their fate was set in stone, and Romeo couldn’t accept it. He made choices—horrid ones—and it resulted in an unpleasant fate. All because he couldn’t accept that there were things ultimately determined by forces greater than himself,” Henry says, shrugging his shoulders. “If he accepted that, *maybe* their fate would have been different. But, they just could not leave it be. No, rather they try to outsmart fate. And they end up without each other because of that.”

The room is quiet, and Gupta is leaning forward, eyes on Alex, awaiting his response.

“And I ‘reckon’ fate is the excuse people use to justify why they can’t make things work. While, yes, there are forces beyond our control, there are also circumstantial forces that can be dealt with in rational ways. I think it’s ridiculous to insinuate that from the second they fell in love, they should’ve accepted their fate. I mean, we wouldn’t have a great love story if they did that, huh?” Alex snaps and turns towards Henry who’s clenching his fists tightly.

“The prologue says their journey was ‘death-marked’, Alex. If Romeo accepted his destiny, maybe he and Juliet could have loved each other from a distance. The lesson here is that predetermined fate and duty cannot be reckoned with,” Henry counters, and now Alex is confident he is talking about their relationship too.

Alex throws his hands up and laughs. “You’re kidding, right? The entire story’s theme of fate is centered around time and the consequences of not saying what needs to be said. If people simply communicated, the world would be better off.”

Henry dares to roll his eyes. Alex wants to punch him in the mouth. Preferably with his own mouth. Has Henry always looked this good when he’s being an asshole?

“Ironic you say that, because if Juliet had simply waited for Romeo, they would not be in that predicament of death, would they now?” Henry asks, and Alex can tell he’s sincerely asking about them.

“I think if two people truly loved each other, they wouldn’t use fate as an excuse. They’d make it work. And if it doesn’t work, it doesn’t work. But hiding behind some theory of uncontrollable cosmic forces doesn’t change the way I feel about you,” Alex says, the words slipping out of his mouth before he can stop them.

The room is dead silent. Alex and Henry are facing each other, chests rising in short, quick breaths as they both realize what Alex had just professed in front of a group of people. Professor Gupta is rubbing her temple, wondering what the fuck is happening.

A boy from the front row leans over to the girl next to him and whispers, “I think they’re talking about each other.”

“No shit,” she whispers back.

Gupta finally writes a brief note down and then takes a deep breath. “So, what is the overall truth you both agree on?”

Alex can’t stop looking at Henry who is looking back at him with glistening eyes, his cheeks flushed crimson red likely due to the audience in front of them. He wants to open his mouth and speak, but he’s frozen in place.

“The overall truth we, erm, agree on is that they were fated to fall in love from the moment they laid eyes on each other. Falling in love is out of one’s control; even if fate prohibits it. Regardless, they were meant to fall in love and die in love,” Henry says, swallowing hard.

Just like us.

“Yeah... that I agree on. I’m sorry, I have to go,” Alex says to Professor Gupta and proceeds back to his desk, gathering his backpack and then booking it out the door.

He doesn’t look at the faces of his classmates or Henry, and the gravity of what he’s just done hits him. If he had any chance of getting back with Henry, it died in that classroom. Revealing his feelings publicly without consideration of what Henry wanted was foolish. Henry was right about Alex—he was self-centered. Every shitty feeling, every insecurity—he deserved it.

After work, Alex finds himself in a situation he hasn’t been in a long while: drunk on his couch and weepily re-watching *La La Land*, wondering why the fuck Emma Stone and Ryan Gosling couldn’t make it work in the end. His lips are wrapped tightly around a bottle of whiskey, and he’s replaying the presentation in correlation to the movie, wishing he shut the fuck up instead of blabbing in front of everyone about still having feelings for Henry. By now, the whiskey should have wiped his memory, but instead, it’s only amplified every emotion and anguished thought that’s crossed his mind.

Alex grabs his phone and texts the group chat.

ACD

hey why cududknt ema and ryan be togehter in la la land lol

June 💕

Are you drunk

ACD

..maybe

Nora 🐱

forget being drunk, why are you calling the actors by their real names? just call them Mia and Sebastian Imao

ACD

i keep forgetin

June💖

Lay off the whiskey and go to bed, Alex. We will get ramen tomorrow to cheer you up. Promise. ♥

ACD

do u think henryz wayched lala land

Nora🐱



June💖

Goodnight, Alex

Alex sighs and picks at the frayed threading on the cushion, sliding down until he hits the floor with a sad thud. There's a knock at the door and he groans with annoyance. Not only does Hunter piss him the fuck off, but now he's forgetting his keys so he has to answer the door for him? Can this douche get any more annoying?

He forces himself off the ground and drags his feet to the front door; when he opens it, he expects to find the ugly face of Hunter Richards, ready to berate him for locking the door at 9 PM on a Wednesday. But all Alex sees are familiar broad shoulders, overgrown golden blonde hair, and the constellation of moles he loves to place kisses on surrounding an imperfect crooked smile.

"I have our evaluation and grade for our presentation from Gupta," Henry says and holds up a single piece of white paper and begins to read from it. *"Mr. Fox and Mr. Claremont-Diaz have a mutual understanding of fate in Romeo & Juliet. While they vehemently disagree about the character's choices in the context of the story, they seem to agree about the fate of indomitable love. Both show an understanding by connecting to the story through their personal lives. Although inappropriate at times, Mr. Claremont-Diaz's passion for the story during the presentation contrasted well with Mr. Fox's understanding of the text. Grade: A-."*

Alex teeters on his feet. He is so fucking drunk.

"An A minus is a harsh grade. I think we killed it... dude," he slurs.

Henry raises an eyebrow. "'Dude?'"

“Yeah—dude. Your Majestyyy? Oh, sorry. You probably prefer Your Royal Highness, don’t you? Let me—,” Alex tries to bow and tumbles to Henry’s feet. It’s pathetic; but he sees Henry’s legs and crawls up to them and wraps his arms around his hips, hugging him tightly. Finally, he lets go of the words he’s been holding onto ever since they last fought. “I’m sorry for what I said to you because I’m probably going to love you forever. Even if you are a dickhead. You’re *my* dickhead. And I’m your—what do you call it? Arsehole. I’m your arsehole.”

Before Henry can reply, Alex falls backward onto his ass. The whiskey truly is winning tonight. He thinks he can make it back into his apartment but Henry is already scooping him up beneath his knees and telling Alex to hold on to him as he stumbles through his living room.

Henry Fox is fucking carrying him.

Although Henry struggles to carry him back to his room, he does so successfully, only banging Alex’s foot on the doorway once which causes him to murmur an apology and kiss his forehead. When he sets him on the bed, Alex’s eyes are bleary and he wants to pull Henry down to bed with him but he’s so drunk and tired that he falls onto his back instead. He feels his shoes being pulled off, his jeans being tugged down and someone pulling the covers over him.

Alex can hear the footsteps leaving his room, so he uses his one last bit of consciousness to say, “I love you, Your Majesty.”

“I love you too, Alex.”

Afterglow

Chapter Summary

“Oh, sorry. Did I get the wrong idea when you told me you loved me not once but twice in your drunken stupor?” Henry simply says as he lifts his mug and takes a sip of his tea. “Don’t look so surprised, Alex. You’ve been wearing my jumper, you sleep next to the book we used to read together and you seem to have bought my favorite brand of tea without me even asking you to.”

“Oh.”

“Quite,” Henry scoffs. “Still as thick as it gets, hm?”

or

alex and henry come together. 😊❤

Chapter Notes

thank you so much for your patience on this one—it’s been a complicated month not being able to post this. I thought this would be my final chapter but I had more to say and wanted to send Alex and Henry off properly. chapter 14 will be my epilogue. 😞
Thank you so much for your kind words and comments, ugh I save all the emails I get from them. I’m gonna try and reply to them all soon!

Thank you to Gia who is [Onpurpose](#) on ao3, who beta read this chapter for me. Your comments made me laugh so much. Her boxing AU fic is coming soon. ♥

"My ears have not yet drunk a hundred words of that tongue's uttering, yet I know the sound."

Alex can hardly process a thought when he awakes to the faint sound of a microwave. His head hurts so bad he can feel each of the four beeps as its cooking cycle comes to an end. The sour taste in his mouth paired with the dried drool next to the corner of his lips indicated Alex was likely close to regurgitating the leftover Chinese he consumed with his whiskey. He’s lucky Henry put him to bed before any of his stomach contents made it onto his shoes.

Fuck—Henry.

Alex springs up, patting the bed until he spots his phone neatly placed conspicuously next to his copy of *Romeo & Juliet*, a full glass of water, and his glasses, which are folded up neatly.

He puts his glasses on and chugs the water as he rifles through his notifications, cringing as he re-reads each text he has sent to Nora and June. Nothing from Henry—he isn't sure if that's good or bad.

Hesitantly, he clicks the call button next to “Prince Dickhead” and brings the phone up to his ear. Alex has no expectations, but after the disastrous presentation and his profession of feelings, all he wants is to talk to Henry. Preferably not plastered.

It rings thrice before he hears a soft, “Hello?”

Alex's heart stops.

“Hi.”

A toaster popping in the background and Henry scuttling around his kitchen fills his ears. “Erm—how are you? Did you sleep okay?”

Alex grips his phone as he tumbles out of bed and into his bathroom. “I'm uh—fuck,” he garbles as he tries to brush his teeth fast. “I slept fine. Listen—whatever I said last night, I wish I could have talked to you while I wasn't on my knees. Although it's not the worst position I've been in, I would prefer to talk to you face-to-face this time.”

He spits hastily into the sink and rushes out to find Henry's UNH sweatshirt. If this is the last time they're going to talk, he might as well give it back when they're done.

Henry laughs. “Yes, well, I would like that too. Is everything alright though? It sounds like a stampede up there.”

Up there? Was he that loud over the phone? “What? No—I mean, yes. I was just looking for my sweatshirt. We can meet up somewhere,” Alex sighs and forgoes the sweatshirt. “Look, just text me the details. I'll meet you wherever.”

“Alex, I'm—“ Alex hangs up, and opens his groupchat with Nora and June to shoot them a text.

ACD

shooting my shot with prince dickhead. he came here last night and i told him i loved him and i think he said it back but i was drunk af

Junebug 💖

Oh god—please tell me you didn't bring up La La Land, Alex.

ACD

fuck off they could have made it work!!

Nora 🐱

WOOOOOOOOOO

Junebug 💖

Good luck, baby brother.

ACD

gonna need it

He dresses quickly and nearly tumbles down the stairs. Alex knew he had to fight for Henry before it was too late. If there was any semblance of hope for them left after that horrific presentation, Alex would capitalize upon it. Henry is the love of his life, and there is no chance in hell that he would leave any unresolved feelings between them.

“Hey, Hunter, put the coffee on, I have to go somewhere soon,” Alex barks without even glancing over his shoulder at the figure sitting at the table.

“I would,” a voice with an accent he’s come to love says. “But I’m afraid I don’t know how to work your coffee machine.”

Alex turns around and takes in the sight of Henry, sitting at the table with his hands folded in. His hair is unruly, he’s wearing the blue UNH sweatshirt and a pair of Alex’s pajama bottoms. On the table, there are two plates with a bagel on each, a small bowl filled with oatmeal to the left of each plate, and a cup of tea to the right of Henry’s plate. There’s even a plate in the center with small squares of cut butter.

“Your breakfast will get cold if you don’t sit. I hope you don’t mind that I stayed the night; I slept downstairs, of course,” Henry says quietly while looking down at his food. “So. If you would, erm. Join me.”

He gestures to the seat next to him, and Alex snaps out of his trance. Henry Fox is in his kitchen. He made him *breakfast*. He carried him upstairs and then slept on his couch. It feels too good to be true—like he was dropped on the stairs and now he thinks he’s living a fairytale.

“You’re... here.”

“I am.”

He manages to move to the coffee pot and start a drip. He can feel Henry’s eyes on his back, and he wants to speak, but the sound of coffee dripping keeps him from doing so. Once he finishes making his coffee in silence, he slides into the seat and takes a deep breath.

“I didn’t expect you to stay the night,” Alex admits. Henry opens his mouth to apologize but Alex stops him. “I’m not mad. Wish you would have just come upstairs—the couch isn’t comfortable.”

“I wouldn’t get into bed with you when you’re like that,” he says with a frown.

“I know. I just—you know. I’m being hospitable. I would have slept on the couch.”

“Mm, not likely. I had to carry you to bed.”

Alex munches on his bagel. “You almost dropped me a few times.”

“Well, you made it look so easy the one time you did it. I thought I could recreate it with ease,” Henry says as he takes a sip of tea. “You’re heavier than you look.”

Alex laughs and mimics him, sipping his coffee. Henry smiles and begins working on his bagel. Alex could watch this all day—the polite way he cuts his bagel into fours and then squishes a slice of butter between each. His odd Royal mannerisms shouldn’t be so endearing to Alex, but watching him do things as simple as eating breakfast is fascinating to him.

“I missed you.” It’s too fast—but Alex doesn’t regret saying it. Even if Henry didn’t reciprocate these feelings after Alex had embarrassed them during their presentation, letting the words go unspoken would be cowardly. Being hesitant in the tongue was not going to be a common theme for Alex; it cost him what he loved—*loves*—most dearly.

But Henry replies without hesitation: “I missed you too. Though, I didn’t quite realize how much I did until you practically shouted it at me in front of the class yesterday.”

Alex’s face burns and he turns to his oatmeal to avoid Henry’s scrutinizing eyes. “That—ha, that was not my finest moment. Remind me—NDAs, right?”

“Indeed. NDAs. Though a few of the girls were rather excited at your profession of love through Shakespeare, they still signed away, and asked if they could have an invite to the first gay royal wedding,” Henry says, a faint smile on his lips. “I thought it was... cute. Once they assured me how much of a good couple we would make, some of the horror I had been experiencing went away.”

He closes his eyes with humiliation and regret. Although his words led them to reunite, it was clear he crossed a line. Alex leans forward and lightly brushes his finger against the back of Henry’s hand.

“I’m sorry for doing that. And for leaving. God, it must’ve been mortifying for you to stand alone after I did that.”

“To be truthful, it might’ve been worse if you stayed. At least I can play it off as you being a crazy obsessed fan who fell in love with me during the semester.”

Alex whacks his arm.

“Alright, alright! It was obvious we were in love. Happy? Everyone witnessed it from the first time we spoke, yes?” Henry teases him and takes a bite of his bagel piece.

Well, that's sort of the reality for me, Alex thinks. He twirls his spoon in his oatmeal, allowing Henry to swallow before speaking again. “Henry... why are you here?”

It's the million-dollar question. Why wouldn't he just go home and send a formal goodbye text or disappear again? What person stays on the couch, makes breakfast, and then seemingly makes implications about them still being in love?

"Oh, sorry. Did I get the wrong idea when you told me you loved me not once but *twice* in your drunken stupor?" Henry simply says as he lifts his mug and takes a sip of his tea. "Don't look so surprised, Alex. You've been wearing *my* jumper, you sleep next to the book we used to read together and you seem to have bought *my* favorite brand of tea without me even asking you to."

"Oh."

"Quite," Henry scoffs. "Still as thick as it gets, hm?"

Alex isn't sure what to say, so he eats his breakfast somewhat content with Henry's bluntness. Part of him is ecstatic that they're being so open, and another part feels incapable of processing what's happening. After not speaking their feelings for so long, being so forthcoming feels out of the ordinary for them. Especially when it's been a bit one-sided; Alex's feelings are clear, but Henry's seem to be up in the air.

After breakfast, they both take turns showering—separately—which allows Alex time to practice what he's going to say to Henry.

Once Alex finishes getting ready, he finds Henry sitting cross-legged on his bed, hair still wet, and flipping through his book without a care in the world. He's already stolen some of Alex's clothes—one of his maroon hoodies and a pair of black sweatpants. It's fucking ridiculous; Henry's waltzing back into his bedroom and life as if they haven't gone weeks without speaking.

"Alright, dickhead, we need to talk," Alex deadpans.

Henry looks up from the book, his fingers nimbly continuing to leaf through each page. "You know you shouldn't doggy ear the pages in a book. It ruins the quality and it looks like shite."

Before he can snark about how Henry shouldn't tell him what to do, he lifts a hand and beckons Alex to come over with one finger. And, of course, with little resistance, Alex listens. How could he not? He's going to love this stupid shithead forever.

As he gets onto the bed, Henry takes his hand but looks forward, avoiding making eye contact. "When we left things in my office, I was wrong for the way I went about ending things. I knew that I... loved you, and you loved me too, but I didn't think you'd say it or question if something was wrong. I thought it would be easy to say goodbye... physically... and then you'd see the news that I'd moved back. You'd wind up hating me—and I wouldn't deserve you, so things between us would have soured for good."

The thought of seeing a news alert on his phone of Prince Henry's arrival back into the United Kingdom without being informed might've sent him into a rage. Or, he would have

used his savings to get on a plane and call him an obtuse fucking asshole for thinking he could get a booty call and escape to London.

“I don’t think you realize I would’ve followed you across the world. I mean, maybe not right away. But eventually, I’d tell you you’re a dumbass for thinking I would stop loving you so easily,” Alex swallows. The words are thick and heavy on his tongue.

They seem heavy for Henry to hear because he diverts his gaze further from Alex’s eyes.

“It’s still more complicated than loving each other, Alex.”

“Complicated because you’re not out and a Prince? Baby, I don’t mind waiting until you’re ready... We can love each other on our own terms and no one else’s,” Alex says and means it.

Despite the sweetness in Alex’s words, it seems to set Henry off. “It’s more complicated than that,” he groans. “They’d never let me marry a man. Even if they did, there would be so much that would have to change and I can’t fathom asking that of you.”

Alex keeps a straight face at the mention of marriage. It’s not like he *hadn’t* thought of it before—but Henry dropping it like a bomb so casually did things to his heart. Alex bringing a man home to meet his parents. Them getting married on a hot Texas afternoon and honeymooning through a summer thunderstorm on a private ranch. But he pushes the fantasy away and tries to bring himself back down to earth.

He leans back in his chair. “What would have to change?”

Henry buries his face in his hands. “Choose a different career path to become my husband, come out to the world with me, we’d have a grand Royal wedding, go to state dinners and public events together for the rest of our lives?” Henry says through muffled hands.

Alex is dumbstruck. “Uhh—maybe not in that order? And with some time in between? And why do I have to choose a different career?”

“Members of the Royal family can’t have political affiliations.”

Oh.

“Well, can’t you choose not to be a Prince?” Alex presses.

He drops his hands from his face. Henry looks sad and defeated. “That’s the whole bloody point, Alex. This isn’t fair for either of us. Neither of us should have to choose between our careers or who we are to make this work. It’s just not sensible for us to give up everything we’ve worked towards just for love.”

“I mean, I would do it.”

And it’s the truth; Alex would forego a political career if he could spend the rest of his stupid, idiot life with Henry. Instead of attending a Comparative Politics course, in place, he might attend Royal etiquette classes and ballroom lessons. If it meant Alex could come home at the

end of the day to be with Henry, to read with him, to talk to him, to play Mario Party with him, to argue with him, to fuck him—he'd do it in a heartbeat. All the niche things that he, Nora, and June mock and laugh at, he would submit to because he loves Henry. Deep down, if the shoe were on the other foot, Alex knows Henry would do the same for him.

Besides—committing to a political career was never truly his dream. It was his parent's legacy pushed upon him; the thought of working in politics, until he was 80 and senile, doesn't seem like a prospective benefit.

Henry snaps his head towards Alex in disbelief. "Are you mad?"

"Are *you*? You know, I may be 'as thick as it gets,'" Alex mimics Henry's accent with an eye roll and a grin. "But you need to get a fucking clue too, Henry. I'm telling you to your face I'm in love with you and would commit to Law and be your... would I be a Prince too? Whatever—we can make this work. I don't think we have to give up *everything* just to be together. I promise," Alex brings Henry's hand up to his mouth and kisses it a few times, "that we will make things work. On *our* terms. If that means long distance, moving, or changing majors, we can make it work. I know we can."

Henry swallows hard, his cheeks flushed pink. "You're an arse."

"And yet, here you are, in *my* clothes, reading *my* book, making *me* breakfast—"

Henry's lips cut Alex off, and soft, needy groans are being panted into his mouth. He grabs a handful of Henry's damp hair and shoves him onto his back.

"Oh, so that's what you want, huh?" he grins. "Was that your plan? Is the official goodbye actually going to happen now? Tell me something, sweetheart, what was it I said that got you going?"

Before Henry can reply, Alex climbs on top of him and pins him down by his wrists. Alex places a knee between Henry's legs and immediately he bucks his hips upwards against his thigh in desperation. To be cruel, Alex moves and straddles Henry instead, effectively pinning him down completely.

"Alex, ha—what are you doing?"

"Giving you what you want, Your Majesty."

Henry cocks his head to the side. "And what would that be?"

"Punishment. I bet you're feeling a little guilty about how we left things, physically. I'd even bet what you wanted yesterday is for me to meet you in your office and finish what we started two weeks ago, hm? I wouldn't be surprised if you checked your office to see if I went there," he laughs at Henry's red face. Alex is going to love watching that blush flood up his cheekbones, his temple, and ears for the rest of his life. Nothing will ever be a secret when it comes to Henry.

Still, Henry just stares up at him, awestruck and stubborn. So, Alex plays dirty. He lets go of one of Henry's wrists, reaches between them, cups Henry over his sweatpants, and gropes him, stroking his dick through the thin fabric.

That seems to do it because suddenly he's babbling. "Alex, for Christ's sake—stop being a tease and *fuck* me."

And just as Alex is pulling on the drawstring of his sweatpants, Henry's phone goes off.

"Oh shit, that's me. Grab it—it could be important."

Alex frowns. "Are you serious right now?"

"Alex!"

"Okay, okay!"

Alex grabs his phone off the nightstand and hands it to Henry, still straddling his lap as he answers it with a steady breath. "Hello, this is Henry Fox's phone."

Fuck, it's such a turn-on that Alex is on top of him like this while he's answering professional calls.

"Professor Gupta, Amy, good morning!" Henry sits up and shoves Alex off him, standing to adjust himself. Alex grins at the soft skin peeking out between the hoodie and sweatpants. With a smirk, he places his hand there and squeezes his hip as he hears Professor Gupta talk into the phone.

"Yes, of course, I understand yesterday was a complete lack of professionalism on my end. I —," Henry is cut off by Alex slipping his hand down the front of Henry's pants and swiping his thumb over the tip of his leaking cock repeatedly until he's a stammering mess. "I—I, 'scuse me. One m-moment, Professor." Henry mutes the phone, eyes indecisive as he watches Alex play with his cock.

Alex looks up at Henry beneath his eyelashes and stops moving his hand, patiently waiting for permission. Henry nods eagerly, eyes wide as Alex falls to his knees in front of him. With his approval, he moves his hand away and takes Henry's cock into his mouth, intently watching as his Prince continues to go about his business over the phone. The brazenness of the act surprised him; Alex had never thought to touch someone while they were on a work call, but watching Henry continue his phone call with confidence was more than enough to convince him.

"Sorry about that," Henry says steadily and unmutes the phone, reaching down with his free hand to tuck a curl behind Alex's ear. "Has anyone complained to the Dean? No? Good—so, sooo goood."

Genuinely, Alex knows he *should* listen to Henry—but it's been *weeks*, and the way Henry's starting to slightly thrust into his mouth makes it difficult to pay attention. Maybe he gets a

little too lost in it because he's swallowing Henry *whole*, firmly grabbing his ass, humming a little too hard each time the tip meets the back of his throat and—

“N-no, I'll let... *Alex*,” Henry says his name in a breathy whine, gripping a handful of Alex's curls to hold himself up, “know t'm-meet me there. I'm—oh, I will be there. *Oh, m'coming, I'm coming too*—“

He can hear Henry laughing while he cums, the “plop” of his phone onto the bed, and then the taste of him floods his mouth. Alex has never been so eager to swallow every last drop until Henry is shivering and jolting away from his mouth to find reprieve. There's the sound of panting from both of them. They've joked about going short periods without being intimate before, but *weeks* certainly proved to be way too long.

“Well, then,” Henry raises his eyebrows and runs his fingers through Alex's curls. “Where did that come from?”

Alex shrugs. “Like I said—I missed you. And I meant that.”

“Will you still be this affectionate if I tell you we have a meeting with Professor Gupta in a bit?” Henry asks and then extends a hand out to wipe at the corner of Alex's mouth with his thumb.

“What? Why me?”

“Don't tell me you've forgotten our performance yesterday,” Henry says and helps Alex off his knees, giving him a swift kiss, as if they're two people getting ready for work. Comfortable. “I have to get my regular clothes at my flat, so I trust you'll meet me at school for our meeting. Oh—wait. Before I leave, d'you want me to...?”

Henry's fingers dip beneath Alex's waistband, his pinkie lingering a little longer as he waits for a response.

Alex shakes his head.

“You can make it up to me later—that was just for you, baby,” he grins, but then feels the façade fading as Henry sees right through him. It feels too good to be true, to be touching and tasting Henry again. So he adds, “But if you can reassure me you're not going to disappear and leave me again, that would be enough for now.”

Henry nods, slipping his fingers out of Alex's waistband and shoving them in his pockets nervously. “I'm not going to lie to you. I am leaving for England at the end of the term.”

It's a punch to Alex's gut. So it was too good to be true; Henry's still leaving.

Then he says, “But I'm going to be back in time for the holidays. I'm going home to negotiate a proper extension for my leave so the Crown isn't breathing down my neck. I promise, love. I, most certainly, am not going anywhere. I'm afraid you're stuck with me.”

It's like every panic button inside him has been disabled because he's throwing his arms around Henry and kissing him, careful not to slip him the tongue. Henry chuckles against his

lips, then holds him tight, allowing Alex to nuzzle into the crook of his neck. He's *staying*—and there was no need to ask him not to leave. For once, Alex isn't worried about being deserted. The promise of a Prince is never void in his eyes.

“As usual, we need to work on your communication skills, Your Majesty. You should've led with ‘I'm going to be back’ in conjunction with ‘I'm leaving.’ I'll forgive it for now,” Alex warns.

“Thank you for your leniency, my love.”

Inside Professor Gupta's office is as niche as Alex would expect it to be.

Whereas Henry loads his office with books, their professor seems to enjoy knitting, crocheting, and crafting. In one corner on the top of a two-tiered wooden shelf is a bowl of colorful pastel yarn balls; on the lower shelf, is a well-loved embroidery kit next to a homemade pillow with mini sewn-on cacti patches. Her desk has small handmade trinkets neatly arranged around a personalized nameplate that says “*Amy Gupta — English Department Head*”. But the most interesting, perhaps, is a framed photo of a scraggly-looking little dog with a groomed mustache. On the bottom of the frame in gold lettering, “Jonathan” indicates the dog's name.

Henry and Professor Gupta are *very* alike, Alex realizes.

“I want you both to speak very little—and only respond when I ask you something. Even then, whatever is said in this room does not leave here. I'd like everyone to keep their jobs—certainly my own,” Professor Gupta says as she sits down across from them.

Alex and Henry exchange a look. Then they nod solemnly in agreement to her terms.

“I know you two have been seeing each other. I figured something might be going on when Mr. Fox began deferring your work to *me* to grade, Mr. Claremont-Diaz. I've had TAs who asked me to take over certain works they are not comfortable grading. But I've noticed that a deferment of one student's work entirely indicates a personal relationship, typically.”

For once, Alex is the one blushing. The fact that Henry had gone so far as to make sure he didn't cross any ethical boundaries by grading Alex's work brought a flustered heat to his chest. It made sense; when things became physical between them, Henry probably felt an inability to remain objective when it came to Alex's work. The thought makes him grip the armrests to keep himself from sliding down in his chair.

Alex thinks: *starting a list of surprising qualities I'm attracted to:*

A strong sense of moral code and character.

His thoughts are interrupted by Henry's voice. “I apologize for not directly disclosing our relationship. But I can assure you, my relationship with Alex has been documented in the Royal court. Legally, it's documented. The second I crossed a line between him and me, I

made sure all his work was not influenced or touched by myself,” before Alex could add anything he said, “Also, we are about 11 months apart in age. I’d like to think our dynamic started on a leveled playing field.”

Professor Gupta shoots Alex a look. “Is that true?”

Part of him wants to say no, that Henry is out of his league and the power dynamic between them, while addressed, *does* exist. But Henry never treated him as anything less than his equal, and jeopardizing both their jobs and future on a technicality that they both chose to ignore would be foolish. And in that moment, sitting across from someone he once saw as perfect but now knows to be just as flawed, Alex sees an equal in Henry. So, naturally, Alex timidly nods yes.

“It is. I never had help on my assignments either—the one he graded before we, uh, kissed was full of harsh editing recommendations. Henry never made me feel anything but another student. Even when we were together,” Alex shrugs and continues, “he always made sure the priority was our work. I’ve also had an NDA signed for a few months.”

“Months?”

They exchange another look which makes Professor Gupta shake her head.

“Okay, well. The presentation was inappropriate. But I must say it was very well done. Although, I think you two should put the book down for a while and talk to each other instead. While I understand using literature to convey emotions that are difficult to speak, I think you two might be depending on a story instead of writing your own,” she says with a strange look on her face.

The silence in the room is louder than ever. Alex hadn’t considered that while the book was their way of connecting, it also may have been the Achilles heel of their relationship. All the time Alex spent reading the book to gain a molecule of insight into what Henry might be feeling was wasteful when he should have driven up to his apartment and fought for him.

Alex knows that now. The fight for their relationship has only just begun.

“Amy, I appreciate your discretion, and again, I apologize. Alex and I,” Henry gnaws at his lower lip, finally taking a deep breath after a pause. “Alex and I love each other.”

Professor Gupta raises an eyebrow that disappears beneath her neatly styled bangs.

“She told us to speak very little—I don’t think she wants to hear the details,” Alex leans over and whispers.

“Sorry, love—it felt good to tell someone.”

Alex smiles to himself and then meets Professor Gupta’s endearing but concerned glare, causing his smile to disappear fast. It becomes awkward as she seems lost for words, opening and closing her mouth several times but forming no sentences.

When the words come to her, her frown is sad and remorseful. “Henry, I’ve enjoyed working with you this semester but I can’t have you be my teaching assistant anymore. I fear we’ve crossed boundaries of professionalism and if I were to keep your secret, I’d risk my own job. So, you will finish the semester, but if you want to continue TAing, you’ll have to find another professor who will have you. I’ll write you a recommendation, of course.”

Alex peers over at Henry, whose face is stony but unreadable. He wants to reach out and touch him, to tell him he’s sorry that he will be losing his job. But Henry stands and holds his hand out for Alex to take, and he’s looking down at him with a smile that lets him know *we are going to be okay*.

And Alex believes him. So, he takes his hand, thanks their professor for her time and they leave hand in hand, until they round the corner and spot people chatting in a circle. As they untangle their fingers, their knuckles bump together and their fingertips brush, a faint reminder of the secret between them. Even if they couldn’t hold hands in public, this was enough for Alex.

For now.

Alex is gently tracing lines on his back beneath Henry’s t-shirt. His fingers cascade every so often over a tiny mole or caress Henry just right, causing him to tingle and shiver. It makes him nuzzle closer to Alex’s chest, fighting sleep just so he can enjoy the gentle touches that are filled with apologetic and romantic undertones. No matter how many times they verbalize their apologies to each other, nothing beats their love language: physical touch.

While they lay in silence, Alex traces and Henry places kisses everywhere his lips brush against. And it’s *fine*—but Alex’s brain gets the best of him and he has to ask the nagging question.

“When do you have to leave for England?” Alex finally asks, his voice full of hope and dread all at once.

“Right after the last final—so next week,” Henry tilts his head up to meet Alex’s eyes. “Don’t look at me like that—I promised I would be back.”

But England is where the influence of the Crown is. England is where anything can happen—and Alex won’t be there to stop it by professing his love in front of inappropriate groups of people.

“I know. But England is your home, so even if you loathe Kensington Palace and your grandmother, everyone gets a little homesick sometimes,” he says quietly. Alex would know; even if he enjoyed the cool weather and freedom of the northeast, sometimes he caught himself missing Texas.

“You are my home now, Alex.”

“Oh, fuck off. Don’t say things like that unless you mean it.”

Henry tilts his chin and plants a meaningful kiss on Alex's mouth, caressing the side of his face which has grown a stubble after a long day of talking.

"I mean it. I was foolish; being without you these past few weeks was quite literally hell. I lost half a stone," he shudders.

"The fuck is a stone?"

"Weight, Alex."

"What am I waiting for?"

Henry laughs, but then he lets out a shaky breath. "I lost 7 pounds, darling. I couldn't sleep, eat, or function. Shaan had to force me to start taking food in fluids the second week. Eugh. It was awful."

Alex squeezes Henry against his chest. The thought that both of them had suffered not only mentally and emotionally but physically as well was harrowing to him. They'd endured so much unnecessary agony at the cost of not communicating. It was a hard lesson learned.

"Baby... I'm so sorry I didn't come for you."

"And I'm sorry I left us. We can stop apologizing, love. I'm here, you're here. We are going to try and make this work. That's all that matters to me, truly."

"Can I ask something though?"

"Hm?"

Alex runs a nervous hand through Henry's hair, twirling an overgrown lock of golden hair before tucking it behind his ear. "It's stupid, and I don't expect you to answer me honestly. How the fuck are we going to make this work?"

He feels Henry shift against his chest, rolling off to his side so he can prop up on his elbow and look at Alex's face. His face looks so beautiful in the dark—but his eyes are serious, haunted, and full of remorse.

"Losing you... was one of the most difficult things I've gone through in a long while. I didn't realize how much I loved you until I no longer had you. So—even if it blows up in my face—I'm going to do everything to make this work. Because you could have given up on us, but you didn't."

"That doesn't answer my question."

Henry smiles and picks up Alex's hand and kisses his knuckles. "The answers are in England, love. This is my battle to fight for us. I need you to trust me on this."

Alex looks up at his ceiling, counting the days until Henry has to go back home. There's a feeling of uncertainty he can't shake, as if Henry tucked into his bed with him is too good to

be true. Alex almost expects that he's going to wake up at any moment, hungover, heartbroken, and Henry-free.

But he looks back at Henry instead of the godforsaken ceiling and he's still there, unmoved and a reality. If they didn't trust each other, he knows forgiving each other would have been much more difficult.

"Alright, I'll trust you. But tomorrow can you do me a favor? There's a battle I have to fight for us as well," Alex says.

"Tomorrow," Henry agrees.

Henry reaches up to Alex's face and plucks his glasses off his nose, placing them on the nightstand. For the first time in weeks, Alex is covered by Henry's broad shoulders, a commodity he forgot puts him to sleep fast. As they fall asleep together, he understands Henry's earlier sentiment.

Henry is his home, too.

On Friday morning, Henry made copies of the NDA Alex had signed and the NDA Hunter had signed, handing them over to Alex. After he cracked a joke about the documents being sacred scribes containing their relationship lore, Henry lectured him on the seriousness of NDAs and how valuable they can be in protecting oneself.

It was exactly why Alex needed them—but not only to protect himself. So, before his shift started, he arranged for a meeting with Attorney Luna and the head of HR.

"Alex, to what do I owe this pleasure of you calling for a meeting with HR on a Monday evening when court calendars are booked and I barely have an hour to spare?" Rafael Luna says with a polite smile as he enters the conference room, worn down but looking handsome as ever.

"Sir, I promise this won't take up much of your time," Alex snaps up, straightening his shoulders out. Nervously, he taps his fingers over a manila folder. "I apologize for how long it has taken me to come to you about this. I was unsure of the professional and private circumstances but after careful consideration, I feel it's important to disclose this information to you and HR."

The HR secretary, Sylvia, and Attorney Luna exchange a look.

"Go on," he says.

Alex takes a deep breath. "Since early in the semester, I've been in a documented relationship with Henry Fox, who you might know is the Prince of England." He pauses to gauge their reactions, but their faces remain unchanged. *Shouldn't that have gotten a bigger reaction?* He continues, "Here is an NDA that documents this. I wanted to disclose this relationship

because we intend on going public on it—not now, of course, it’s still early, I think—but, um, I also feel it’s important you know of something else that has occurred.”

Anxiously, he leafs through the manila folder and pulls out the NDA Hunter Richards signed weeks prior. Then, he pulls out a neatly typed document of dates, times, and descriptions of encounters Alex and Hunter had about his relationship with Henry. Every transgression, every damning piece of evidence he could think of, he wrote down.

“And what is this?” Luna slips on his readers, scanning over the document Alex has passed him.

“An NDA Hunter Richards has signed where he alludes to threatening and blackmailing me about Henry Fox,” Alex deadpans.

Finally, a reaction; Sylvia, who has been writing down notes in a small notebook, looks up at Alex, eyes wide and shocked. Attorney Luna remains still, but Alex can see the anger in his jaw with the way his eyes stay trained on the NDA. The silence in the room makes him anxious, and momentarily, he feels he might be in trouble, but Sylvia is furiously writing, Luna is reading, and he *knows* he did the right thing.

Starting a serious relationship with Henry meant not burying every conflict in an NDA. A gag order could only do so much for them; it was time for Alex to stand up for himself and protect what was his.

When Attorney Luna reaches the last page of Hunter’s NDA, he closes it and gnaws on his lower lip. Finally, after Sylvia and Alex exchange worrisome glances, he speaks: “Thank you for bringing this to my attention. Of course, we will have to do a thorough investigation of our own and interview Mr. Richards, but if what you provided here is true, this is grounds for termination of Hunter’s position at this firm and a suspension from taking the bar.”

Alex lets go of the breath he didn’t know he was holding in.

“You did good, kid. Next time, bring this to me earlier. It’ll save you a few gray hairs and the trouble of all this damn paperwork. I’m sorry this happened to you. If Sylvia can do anything for you, let her know. I won’t tolerate any harassment of my employees regarding their personal lives,” Luna frowns, rubbing a hand through his beard.

Alex stands, leaning over to shake Luna’s hand.

“Thank you, sir. I was just standing up for someone I love.”

After work, Alex is rightfully in a state of panic. He drives home, imagining scenarios where Hunter gets fired, comes home, and throws Alex out. While he does pay rent, his name wasn’t on the lease—so he had no guarantee of staying there. So, protecting his relationship indeed is important to him, but his next concern was finding a new place to stay. Preferably in the next few days—something Alex hadn’t thought through.

Searching for apartments is depressing; every listing is too far from school or out of his budget, which would mean he would end up in the roommate position yet again. Alex is past that—Hunter is his reminder that he wants his privacy, especially if he and Henry are going to have a private relationship.

Alex's phone buzzes, lighting up with the first text from Henry in weeks.

Prince Dickhead

Hi you.

ACD

hi

Prince Dickhead

Everything go ok at work?

ACD

yeah

Prince Dickhead

Just "yeah"?

Alex starts to type, but then deletes his message and hits the call button next to Henry's name.

"Hi, sweetheart."

There's a soft heartbeat thudding in his ears at the small possibility that Henry will say no to what he is about to ask. But he has to ask it—because if Henry truly is home, then there's one place he can go when he's not feeling safe.

"I know it's Monday night and it's finals week. And today was just... it was a lot. It was really fucking a lot. I don't want to be here anymore. Can I come over? Please?" Alex whispers into his phone.

"Alex," Henry starts. Here it comes—rejection. But instead, he says, "Love, I always want you here. Come over as fast as you can."

Alex clutches his phone as close as he possibly can to his ear. Anything to be as close as he can be to Henry. "Thank you. I'll be there as fast as I can. I'll break the fucking sound barrier if I need to."

Henry chuckles. "There's no need to make haste, darling. We've got time."

There's a finality in his words that makes Alex realize he's going to be okay no matter what happens. So, he packs a bag and intercepts the feelings of doubt and dread by driving to Henry's.

"Mr. Claremont-Diaz!" Shaan calls out before he enters the elevator. Alex turns to see Shaan unusually beaming at him, breaking his typical stoic form.

"How's it going, Shaan?"

"I'm glad to see you back, I admit. His Royal—sorry, Henry, was inconsolable without your companionship. I was rather mystified when you stopped coming over," he admits, now looking at Alex with an unreadable expression on his face.

"Oh?"

"Sir, this could be me stepping out of line," Shaan says with a hushed voice, as the elevator doors open again. "But I'm telling you—Henry is the closest thing I have to a son. If you ever so much as hurt him... I have connections to make sure you never—"

Alex steps into the elevator, touting his bag in hand. "Henry is it for me, Shaan. He's the one I plan to stay with for a very long time—you don't have to worry about me hurting him. At least not on purpose," Alex says with a wink, laughing at the vexed face Shaan pulls just as the doors close.

There's a lightness in his step as he approaches Henry's apartment, who is already waiting for him in the doorway. After everything they've been through these past few weeks, Alex shamelessly throws his bags to the floor and crushes Henry in a tight hug. He doesn't care who sees—they're in the hallway, embracing, and Henry is his again. That's all that matters.

But then Henry's pulling him in by his belt, slamming the door hard behind them, and kissing Alex with a fervor that only meant one thing: His Majesty *wanted* him.

"Did the meeting not go as planned?" Henry says between kisses, trying to mask his intentions with casual questions as if they're a married couple.

He looks around at Henry's apartment which hasn't changed a bit, David is already passed out on the couch like a sleeping baby, and suitcases presumably packed for England are set by the bedroom door.

"No, no, it did, it's just... You're leaving and I don't want to stay at that fucking apartment with that homophobic douchebag. You haven't even left and I already miss you," Alex murmurs under his breath.

Henry cups his face and tilts his face up, stroking the pad of his thumb across Alex's lower lip. Over the weekend, they agreed to take things slow, to not jump into things. But Henry's staring at him, lovesick and horny, and he's worried about his lack of self-control.

"You miss me? When I'm standing right here, in front of you? Hm?"

“We said we’d—”

“I remember what we bloody said, Alex. What *I* am saying now, is that if you miss me, you could fuck me right now. I think that is a rather fair arrangement to our former agreement, yes?” Henry quips, dipping his thumb past Alex’s lips, where he caves and sucks on the tip of it. Henry grins and yanks his thumb out of his mouth, making Alex whimper at the sudden loss. “So, what do you say? Do you want to be a good boy and fuck me until you don’t miss me anymore?”

Good boy?

Alex doesn’t need to think twice; the pet name sends him into despair, where he’s lost all sense of decorum. He’s pulling Henry into the bedroom, whose eyes are blown wide and he undresses him without consideration of the expensiveness or delicacy of the fabrics. But Henry does just the same to him and is pulling him into the bathroom.

“Here, first,” Henry orders as he turns on the shower. “I need you to relax for me. Can you do that?”

“I can—what, you want me to fuck you here, Your Majesty?” Alex laughs, placing his glasses on the edge of the bathroom counter.

“Just get in, you cretin,” Henry says, eyeing him up and down as Alex steps past him.

The water slips down his body, and Henry comes up behind him, wrapping his arms around him. It’s calming, a staunch contrast to the animalistic pace they were starting with. Henry’s kissing the back of his neck, caressing his chest, and *oh*—lightly pinching his nipples? *This is new*—the slight electric jolts he feels make his knees weak, so leans back against Henry’s chest and gasps softly, trying to process this new feeling.

“That okay?” he murmurs in his ear.

“Mhm,” Alex says and blinks, lashes wet and eyes big as he turns his head to look back at Henry. They kiss while Henry’s hands move down his stomach, and Alex is so fucking hard already, just waiting for any touch.

“Have you touched yourself while we were apart, love?” Henry asks.

Of course not. Not even after the blowjob last Thursday did Alex even think of touching himself without Henry—once he got a taste of what it was like to be with him, his own hand would never live up to the feelings he experienced under Henry’s touch.

He shakes his head no.

“Good boy.”

Good boy—there it is again.

“Looks like I will have to take care of that, hm?” Henry kisses his cheek once and grabs a loofah and a bar of soap, lathering it thoroughly before he starts to wash Alex’s body from

behind. First, his neck. Then, his back. Chest, stomach, legs, thighs. It's all so good—relaxing. Even if Henry is teasing him at every step, avoiding his most sensitive spots. Finally, when he's had enough, he grabs Henry's wrist and shoves his soapy hand lower down his pelvis.

Henry laughs and runs his fingers through Alex's pubic hair, continuing to avoid touching his cock. "What? Is there something you need, darling?"

"Baby," Alex groans. It's all he can muster—after weeks of *nothing*, he's painfully hard and dying to be touched.

"I know, I know," Henry says, voice low and soft. His pleading "baby" must've done *something*, because the soapy hand was slipping behind him, between his cheeks and Alex could hear himself panting and feel the soft kisses being pressed along his jaw. Henry's index finger drags along his perineum, circling up to his rim and Alex is so fucking turned on at this that he almost, *almost* wants to ask Henry to fuck *him* instead.

The thought shocks him. He's never once thought about Henry fucking him before, but the way he's touching him and calling him a "good boy" *does* something to Alex. But he swallows it down. They've only fucked once before, and he doesn't want to freak Henry out. So, Alex turns around and grins at Henry who has gotten away far too long with teasing him.

"My turn, sweetheart. Can't let you have all the fun," he smirks and grabs the loofah, beginning to return the favor and wash Henry's body. He pins him against the shower wall and goes over every inch of his body until he's clean, but so tormented by the way Alex has nearly coaxed an orgasm out of him but stopped just in time. It's the best foreplay they've ever done.

After they dry off and tumble into bed, laughter faint on their lips between kisses, Alex's heart has never been more full. They're together, naked, in love, and safe. Henry's whimpering and arching his back as Alex thrusts his fingers in and out of his hole, moaning "God" every time he curls his fingers over that sweet spot. It's perfect, and he can't see himself loving or touching anyone else like this.

"Tell me what you want," Alex demands, withdrawing his fingers to Henry's immediate protests.

"I want you. Inside—now," Henry bites his lip.

Alex reaches for the bottle of lube and a condom, and he climbs over Henry. But he's stopped with a hand on his abs, and they lock eyes.

"Without that—and I want to be on top. I want to feel all of you. So, hand me that," Henry says, taking the condom and placing it back in the drawer. Then he holds his hand out for the lube. "And give me this."

Alex, who's staring down at Henry beneath his eyelashes, gently places the bottle in his waiting palm. They switch places, Alex falling to his back and Henry, straddling his thighs, slicking up his cock. If there was anything he'd always wanted to see, it was Henry riding

him. And here he was, about to bareback with the Prince of England on their second time together. It was *insane*.

“I’m ready when you are,” Henry says, leaning forward to kiss Alex.

Alex grins against his lips. “Ride me.”

And, *god*, the feeling of Henry slowly easing down his cock is *lethal*. He’s moaning, gripping Alex’s shoulders and allowing Alex to guide his hips down until the base of his cock meets the hilt of his ass. It’s been so long, and yet, the way Henry rolls his hips in a slight bounce over and over is so familiar and *good*.

Henry’s taking his time, going slow and enjoying the slight ache from waiting so long between fucks. Alex’s eyes are trained on him, watching how beautiful Henry is, even in the dark. He wants to put his mouth *everywhere*—so he does. He sits up to kiss Henry’s lips, his jaw, his earlobe, his neck, down his collarbone, and to his chest... he even flicks his tongue out at Henry’s nipple, taking it in his mouth and sucking it, which just makes him leak against Alex’s stomach.

“Oh my *god*, I’m so in love with you,” Henry groans, gyrating his hips faster.

“I love you so much, *fuck*—you’re the only one. God, baby, please, just—m’so fucking close to losing it,” Alex says, breathless and wanton, just watching Henry fuck himself back on his cock. He feels every clench, tremble, and jolt going through Henry’s body—and it makes him fall even more in love.

Henry’s pushing him onto his back again and intertwining his left hand with Alex’s right. He’s squeezing so hard, which lets Alex know he’s closer than ever. His lips are parted, and Alex’s eyes are fixated on the beautiful mole next to his mouth that he loves to kiss. Henry feels so tight and hot and he wants to lose control but he lets Henry set and keep the pace—and that’s all Alex wants.

Oddly enough, he’s thinking back to the first day they met, how he thought he knew Henry to be some pompous asshole, and he turned out to be his best friend and the love of his life instead.

“I can’t believe how wrong I was about you,” Alex rasps, squeezing his hand back, watching Henry come undone on his cock.

He knows Henry wants to reply—but he’s starting to jolt forward against Alex’s chest, cumming so hard that Alex follows him over the edge. Henry gets so loud that he muffles him with one hand so he doesn’t wake the neighbors, softly whispering “shh” over and over until his body subsides.

When they both come down, Alex’s stomach is slick and sticky, and Henry’s fucked-out and half-asleep. They manage to make it to the bathroom and clean up before bed, with Henry grumpily rolling his eyes when Alex reminds him to brush his teeth.

As they dress for bed, Henry plops down on the bed and reaches into his bedside table, pulling out a house key on a long chain. Alex raises an eyebrow, staring at it as he turns it over in his hand, tracing over the ridges.

“So. I don’t want you to feel, er, pressure. But—but I have never felt this way about anyone before you. Before we had our spar and went our separate ways, I had Shaan make a spare key for the flat. I was going to give it to you, but then...” he trails off, furrowing his brow. “Alex, I don’t want you staying with that guy. Especially while I’m away. Move in with me for now. Please. While I’m gone you can take care of David, too. What do you say?”

Henry holds out the key to Alex. He pretends to consider, rubbing his hand over his face and tapping his finger along his chin. But the reality is there’s never been a more simple, easier answer. After spending so much time apart, Alex can only think of one place he wants to stay while he goes to college for his law degree.

“It’s about fucking time; David loves me and Shaan thinks I’m going to be his son-in-law one day. What took you so long?” Alex grins and takes the key, looping the chain around his neck. The chain dips between his pectoral muscles, the key resting flat atop his solar plexus.

“Hm.”

“What?”

Henry smiles coyly. “Nothing. It just looks right to me.”

Love Story (Alex's Version)

Chapter Summary

“But what if you regret having me live with you? Like, you end up realizing you can’t stand me?”

“That’s quite unlikely. Have you already forgotten our time apart? Truly miserable. I cannot fathom doing that again,” Henry says.

Alex swallows. It’s embarrassing, but he forces himself to ask: “What if I end up being too much?”

Henry goes quiet behind him, and Alex imagines he’s about to warn him to not be too much. But instead, he just tilts Alex’s chin towards him so he can look into his eyes.

“Darling, I cannot imagine there ever being enough of you.”

Chapter Notes

Thank you to everyone who has read: but especially to Gia and Becky. I dedicate this last chapter to you both, as I'm unsure if I could have finished the story without your support. [Onpurpose](#) thank you for betaing and [andthatshowitworks](#) for cheering me on. And thank you to phee aka [strwbrryfox](#) we didn't finish "say don't go" together but I couldn't have done this without you either! I love you all.

Please read end of chapter to see where Alex and Henry go. Thank you 🥹

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Prologue

For the first time since Alex can remember, he thinks he could be attached to the ground beneath his feet.

Henry had shown up at his apartment with Pez, toting boxes and a borrowed pickup truck from one of Pez’s frat brothers. Even if he wanted to stay there, it wasn’t safe for him to be around Hunter. With his sleeves rolled up to show off his surprisingly thick, muscular forearms, Henry insisted on carrying down each of the three boxes they had helped him pack. Alex leaned against the door and shook his head, wondering when he became the one in the relationship who loved being doted on. As his room emptied, moving in together became

more of a reality. Alex wasn't entirely sure if they were ready—but the alternative wasn't an option.

It was an offer Alex couldn't resist; watching the man he loves haul his belongings downstairs and out of Hunter's apartment as the asshole loses his job nearby? It was a *massive* turn-on—and the result was also a bonus: more privacy, no rent, Henry.

Alex fiddles with the newly gifted key looped around his neck, flipping it over each time Henry is passed a box. When he notices Alex's fidgeting, Henry stops before him, picking up the key and lifting it between them. "House keys typically belong on a set, hm?"

"I don't need to have it on my set of keys. Besides, you always reach the door before I do," he shrugs.

"And if I'm not available to reach the door? Wouldn't it be helpful to have your key to my flat on hand and not 'round your neck?"

Alex plucks the key from his fingers and pecks Henry's lips. "Nah. If I have to get on my knees to open the door, so be it. You shouldn't have put it on a chain if you didn't want me to wear it as a necklace. Mixed signals, and all."

Henry half-smiles and leans in to kiss him, but Pez comes stomping up the porch, hands shoved in his pockets and puffing out big clouds of cold December air. "Are you two love doves ready or are you two waiting to give that prick an intimate spectacle?"

Alex nods, not looking back at the apartment behind him as Henry takes his hand and leads him down the steps. The drive is short, with Pez and Henry bickering amongst each other about Henry still not having his license to drive in America. Pez teases him, calling him a "passenger princess," which makes Henry catch Alex's eye in the rearview mirror for a moment so fleeting, and yet it's all Alex needs to know exactly what Henry is thinking. Flashes of Henry on his knees in the backseat before classes in the mornings, the way Henry loves to lay back and let Alex take care of him. For the rest of the ride, he tilts his head back and grins to himself about the things they could explore together now that they have actual privacy.

It almost feels too good to be true.

Everything that was near and dear to him was in those three packed boxes, now relocated into Henry's apartment. One contained his clothes: neatly folded and rearranged by what he would most likely wear. At the top of the box was Henry's UNH hoodie, finally washed after being hoarded for so long. Next to it are his leather jacket and work blazers, which are in desperate need of being ironed. Underneath were his casual clothes: several pairs of worn-out jeans, t-shirts, and one too many patterned button-downs he got on sale at the gap.

In the next box were miscellaneous items around his room that he brought from home in Texas: his Nintendo Switch, his last lacrosse trophy before graduating high school, a framed photo of him, Nora, and June at June's graduation, clueless and carefree. A bag of toiletries

Pez helped him pack up, which came with a free lecture on how he was doing his skincare routine all wrong. Included were his laptop and printer, and all his school work and office supplies. A now-wrinkled flag of Texas that he had pinned above his bed.

Lastly, in a third and smaller box, his textbooks from school that he had purchased despite preferring the audio formats. Once Alex took a liking to his audiobooks, he neglected much of them, gathering them in slanted stacks on his desk. On the top of the neglected textbooks is his doggy-eared collector's edition of *Romeo & Juliet*, worn out with notes scribbled in the margins.

Alex finds himself crossed-legged on the floor in Henry's room, thumbing through the marked pages. After catching interest in the second act, he starts over and begins to read silently to himself.

It *should* be easy to unpack. He doesn't quite know why he can't. But Alex falls into the comfortable familiarity of the book instead, the feeling of being wrapped in Henry's arms, and loses time.

He makes it to the second scene of the second act, mouthing along to the play, eyes flickering between stanzas and his scrawled notes. At a certain point, Alex becomes so engrossed he can almost hear Henry's voice in his ear following along.

"Reading?" Henry asks.

Alex jumps. "Shit. Fuck—yeah. Sorry, I was. Got distracted." He turns around and looks up at Henry, tall and perfect, leaning against the doorway. Alex waves the book above his shoulder gracefully to show him—which makes Henry's mouth melt into a soft smile.

Henry pads up to where he's sitting and sits down behind him, legs wide open and welcoming. Alex leans into him, his back to Henry's chest, taking in breaths evenly together.

Alex opens the book back up to where he left off and Henry rests his chin on his shoulder. His voice comes out low and animated as he starts to read aloud, "*What man art thou that, thus bescreen'd in night. So stumblest on my counsel?*"

"*By a name,*" Alex reads the next line in response, "*I know not how to tell thee who I am: My name, dear saint, is hateful to myself, Because it is an enemy to thee. Had I it written, I would tear the word.*"

He can feel Henry's breath, hot against his curls, edging around to the back of his ear. Alex knows the next line is one of their favorites—especially Henry's.

And it hits hard in all the right places.

"*My ears have yet not drunk a hundred words of thy tongue's utterance, yet I know the sound. Art thou not Romeo, and a Montague?*" Henry recites perfectly, probably without looking. Alex closes his eyes and drinks in the words. The subtle smell of Henry's fancy cologne, earthy with notes of clean linens, captivates him so much that he loses their place once he reopens his eyes.

“Neither,” Alex replies, his breath caught in his throat.

“So beautiful,” Henry whispers, kissing Alex’s earlobe once and then pressing tender kisses down to his clavicle. He could be talking about the passage or Alex; with Henry, it’s probably both. “You’re invested in reading instead of unpacking. Having doubts?”

Any doubt he had about Henry never existed in the first place—and yet, he’s sitting on the floor, mulling over his belongings, everything that makes him who he is stowed away in three simple boxes. Alex can’t help but ponder the possibility of growing beyond 3 boxes of material items that make up who he is and fitting himself into Henry’s world. He’s never realized that he carries most of himself on his sleeve, deep from within his heart.

He shakes his head. “Not exactly—I’m just a bit uncertain how I fit in here. I guess I’m trying to figure out how it’s going to work out. You. Me. Royalty. David.”

Henry laughs, wrapping his arms around his waist and holding Alex close to his chest. “Hm. I think David and I can handle you joining us.”

“But what if you regret having me live with you? Like, you end up realizing you can’t stand me?”

“That’s quite unlikely. Have you already forgotten our time apart? Truly miserable. I cannot fathom doing *that* again,” Henry says.

Alex swallows. It’s embarrassing, but he forces himself to ask: “What if I end up being too much?”

Henry goes quiet behind him, and Alex imagines he’s about to warn him to *not* be too much. But instead, he just tilts Alex’s chin towards him so he can look into his eyes.

“Darling, I cannot imagine there ever being *enough* of you.”

ACT I

There’s a cloudy mood hovering over them in the morning, only to be broken up by soft kisses and hushed promises. Henry was England-bound, and Alex was soon to be left to his own devices. Only so many kisses can withhold the impending heartbreak of the goodbye that was coming.

The car ride to the private terminal east of Laguardia is solemn and quiet. He holds his chin up when Henry gets out of the car, politely swatting at Jerry to get back into the car so he can take care of his luggage. From over Henry’s shoulder, he can see Bea waiting patiently at the gate for him—her smile growing once she spots Alex as he emerges from the car.

Alex waves at her, his eyes flitting back to Henry, who looks as if he’s en route to a funeral. “I am going to miss the fuck out of you.”

“Remind me, how does one ‘miss the fuck’ out of another person?” he asks, tone flat.

“Alright, alright, come here. Enough sulking—you’ll be back before you know it,” he says and means it. Alex squeezes his shoulder, sheepishly looking around at the people passing by. There’s a dull ache in his chest at not being able to steal one more kiss, one more hug.

Henry nods once, picking up his bag and turning towards Bea. Alex can see the disappointment on his face—and he doesn’t know why he chooses to do this *now*, of all fucking times. Maybe it’s because he loathes seeing Henry withering and wretched, or he craves witnessing the flush enter Henry’s cheeks. Not the faux-pink sting whipped across his cheeks and nose from the winter weather—but rather the genuine heat that spreads through his face, that tells Alex everything Henry is feeling.

Alex grabs the cuff of Henry’s coat and pulls him hard back until his shoulder crashes into his and his mouth is close enough to his ear so that only he can hear him.

In a low, drawled-out voice, and full of intention, Alex whispers, “You know when I blew you and I said you could make it up to me later? Well, *ha*, when you get back from London, I want *you* to fuck *me*. ”

When he pushes Henry’s shoulder back, the look on his face is priceless; his mouth is open, his pupils are blown wide, and Alex swears his eyebrow is a little quirked. If anything, Alex just gave him ten times more reason to look forward to coming home.

“Alex, I am not—“

He smirks at Henry who is still shellshocked. “Just consider it. See you, Your Majesty.”

As he walks away, he watches Henry fight the disbelieving smile from his mouth. Alex gets into the car, driving far from the sexual tension crisis he’s just conjured with his own words. It only takes 30 seconds for his phone to light up with a text.

Henry-dickhead♥

I’ll have Shaan set you up for a PreP shot. I have fibre pills you can take in the morning—I’m sure you’ve already done your research, even though I told you to talk to me first. While I’m gone, you should practise with your fingers and see if it feels comfortable to you.

ACD

so is that a yes

Henry-dickhead♥

yes

ACD

that didn’t take me much effort

Henry-dickhead♥

I can still change my mind, Alex

ACD

yeahhh but we both know you wouldn't

Henry-dickhead♥

You're unbelievable.

ACD

and you're the love of my life, lmao have a safe flight. Love you, your majesty

Henry-dickhead♥

I love you too, Alex.

Alex grins triumphantly.

ACT II

Although Alex had bugged him more than a few times with questions of what his trip home would entail, Henry remained tight-lipped. It took everything in him not to pry Henry open and get him to bear the side of himself he kept so well hidden. Despite his cryptic nature, Alex knew he would come around when he was ready. He could wait as long as Henry needed—patience was becoming a newfound skill of his, after all.

Within the first day of Henry's arrival back home, photos of him hit the tabloids. Alex knew his return to England would be big news, but the feral reactions of the British press were bigger than he expected. In Connecticut, Henry was just... Henry. Humble and maintaining a lowkey life. In England, he was the British equivalent of an American celebrity—they seemed to think he was making a royal comeback. It was funny seeing the speculation surrounding his absence and the conclusions trashy journalists came to. Some of his favorites made it into his screenshots folder, some of which he shared with June and Nora.

HRH PRINCE HENRY OF WALES RETURNS TO ENGLAND: NO DEGREE AND A DEGREE FURTHER FROM THE THRONE

[EXCLUSIVE] INSIDE PRINCE HENRY'S WILD AMERICAN FESTIVITIES: HAS THE PRINCE FINALLY COME OFF OF HIS SHAGGING TOUR?

PRINCE HENRY'S BIG RETURN: IS HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS FINALLY READY TO BECOME ENGLAND'S MOST ELIGIBLE BACHELOR?

It *was* funny—until Henry told Alex he found it offensive and had harped over one particular tabloid that photographed him speaking to a pretty brunette staffer while claiming he was her new 'beau.' Alex admittedly seethed at that one and had to turn off the alerts, especially once

he wondered how many girls Henry would be photographed speaking to and getting paired with by the media. Girls that would never be him.

That particular phone call was difficult—not being able to hold Henry as he cried out of stress and anger at his privacy already being invaded. Alex cried too and told him when he came back, he wouldn't have to worry because, oddly, no one gave a fuck about him in Connecticut. It made Henry laugh and call him an arse. A laugh that had made Alex grin through wet cheeks and heartsickness.

The first weekend he spends alone, June and Nora sleepover to keep him company. After several rounds of Mario Party and movies, Alex suspects they have other motivations. Between snacks and movie pauses, they pick up their phones and start texting at the same time. He watches from the kitchen, filling David's food bowl, watching them share glances, their fingers taking turns tapping away messages. Finally, it clicks in his brain: they're talking to each other behind his back.

"Alright, enough shit-talk behind my back," Alex marches up to them, his hands on his hips. "What are you two talking about? And don't lie—Nora only texts us, so I know she can only be texting you or me, and only one of us is holding a phone."

They look up at him from their phones, their eyes sheepish. He wonders if they're about to dump something on him: a confession they are moving back to Texas, or that Henry has a secret lovechild. Any sort of bad news that is about to dampen the bit of happiness he's found with Henry in Connecticut.

June breaks first. "We wanted to talk to you about something, and we weren't sure how you'd take it."

"So, tell me?"

They both scoot apart, making room for him to wedge himself between them. Nora loops her arm through his as he sits between them, and squeezes his bicep.

"June and I are moving in together, in an apartment off campus. Our move-in date is the first of January, and we wanted to invite you to come live with us. There's an extra room, so you and Henry would have your privacy," Nora says in a calculated, delicate voice.

Oh. They don't think I'm ready to move in with Henry, Alex thinks.

"It's a lovely place, two bedrooms, *very* affordable, and not far from school or any of our jobs. What do you say?" June asks cheerfully, an uncertain tone in her voice.

He imagines the three of them living together—a well-oiled machine. June, the organized neat freak. Nora, running numbers and helping them save money. Alex, cooking breakfasts and dinners to ensure they start and end the day as well as it began. It was his dream, really. His two favorite people are no longer a phone call away—now his roommates, together in a safe place where he can bring his boyfriend over.

But then there's Henry.

Henry—the epitome of the person who has become his sanctuary, who gave him the key to his home on a key resting on his sternum and looped around his neck. Alex placidly places two fingers over it through his shirt, moving his hand up over his heart and feeling the even beats as he ponders the reality of his life now: he's not just Alexander Gabriel Claremont-Diaz, son of politicians, studying law and politics. He's simply just Alex, in love with Henry. It doesn't have to be anything bigger than that.

Alex pushes his glasses up his nose, loosening Nora's grip from his arm so he can stretch his arms out to bracket around each of their shoulders. He feels like a dad letting down his daughters, oddly. "Listen, I appreciate you guys looking out for me. I know this semester has been crazy, with me and Henry, the thing with Hunter. But, really, I'm fine. I want to live with Henry—it'll be good for me. For us."

"I never said it wouldn't be good for you, Alejandro," Nora shoves him off playfully. "It was just a suggestion."

He furrows his eyebrows and turns to June, confused. "So, you guys support me moving in with Henry even if it is a bit fast?"

"Obviously. I mean, you two have been down bad for each other since like, the party where you ditched us and Pez to go makeout." June shrugs and looks at her nails disinterestedly.

"So, why are you guys being so secretive and talking behind my back about it? It's just an apartment."

Nora takes a sip of beer, tilting her bottle in June's direction. "How long do you think it'll take for him to catch on?"

Alex has never been more confused. June cracks a smile, shaking her head as he sits there obliviously. He wracks his brain, thinking of what they could be referencing. An apartment. Together. Off campus. Two bedrooms.

Two bedrooms.

Three people.

But only *one* invitation. Two bedrooms, three people, and one invitation extended to him to move in. The math is simple; if they are moving into a two-bedroom apartment, offering one of them to him, then that can only mean...

Oh.

"Oh—but if there's only two rooms and three of us—"

"Yes, Alex," June affirms his implications.

"But wouldn't that mean you two are—"

Nora pats his shoulder. "Oh, buddy. Welcome to the party. You've been sorely missed."

Alex blinks. He knew his sister and Nora casually had a thing for each other on the side, but right now, here to his face, they were confirming their status as more than just that: a couple.

“Well. Congratulations, I guess. Though, I thought you guys were asking me to move in because you thought it wasn’t a good idea for me to move in with Henry.”

“On the contrary, actually; rent is still high between the two of us and you’re the only person we can trust to move in with us. Bummer that it seems to be a no,” Nora sighs. “It’s not shocking that you made our official announcement as a couple about yourself, though.”

“Not everything is about him, as much as he wants it to be,” June shakes her head, talking as if he’s not there.

“Well, it should be. Y’all are stealing my thunder here a bit—”

Nora and June pummel him with couch pillows, their laughter loud and infectious. Alex joins in and smacks them each once with a pillow, eliciting barks from David who seems to have grown protective over them already.

“Alright, alright, take it easy; y’all are going to get David going,” he gasps through more pillow shots to the back of his head.

David trots up to the couch, ears flopping and nose snuffling against June’s knee. June picks him up and plops him on her lap, scratching behind his ears. “I think he loves us more than you. Anyway, I hope everything works out for you and Henry. I’m proud of you, or whatever. You finally stopped listening to what everyone else around you thinks is right, and did what’s best for yourself.”

“Thank you—and I am happy for you and Nora. Though, did you need to steal my ex? Nora is just bragging at this point by pulling us both.”

June rolls her eyes. Alex’s face splits into a pleased grin and he gives her a tight hug, causing David to lean up to lick at their faces. They both groan and laugh at their moment being stolen.

Nora kicks her feet up on the coffee table and shakes her head, laughing under her breath.

“What?” Alex and June ask.

“The odds, man,” she snickers. “Not even I could have predicted the likelihood of both Claremont-Diaz children being in queer relationships before the age of 25.”

ACT III

Henry’s been gone for exactly two weeks.

The holidays have been quiet. Even with prior impromptu Mario Party sessions, Alex was lonely in Henry’s flat. By the second week, he had gone to Target and filled it with cheap

Christmas decorations to make it feel more homey. After lining the living room windows with bright white Christmas lights, he placed several Christmas coasters on the coffee table containing pictures of dogs in Christmas sweaters. In the corner near the dog bed was a mini fake Christmas tree with rainbow lights, something he felt Henry would appreciate. He even replaced David's collar with a plaid green one, which he snapped a photo of and sent to Henry, who demanded more photos of him immediately.

Henry became too busy to text or call—which was fine. Alex would see him when he was ready. They'd survived two weeks apart before, so this time should be no different, just a little longer and less heartbreaking.

But it was Christmas Eve, he was homesick, and it was freezing in the apartment, so he and David were snuggled under a blanket on the couch. Things couldn't be any more glum—part of him wished he had sucked it up and went home with June and Nora for the holidays. He just wasn't ready to go home until Henry came back to him—until he knew for certain what the next step in their relationship would look like.

A sudden knocking at the door breaks his thoughts, which surprises him because he isn't expecting any visitors. Shaan certainly would have called if someone was coming up. Maybe it's a neighbor or Shaan himself. Or perhaps Andrew Garfield himself had finally decided to bless Alex's life so he could stop staging failed run-ins after work. (Alex was starting to think Nora and June scared him off permanently.)

He leaves David tucked in under the blanket on the couch and tip-toes to the door, so he doesn't wake up and start barking. When he opens it, he nearly falls to his knees.

Henry is standing in front of him, hair freshly cut and gelled perfectly in place like every Prince would expect to have their hair styled. It takes a moment for him to register that he's standing in front of Henry, who is as handsome as ever, and windswept like always. Alex grabs his face and kisses him hard in the hallway, and Henry laughs hotly against his mouth, shoving him back into the apartment. Alex doesn't care why he's here—he's slamming the door behind him, prying his bags from his hands, tossing them to the ground, and pushing Henry hard against the door.

"You're home," Alex grins against his mouth.

"Hello, you," he murmurs, brushing a fallen curl away from Alex's forehead. His eyes catch the decorations and lights around the apartment, blue-green irises twinkling under strung Christmas lights. "Love what you've done with the place. It. Looks. Lovely." Henry says, kissing him one time between each word.

"Yeah, the place needed some holiday cheer—wait, why are you home so soon?" Alex asks a little too loud, which wakes David fully, who is already stirring beneath the blanket on the couch. Once David notices Henry, he jumps off the couch, trotting up to his Dad and whining. His tail is wagging so hard, and Alex can tell he's fighting the urge to jump up against Henry's legs. Henry kneels and gives him kisses and scratches, looking up at Alex as David begins to sniff his coat for cookies.

He mouths “*treat*” at Alex, then says, “I decided to come home and surprise you for the holidays. The idea of you alone for Christmas made me distraught. Leaving you by yourself would make me a—what do you call me behind my back? A ‘dickhead’?”

Alex shakes his head laughing, handing Henry a dog treat, which David immediately snatches and runs off to his bed to hide. Both of them laugh together, and it feels so light.

“Yeah, my dickhead. I suppose it’s okay that you showed up here, unannounced. And you cut your hair,” Alex points out sourly, fingers tracing along the tops of Henry’s ears.

“It was for Holiday photographs. Gran and Mum practically chastised me until I surrendered to a hairdresser. A formality I am not keen on continuing any further,” he replies, turning his head to kiss the inside of Alex’s palm. “Besides, hair grows back.”

“I liked it long—see, this is why I should have come along with you. A Prince’s rights to his hair should be protected; are you in need of a lawyer, Your Highness?”

Henry stands slowly, eyeing Alex up and down beneath blonde eyelashes. He swallows hard as Henry palms his hip and pulls him in close. ““*Your Highness*”? Where on earth is that coming from?”

“From two weeks of forced abstinence and having the entirety of England’s dating society think they have a shot with you,” Alex leans forward, their foreheads touching. His lips nearly brush against Henry’s with every word. “I don’t like other people thinking you’re single.”

“Good thing I’m not,” Henry tilts his chin up and steals a kiss.

Alex pulls back. He knows he’s being a tease—and he intends to be difficult. He knows it’s the fastest way to get what he wants out of Henry. To get the one thing he’s been thinking about non-stop since the first time they fucked after getting back together.

“They don’t know that,” Alex fires back with an attitude. His fingers are already lingering on the top two buttons of Henry’s shirt, popping each open as they slip further down his chest.

“Oh, but I quite do,” he tilts his head with a cockiness Alex loves. He plucks Alex’s hand from his shirt and pecks his mouth. “Now, if you will stop trying to undress me, I have something I want to give you.”

He takes Alex’s hands in his and leads him to sit on the couch. “I know we said no presents but I wanted to get you something special, so let’s not call it a Christmas gift. It can be an ‘I love you, sorry I haven’t been the best boyfriend’ gift?” He walks to his bags and comes back with a large duffle bag. Alex is grinning to himself—not because he’s receiving a gift, but because he had gone against their no-gift rule and gotten Henry something as well. His competitive edge gave him a feeling Henry might do the same, so Alex prepared a gift to give him when he returned home. However, he decides to not tell him yet to give him a few more minutes of glory.

“Alright, let’s see it,” Alex bats his eyes at Henry.

Henry sits beside him and opens the bag, taking out a plain grey gift box with a red bow on top and placing it in his lap. Alex's smile fades a little, impacted by nerves as to what could be in the box. Slowly, he takes the lid off and—

Well.

It's a matching dark blue three-piece Ralph Lauren suit, neatly folded. Alex touches the fabric of the jacket, then the vest, and instantly he can tell it's expensive. As he takes the jacket out of the box and holds it up, he can see two buttons on each cuff and the double-pleated trousers that were hidden beneath the jacket in the box. It's very Alex; it's perfect.

"It's made of wool from Scotland. Bea helped pick it out when we went shopping. She insisted that we play it safe and go black but I said that you had a very specific knack for navy blue. Did I get that right?" Henry asks, fingering a button on the vest. "I figured if you are to pursue law full time you might fancy starting a collection of suits when you start going to court."

Alex swallows hard. He isn't sure if he can speak right now—he might end up crying if he does.

"Alex? Love? Do you like it?" The tinge of insecurity in Henry's voice at Alex's momentary muteness forces his voice back up into his throat.

"Baby. I *love* it." He places the box to his side and clears his throat, shaking away whatever tears are attempting to escape his eyes. Henry leans in for a kiss but Alex stops him with a finger on his lips, shaking his head with a sly smile. "Not yet. I may have cheated and also got you something as well."

Henry raises an eyebrow. "Alex. We said no gifts."

"Says the man who just gifted me a two-thousand dollar suit."

"For work."

"And that makes it not a gift? Don't be a hypocrite—sit your hot ass there and let me give you a gift," Alex demands and hops up to the mini Christmas tree, which was obscuring a gift box he had assembled days ago. It was depressing putting a gift under a tree when Henry wouldn't be there to open it—so Alex tucked it behind the mini faux pine decor to ease his disappointment. But now, he was here, and Alex took great pleasure in placing the gift on his lap.

The cost of his gifts is nothing compared to the beautiful suit, but Alex put his heart into these items. Watching Henry tear the wrapping paper off the box fills him with so much anticipation that he bounces his leg, barely able to sit still. He can't decide which of the three gifts in the box Henry will love most: an incomplete handwritten list of all the things Alex loves about Henry, the gold-plated nameplate engraved with "*Henry Fox - Teaching Assistant*", or the photo of them from the Halloween party, framed. The only photo of them that exists—*that can exist*—because it's a group photo. But Henry's arm is firmly around his

waist and every so often he zooms in, obsessed with how even in October, it was clear they were so possessive over each other.

Henry opens the box, seeing the nameplate first. He stares at it for a moment, then traces his name, dragging his finger along the carved indent of “*Henry Fox*”, as if he couldn’t believe it was his name. Alex watches intently as he picks it up and turns it over, taking it in—realizing that he was more than Prince Henry to Alex. When he tears his eyes away from it and sets it back down in the box, Henry is pulling Alex in by his neck and pressing his forehead against his.

“It’s beautiful. Thank you,” his breath is gentle against Alex’s lips as he strokes the back of his neck. Henry goes in for a kiss, but Alex stops him.

“Not so fast, there’s more.”

“More? I already feel so spoiled by how good you look right now.” Alex rolls his eyes and points to the picture frame placed upside down. Henry hums in approval, picking it up, his face splitting into a huge, crooked grin at the photo of the group. “Hm, the Halloween party. You grabbed my arse in front of all those people—what a night that was. *Oh*, and June and Nora look so lovely, too. I love it.”

“There’s one more—”

“Three gifts? Bloody hell, Alex, make me seem like a shite boyfriend, why don’t you?” Henry huffs with fake annoyance.

Alex knows this one is too important to joke about; his heart is pounding just thinking about Henry reading it. The incomplete list of things he loves about Henry Fox—everything he couldn’t say to him in the past few months, condensed into a simple list of twenty. A list that is sure to grow every year they spend together.

Henry picks up the handwritten list, raising his brow as he reads aloud, ““*An Incomplete List: Things I Love About HRH Prince Henry of Wales.*”” He blinks a few times, his face turning red with modesty and a touch of swoon. Alex takes the paper from his hands and stands, proudly chuckling as Henry leans forward with anticipation.

“Henry, if you’ll allow me, I have some things I’d like to get off my chest—I’d like to tell you some things that I love about you,” Alex professes with a smirk as Henry hides his face with his hand, laughter rippling from his chest. “Things I thought I’d never feel about another person.”

Henry blinks, straightening his shoulders and nodding. “Okay. Yes, go on, my love. Let’s hear it.”

Alex lifts the paper, confidently reading his once-contained flatteries of Henry in a slow drawl:

“1. *Your strong sense of moral code and character.*”

- 2. The way you're always willing to laugh with me, even when I piss you off.*
- 3. The fact that you paid for most of our dates—before we knew they were dates.*
- 4. Your inability to understand the purpose and rules of 20 questions.*
- 5. All the things I understand about myself now because of you.*
- 6. How your hands look when they turn the pages of any book.*
- 7. Your ability to recite Shakespeare.*
- 8. Your ability to also recite George Orwell.*
- 9. How hard you try.*
- 10. How hard you've always tried.*
- 11. How much you care.*
- 12. You're the reason I started wearing my glasses all the time.*
- 13. When you first asked me to make love to you... it was the most romantic and sweet thing anyone's ever asked of me.*
- 14. The fact that you're devoted to your skincare and taking care of your hair. You're always going to be my pretty baby.*
- 15. Your shoulder-to-waist ratio.*
- 16. The fact that you've been through so much and yet your heart is still so big and selfless, even when you're hurting.*
- 17. Your equally huge dick.*
- 18. The way you're probably burning up at a thousand degrees at that last one.*
- 19. The fact that you didn't give up on us.*
- 20. The fact that you loved me all along."*

When Alex looks up, Henry's face is damp, eyelashes wet and fluttering and his mouth is slightly parted—but no words come out. He's used to seeing and hearing Henry cry by now, but it still triggers something in him. Alex pulls him up by his hands and into his arms, kissing away his tears, then pecking him on his lips, chin, and his perfect, royal nose until the tears stop flowing from his eyes. The entire time, David is crunching obliviously in his dog bed, watching his Dad get coddled and soothed by his boyfriend. It's overwhelmingly too good to be true; yet, Alex has never felt more at home.

"You read that perfectly and so beautifully," Henry coos, pulling Alex against the crook of his neck so he can kiss the top of his curls. "That might be the best gift I have ever gotten."

“Alright, you sap, enough about how much of a great boyfriend and gift giver I am,” Alex brings him back to the couch, setting their gift boxes on the ground. “I want to hear about what it’s been like at home. You haven’t told me anything,” he frowns.

Henry snuffles a little and blinks, nodding solemnly. Alex’s heart sinks at the thought of bad news—at the thought of losing Henry to distance, to the unrealistic and antiquated expectations of royalty.

“I asked for an extension to continue studying here until I get my Bachelor’s. There were some... intemperate responses from my family about my lack of attendance at several mandated events these past few years. I told my Mum and Gran that I had met someone in the States who inspired me to pursue my dreams, and they were rather alienated by the idea that I wanted to continue spending my time here instead of there... you know, in a closet, uninspired and attending ribbon cuttings for money laundering prospects,” Henry’s nose wrinkles and he shudders at the mere mention of royal formalities.

“So, they said no?” Alex presses, his heart sinking even further than he thought it could.

“Oh, no they said yes.”

Alex groans in relief and rolls his eyes. “Baby—once again. Lead with the good news. You’re *killing* me here.”

Henry takes his hands in his, rubbing small circles into the back of his fist. “There *is* bad news, though. I may have elaborated a bit too much that the person who inspired me was a close friend I was mentoring. Truly, I need to learn how to shut my mouth up. Nothing could quell their interest in you—so I told them you’d fly back with me to finish the trip. I just think their excitement stems from being relieved I made nice with someone who wasn’t Percy.” Henry rolls his eyes, scoffing.

Alex stares at him, mouth agape. No. Fucking. Way. Dating the Prince of England was one thing, but the thought of being touted around on his arm in front of his family was another. Especially considering that they’re two men; Alex can already picture it: Henry bringing him into Kensington Palace in front of the Queen and his mother, both of them asking who his friend is, just for him to plant a flamboyant kiss on his lips. The Queen would die on the spot, disturbed that one of her potential heirs was gay with a smartass lawyer boyfriend.

The thought made Alex crack a smile.

“When do we leave?”

“I beg your pardon?” Henry croaks, dropping his hands in confusion.

He knows he should be terrified—running for the hills, even. But the thought of flying across an ocean, hand in hand with the most eligible bachelor of the United Kingdom, and nobody knows he’s *ineligible*—well. It makes Alex a little cocky. And lightheaded.

“You’re joking, right? You cannot honestly say you think it’s a good idea to meet my family under these pretenses. They’d make us in under a minute,” Henry gripes.

“Well, you already said I was coming. So, I am coming. To England,” he grumbles as Henry rolls his eyes. Why was Henry being so dismissive of an idea he had conjured at his fault?

“Sweetheart, I love your enthusiasm, truly. I do. But my family, er, I am trying to say this as eloquently as possible,” he gesticulates in front of him. “They are... god. They’re beyond admonishment. Philip is a prick, Mum is completely oblivious, Gran is well... outdated.”

“Oh, you mean racist?” Alex holds in a laugh.

Henry glares at him.

“I don’t give a fuck about your family and what they think about me or us. After all this, I don’t think I *can* measure up any fucks to give. Wanna know why? Because it’s you and me. It’s always going to be me and you, and nobody else. I’m never going to love anybody else in the world like I love you. So, we are going to go to England. And they’re going to clock us, *for sure*. It might be a disaster. But we are going to be together, and that’s all that fucking matters. Okay?”

Henry just nods, looking scared and young and nothing like the Prince of Wales who just did a press tour with his own family, informing them of every aspect of his plans for his future so that he can get *permission* to live out those plans.

Not anymore, Alex thinks. Not if he can fucking help it.

ACT IV

It’s getting late, and he’s been loitering in the bathroom for way too long. He’s fresh out of the shower, clean-shaven, not a thing more he can do. After a few paces around the bathroom, his eyes catch the key, sitting in plain sight on the counter. It’s been hanging around his neck since he’s gotten it—he hasn’t been able to bring himself to move it with his keys. The coolness of the metal against his hot skin is a reminder of how close Henry is to his heart—even if he’s thousands of miles away.

Alex stares into the mirror at his reflection. What does he have to be nervous about when someone like Henry is in love with him? To be loved by someone who should be so fragile yet has become so strong—Alex knows they are at their bravest when they are together. So, he slips the chain over his neck and watches the key fall flat against his solar plexus. *Fuck it.*

When he exits the bathroom, Henry is sitting on the bed, jacket discarded, tie missing and his sleeves rolled up to his elbows. It’s as if he got off work and is patiently waiting for Alex with a small smile on his lips.

“Come here,” he orders. Alex is already ahead of him, taking two strides until he’s standing between Henry’s open knees. He’s only got on a pair of loose pajama bottoms, and he’s rocking back and forth on the backs of his heels as Henry leans in and starts to kiss his stomach. The feeling of his soft lips against his abs, his navel, the patch of hair leading to

underneath his bottoms. Alex is sighing and tugging at the roots of Henry's newly short hair, afraid to let go of him. "Are you sure this is what you want, Alex?"

The sudden sound of Henry's voice *asking* if he's sure sets him off because he's straddling him, their foreheads pressed firmly together, noses brushing and lips aching to be kissed. Henry's palming his ass and pushing him against the bulge in his pants, eliciting breathy moans from Alex.

"I want you so fucking bad—baby, I want...oh god, I want everything. I want you to—" Alex doesn't have to finish saying it because Henry is kissing him, with teeth, his tongue teasing his bottom lip and effectively shutting him the hell up. He grinds down on Henry's lap until he feels the hardness in his pants and bounces lightly against it. Henry groans and pushes Alex impossibly closer against him until they're both red in the face, panting against each other's open mouths.

Henry still hasn't removed his hands from his ass, squeezing every so often and making Alex wince. "Can you lay back for me, love?"

Alex nods, giving one last bounce of his hips to Henry's amusement, and lays back on the bed. His heart is pounding—he knows he can do this. It's all he's thought about for weeks.

Henry climbs over him, grabbing the waistband of his pants and Alex lifts his hips without protest. Then, he watches Henry's long, elegant fingers unbutton his shirt and toss it over the side of the bed. He looks down at his own fingers, then back at Henry's and tries to regulate his breathing. Alex can feel his chest rising and deflating a bit too rapidly; Henry must notice too because he places his hand over his heart and waits until his breathing evens out.

"We can go slow, love. I'm in no hurry tonight," Henry says softly. Alex closes his eyes and thinks, *don't miss this. It's too important.* In one motion, he pulls Henry down by his neck and kisses him messily, finding courage in just letting whatever was about to happen, happen.

"Oh—let me get these," he reaches for Alex's glasses and plucks them off his nose, placing them on the nightstand. It's become a thing Henry just *knows* to do; that his glasses get in the way during sex so he takes them off without asking. He'd never admit it but Alex purposefully keeps his glasses on and *waits* for Henry to take them off for him. Ironically, it made him feel seen and taken care of.

Henry kisses down his neck, stopping to grin and place a kiss on the key, kissing further down until he meets Alex's weeping cock, giving it a teasing kiss on the tip. He moans and arches his back, spreading his legs to accommodate Henry in between them.

"Have you been doing what I asked?"

"Yes—you know I have," Alex groans.

In so many more ways than one—once they agreed to what Alex wanted, he demanded that Alex start "practicing" for him. And god, did Alex *practice*. The rare times he caught Henry on the phone would result in impromptu phone sex, where he'd open himself up with his fingers while Henry whispered foul orders in curled vowels. Every time, he'd cum with three

fingers knuckle-deep inside his ass, while Henry called him his “good boy.” On nights by himself, a small toy sufficed his needs while he whimpered Henry’s name into his pillow until he coated his own stomach.

It was all too fucking good—he didn’t expect to love the feeling of being full. It just made him want Henry even more. If anything, the feeling provided him a glimmer of what he imagined Henry felt while getting fucked by Alex.

“Just checking,” Henry looks up at him, grinning as he reaches into his nightstand and pulls out their lube. He squints at the half-empty bottle. “Hm... looks a little low since I’ve last been here. Guess you really have been practicing, huh?”

The sound of the bottle flicking open makes his heart skip a beat. He can barely conjure up a response before he feels Henry’s finger firmly massaging his perineum, slipping over his rim and back up over and over until he’s clenching his jaw and curling his toes.

“Fuck. You,” Alex grits his teeth.

“Oh, I will be soon, darling.”

The first finger entering him feels so good that Alex is already rocking his hips against Henry’s hand. Henry just chuckles, adding a second finger. He knows this part, loves it even. The repetitive motion of Henry thrusting his fingers in and out, the way he curls them, and the fact that he *avoids* Alex’s prostate until Alex is a mess—both physically and emotionally. Henry curls his middle finger upwards inside Alex’s ass and drags it until he finds that spot, pressing the pad of his finger against it over and over until Alex’s hips are coming off the bed.

“Hen, *baby*—god. Gonna c-cum if you don’t s-stop that,” Alex barely manages as he tries to writhe away from Henry’s repeated assault on his prostate.

Henry withdraws his fingers, much to Alex’s reprieve. He’s trembling from his previously building orgasm, and Henry has lust written all over his face. He thinks Henry might fuck him now—but instead, he’s leaning down to kiss his thighs, sucking gently on each spot he kisses. The back of Alex’s thighs are tingling, and he’s so fucking hard, each kiss makes him twitch.

Strong hands spread his thighs and push them up a little further so they’re bent, and Alex thinks Henry’s about to blow him—until he feels hot breath against his ass, and Henry’s kissing along the bottom of his cheeks. Before he can register what’s happening, Henry’s tongue is pressed flat against his hole, spit mixing with the lube and making it even wetter.

It’s like nothing he’s felt before—the way Henry laps at and kisses and teases his hole with his tongue sends a flurry of vulgarities flying from his mouth. At one point, he can even fucking *feel* Henry chuckling while he eats him out.

“Fuck, do that a-fucking-gain with your tongue, god, fuck me, fuck me, *baby*... want your tongue and cock in my ass so bad,” Alex blurts out, and he can’t stop. “Baby, *b-baby*—sweetheart, fuck... serious—c-cumming soon.”

Henry just hums, the vibrations making him jolt. He wasn't sure why Henry wasn't stopping—if anything, he was speeding up, holding Alex down by his hips and ignoring his warnings.

“H-henry.” is all that comes out, in a whiny low whimper as he holds onto the sheets for dear life.

Henry pulls back and Alex thinks he has a moment to collect himself—just for him to slip two fingers in easily. He goes back to thrusting them in and out, bullying Alex's prostate without any sign of stopping. Alex is *fighting* his orgasm at this point; his heels are dug into the mattress and the heat deep in his pelvis is overwhelming. He pinches his eyes shut and prays he doesn't cum before Henry can fuck him.

Henry sees him stiffening, and gives a loving kiss to the tip of Alex's weeping cock. The contact alone makes him almost lose control, but he holds on.

He opens his mouth to say he thinks he's ready to move on to fucking now, but Henry is dragging a finger along his length, collecting a decent amount of pre-cum on his finger. “Is this all for me?”

All he can do is fucking nod and make a pathetic choking sound. Because Henry is bringing the finger up to his mouth and *sucking* Alex's cum off it. Prim and proper Prince *fucking* Henry bats his eyelashes up at him while licking his seed from his finger, all the while he's still fingering Alex's ass. All Alex could think is: *I'm the luckiest motherfucker alive.*

The room is going hazy, and Alex can be coy no longer about how *desperately close* he is. “I c-can't any longer, baby—gotta s-stop now or I—“

Henry cuts him off with a *tsk*. His voice comes out low and affectionate. “Oh, darling, don't fight it—be a good boy and cum for me.”

So, he does. Between Henry's fingers, his voice, and his doting kisses on his cock—Alex's body begins to shake and tense up. He's gripping fistfuls of the sheets as his hips come off the bed, his body jerking as Henry works him through the most powerful orgasm he's ever had. Alex can feel Henry's mouth around him and swallowing hot ropes of cum. As his hips buck up against Henry's mouth and hand, his fingers end up slipping out from how hard his ass is contracting around the digits. It's all too fucking good—so good, that even after he *thinks* he's done cumming, Henry swipes his thumb over his rim and it sends his body thrashing even further.

Once his orgasm subsides, Henry brings himself up and holds Alex, kissing his forehead and stroking his sweaty curls. Alex is so worn out he still hasn't found his voice—it's lost deep within his chest, underneath his stupid pounding heart.

“Good boy, that's right, you did so beautifully for me, Alex,” Henry coos into his ear; it positively makes Alex *melt*. “We can stop now if you want, hm? Is that what you want, love?”

Stopping is anything but what he wants. His body is loose, boneless, free of any tension, and yet, still wanting to get fucked. But he's so out of breath and in a post-orgasmic glow that any

tangible response is lost on his tongue. Henry tilts his chin upwards to look at his face and Alex just shakes his head.

“No?”

Alex shakes his head again, staring upwards at the ceiling as Henry kisses along his jaw then uses one finger to turn Alex’s cheek so their eyes can meet.

“I need you to use your words, love,” Henry eggs him on, stroking his sweaty bicep with the back of his knuckles. The cool skin on his overheated chest is calming him down enough so he can formulate a proper response. Any response, really.

“No. No, I don’t want to stop now. Even though you *completely* just took my orgasm from me,” Alex groans and covers his face with his arm.

“Are you embarrassed?”

“Yes, Henry,” he groans into the crook of his elbow.

The realization that he came before they could even fuck has hit him. It happens to guys, sure—but not him. It certainly has never happened with Henry before. Regret is settling in, along with embarrassment. He wants to hide, but Henry’s prying his arm from his face and looking at him with sincere eyes.

“D’you really think what just happened wasn’t my intention? As if I don’t know your body by now, and what you need?” he says and cocks his head.

Alex, stretched out and languid, looks at Henry. “Oh yeah? And what’s that?”

“To make sure you’re relaxed before I make love to you.”

“Not this cheesy shit again. Cue the music—he’s using the phrase ‘make love’ ag—,” Alex tries to joke, but the last syllable gets caught in his throat because Henry’s grabbing his hand and placing it over the rock-solid bulge in his pants. Alex palms his cock until he’s rutting his hand, desperate for any alleviation. Fuck—Henry’s been so patient with him, he’s put his own damn needs aside. Selfless, as fucking always.

Alex undoes Henry’s belt and pants, tugging them down with his underwear until they’re both naked together, grinding their centers against each other. He isn’t sure of the mechanics of what’s expected of him next; admittedly, he’s way in over his head being in Henry’s position. Henry kisses his neck, telling Alex he’s so hard and Alex can hardly think of what to do with his hands except hold on to Henry for dear life until the important part comes.

And when it does, Henry takes over.

“Lay on your stomach for me,” he instructs, sitting up to kneel next to Alex—he’s fumbling around in the nightstand drawer until he pulls out a condom. Alex rolls over onto his stomach, the side of his face tucked into the pillow he’s clutching.

“Lift your hips.” Henry’s simple orders bring heat back to his groin; Alex lifts his hips and Henry tucks a pillow beneath him. He feels his knees being spread apart until Henry is comfortably between them, pressing his slick cock against Alex’s hole. He waits—and nothing. To test the waters, Alex pushes his hips back, groaning as the tip of Henry’s cock easily slips past his rim.

“Someone’s in a hurry,” Henry gasps out a shaky laugh. In response, Henry rolls his hips forward, and Alex feels him enter an inch more. It feels different—not bad—but it makes his breath catch. Henry notices him holding his breath and leans down to kiss his shoulder. “Breathe for me, love. It’ll help you relax, and it will feel better.”

Alex lets go of the inhale he’s been holding hostage in his lungs and Henry slides in a bit more, both of them letting out mixed moans of pain and pleasure as he does. They continue this until he’s bottomed out, his hips meeting Alex’s ass, and his chest flush against the plane of Alex’s sweaty back. There’s pain, of course; but Henry is patient and in no rush, keeping the bottle of lube close by in case they need more. Everything is about what feels good to Alex, what he needs, but all he has ever wanted, needed, and desired is Henry Fox.

Alex wants to stay like this forever; in love, Henry on top of him, about to get his lights fucked out by someone who no one else will ever get to see him like this. Henry places open-mouthed kisses on the back of his neck when he asks in a raspy voice, “Is it okay if I move now?”

With a simple look over his shoulder and a nod, Henry lifts his hips and thrusts once, then twice, and Alex’s eyes roll into the back of his head. Never in his life could he have imagined getting fucked; even more surprisingly, he is *enjoying* getting fucked. Relishing it. Henry’s gentle, hesitant—rolling, rocking his hips just enough so he thrusts into Alex without hurting him. There’s an intense pressure, sure; but it feels good. The way Henry pulls out just enough to graze against his prostate, repeating the motion until he’s hard again, grinding against the pillow for reprieve.

“How does that feel, love?” Henry coaxes.

“Um, it feels like... a lot. I—I like it when you rock your hips a little,” he admits.

Henry presses a kiss against his shoulder and rocks his hips back and forth, making Alex whimper. “Like that?”

“Yeah, baby. Like that.”

The way Henry listens and is so in tune with what Alex needs makes his first time getting fucked pleasurable. Alex thinks back to their first date at the cafe and thinks if Henry had just taken him home and bent him over the couch, they might have avoided all the complicated parts of the last few months. Who could have known getting fucked by the Prince of England made him so congenial?

“Baby, God, you feel so good,” Alex says hoarsely, pushing his hips back against Henry’s cock. He waits for Henry’s reply but all he hears is soft sputtering and then a pause. “Sweetheart?”

“Alex, m’not going to l-last,” Henry admits in a shaky voice and rests his forehead on Alex’s shoulder blade.

“Then don’t,” he grins and wiggles his ass against Henry’s hips. “Fuck me until you cum, sweetheart.”

Henry pulls out, making Alex *whine*. Suddenly, he’s being flipped over onto his back and Henry is kissing him, open-mouthed and eager. He enters him again and Alex arches his back, letting out a guttural moan. And, god, the next few thrusts are enough to make Alex’s body writhe underneath Henry. He lets out a sob of pleasure at a particular thrust which earns him a sloppy kiss to quiet him. But he can’t—Alex is about to cum *again* and he can’t fucking stop it.

“Hm—I should have started this way. *Look at you*,” Henry looks down at his body, then gives him another brutal kiss. “You’re so, so good, love. So responsive, so b-beautiful. *Fuck—Christ*, Alex. I love you, s’much.”

“Love you more—more, Hen. I want more,” Alex nips at Henry’s kiss-swollen lips and hikes one knee around his hip, using his calf to push Henry harder, and impossibly deeper into him. The subsequent moans that follow are sure to repeat in his head until the day he dies.

Alex feels a hand on his stomach, then his cock and it takes just a few flicks of Henry’s wrist before he’s experiencing his *second* orgasm. This one isn’t as powerful; but still, he shudders underneath Henry, panting out “*baby*” over and over until he feels Henry grunting and palming at Alex’s hip as he cums.

The way Henry collapses on his chest is adorable, his face bright red as he takes in short, jagged breaths. His fingers lightly trace over his chest hair and stop above Alex’s heart, tapping once, then twice. It’s so simple, yet it makes Alex’s head go stupid, and he’s wondering how he went his whole life without *this*.

Once they roll apart and clean up, Alex stands in front of the mirror, admiring the red marks on his hips and ass that Henry left. There’s a new blush to his skin, warm and delicate. *Loved*.

As he returns to bed, he thinks Henry has already passed out. But he rolls over and takes Alex into his arms, kissing his forehead.

“So, how was it?” he asks.

Alex rolls his eyes. “You made me cum twice and you’re fishing for compliments. Your trip to England has diminished your humble foregoings; am I in bed with Prince Henry or Henry Fox?”

“You absolute bloody *arse*,” Henry laughs, his crooked gummy smile that Alex loves peeking out. Then, his smile softens to something more serious. “But was it good for you?”

Beyond good. Alex’s chest fills with heat at the mere memory of what occurred just a few minutes ago. The rare times in his life that a partner has made him cum twice, the love he

felt, the gentleness. All of it was indefinite, all-consuming, unbelievably perfect. Even the slight soreness in his lower half was negligible considering how high he felt right now.

He nods. "It was. Though, ask me again tomorrow morning."

Henry winces. "I made sure to be gentle."

"And you were and it felt so, so good. God, Henry. You gave me exactly what I wanted. And it was fucking... great," he grins.

"Preference then?"

Alex laces their fingers together and brings Henry's knuckles up to his mouth to kiss them. "I will always love fucking you. But god, now I *know* what you feel. It just makes me want you that way more. Like, you've fucking taught me what I can make *you* feel even better."

Henry looks at him through heavy-lidded eyes. "Hmm. A rather interesting approach—methodica, even. Have you ever considered it's impossible to make me feel 'even better' because I already feel smashing when I'm with you?"

It makes him stop and think; that, after everything, after capturing the most "eligible bachelor" in Britain's high society, nothing more has to be done. Alex is *enough*. There's no overarching feeling to be anything more than Henry's boyfriend, by his side and supporting each other. For once, life doesn't have to be about being the best. They can just *be*.

Alex lets out air through his nose, and it feels like he's letting go of every bad thought he's had about himself his entire life. "You know, I'm so fucking glad you came back to me."

"And I'm glad we found each other. Who knew I had such pull on straight men?" Henry teases.

Alex slaps his chest and laughs, and Henry covers him with his shoulders until they both fall asleep.

ACT V

The next few days are an eye-opening experience.

After Christmas Eve night until New Year's Eve, Alex fucks Henry *four* times. Additionally, after some weak begging, Henry bends him over the arm of his couch. They fall asleep there afterward, and Henry follows it the next morning by waking him up with his lips trailing down his back, stubble tickling his skin and Henry's tongue mapping out horizontal and vertical lines between his legs until Alex passes out from the intense sensation of Henry's royal mouth being anything *but* proper.

During quiet moments, Alex passes the time by listening to the audiobook versions of his textbooks for next semester's classes. It's always been his ritual to overprepare and study the syllabus adequately to be a few steps ahead. Alex would never admit it, but with work,

Henry, and classes, he already felt overwhelmed at the prospect of balancing a relationship and a student-work schedule. If he practiced juggling all three before the semester began, it would be a matter of time before Alex was the model boyfriend, law student, and paralegal.

Go to work, study, and be Henry's boyfriend. Rinse and repeat. It should be easy to pull off.

Until Alex makes a mistake at work and the domino effect one experiences during a bad day takes off. He misses one signature on a document for a working mother's greencard application, sends it in, and it comes back denied. It shouldn't be the end of the world, but the disappointment on Luna's face when Alex finds out sends him into a spiral he's not experienced in a long while.

When Alex gets home, Henry knows not to pry, but his questioning eyes make him miss every word that comes through his headphones from his audiobook. It's not his fault—but his mind is moving a million miles a minute and every word is fleeting, in one ear and out the other.

Finally, Henry sits beside him on the couch and musters up the courage to ask him what's wrong. When Alex insists it's nothing, Henry nods once, gets up, leaves, and comes back with a small stack of papers.

Henry looks up, takes a deep breath, closes his laptop and his face softens. "May I show you something?" His tone is full of compassion, and a hint of apprehension. Henry sits back down next to him and takes a deep breath.

"Sure?"

"Do you remember when you asked me if I could choose between being a Prince and a normal person, what would I choose?" Henry asks.

He remembers. It was weeks before they broke up, before the incident with Hunter. "I do. Why?"

"Alex, I meant what I said. I want more than my Master's in Literature. I want to stay here and get my credentials to become an educator. I want to make a difference in the world—I enjoy being a teacher's assistant, and I believe I would flourish in a career as a teacher. This semester has been transformative for me, and it would mean I would be able to stay here a few more years," Henry informs him with a thick voice.

Alex wants to jump with joy, and he can hardly stop the grin spreading across his face. But Henry isn't smiling. No—Henry's eyes are serious, and he keeps swallowing like he's trying not to cry. They should be celebrating, falling into bed, but Henry stares at him as if it's the worst news he can give him.

"Why aren't you happy? I support you doing that—it means we would go to school at the same time. Is there something else? Sweetheart?"

Henry takes his hand. "I need you to remember that you love me, and I love you. And nothing will ever change that. I *hope* nothing changes that for you."

Alex opens his mouth to reply, but Henry lets go of his hand and shows him the papers he's holding: two of Alex's English 102 papers. Then Henry sighs, bites his lip, and says the worst thing Alex has ever heard.

"I think you might have ADHD, love. Before I became a TA, I attended an optional workshop off-campus to learn some tips. We learned about students who might have developmental disabilities, how to recognize them, and assist those who might need help. When I sat next to you in class, I noticed you wrote everything in list form, even if Professor Gupta didn't format her slides that way. So, I decided to suggest George Orwell's *Politics and The English Language* for one of your analysis essays because your first essay was a tad bit all over the place," Henry holds up the two stapled essays side by side—the George Orwell one and *The Yellow Wallpaper*. Alex looks at the difference between the two. One is marked with red to the brim, and the other has much fewer edits scribbled in the margins. His stomach twists.

"George Orwell's essay was written in a list form. Professor Gupta had taken over grading your work at this point—she raved about how amazing your work was. You got an A," Henry whispers, and sets both essays down gently, as if he were handling an active grenade.

Alex loved that essay—he read it on the way to Henry's apartment and then again at home. It was one of the rare occasions where he devoured the content he read, repeatedly, in such a short amount of time.

"So, when I made up the NDA, I made sure that Shaan prepared it in a list format so you can properly take it all in. I knew you were a law student, but I figured you had a niche for these things. And you understood it very well. I only had my suspicions then—"

Alex shakes his head and runs his fingers through his hair, trying to catch a singular thought but all he can think is: *what the fuck?* He thinks about the lists, the essays, the NDA. Sure, he had a knack for different note-taking methods but that couldn't mean he had fucking ADHD, could it?

"So, I make lists. I don't think that means shit. Plus, you said you wanted me to analyze that essay because it was related to my major. Have you ever considered that people do well when they write about things they know?" Alex challenges weakly.

"I did."

"And?"

"And then you didn't want to read with me until we read aloud together. I did a little research. Reading aloud uses auditory and cognitive processing skills, so it diminishes distractions and helps improve attention," Henry deadpans.

Alex thinks about jumping through the window. His face is hot, and the last 21 years of his life are flashing before him. He's trying to figure out if his life is one long cosmic joke and someone's finally explaining the punchline to him.

"Reading together doesn't—"

“And then you told me how you felt about me, in a classroom full of people, our Professor,” Henry half-smiles. “Which I don’t think you would have done under ordinary circumstances. I’m trying not to, erm, speak for you or diagnose—”

Alex balls up his fists and finally snaps. “Then don’t, Henry.”

“Oh. You’re angry with me. I understand, hearing this may sound like a detriment but I can assure you that it isn’t. Of course, we can’t be one hundred percent sure until you visit some sort of—”

And Alex *knows* he shouldn’t—but he laughs. Not because anything is funny, but because for the first time since moving in together, they’re about to have their first fight and it’s nearly over the same thing they fought about the first day they met.

“Do you hear yourself right now, Henry?” Alex pauses to frown at the sound of Henry’s name coming out of his mouth—it feels foreign and unusual. Not calling him ‘baby’ felt wrong, even when he was angry. But he can’t stop himself. “As always, you are presumptuous about things you know nothing about. Like, who even thinks it’s okay to try and diagnose their partners based on observations of—what? Nothing. Because I learn differently and I’m not perfect and missed you so much that I said the wrong thing in front of the wrong people? And your go-to is to assume something is *wrong* with me. Do you understand how that fucking makes me feel?”

At Alex’s lack of composure, Henry loses a bit of his subduedness. “No, *Alex*, actually I don’t assume anything is wrong with you. I’m trying to help you, to help you see that maybe there is *something* wrong with the way *things* are—not you as a person. Life doesn’t have to be this sophisticated and hard. Not like *this*.”

“Oh my fucking god, you don’t get it, do you? I have to work, go to school, and be your boyfriend. That’s shitty, okay? It doesn’t mean I have ADHD—it means you figure out ways to manage what life throws at you. This is *my* reality, Henry. Can’t you just support me instead of trying to fix me?”

Fuck. He clamps a sweaty hand over his eyes and forehead, knowing he essentially just admitted to Henry being right. Alex knows Henry is right, but he’s feeling insecure, and he’s unraveling in front of the man he loves and nothing can fucking stop it.

Henry stiffens and nods. Alex knows he means well—it’s Henry for fucks sake. But he is pissed, and listening to him rehash the past few months as if he was a therapist makes Alex feel analyzed and judged. He feels picked apart, like he’s under a microscope and being examined for cracks and defects.

Alex needs to get out of there—anywhere but here. Henry’s staring at him as if he’s going to break and it’s the last thing he fucking needs. So, he heads towards the door, grabs his coat, and puts on his shoes.

Henry stands from the couch, twisting the signet ring on his pinkie finger. “Where are you going?”

“Out.” Shit—the urge to cry is building up. Alex grabs his wallet and phone and stuffs them into his pants.

“That’s rubbish—Alex, stop. Don’t bloody go.”

He’s snatching his car keys off the key rack on the wall, and he has one hand on the doorknob, but then he feels Henry’s hand grab his wrist. It’s not aggressive in the slightest; in fact, it shocks Alex at how delicately his hand wraps around his wrist as if he was unsure he was allowed to do so. When Alex turns around, Henry’s eyes are tired-looking, his shoulders slumped forward as if he’s about to cave in. Seeing him like this reminds him of the fragile version of Henry he held close to his chest after a plight of bad days. Almost instantly, Alex can feel himself softening—it’s become a reflex he once didn’t understand, but now he knows it’s his reaction to seeing the person he loves in distress.

“Wait,” Henry whispers, his voice trembling and bottom lip quivering. “Please don’t go, Alex. Just stay and we can talk this out. I don’t care if we do it tomorrow, I would rather us not make it a habit of walking away when things get tough. I don’t bloody know anything about being someone’s boyfriend but I’m learning, and trying my best. Please stay?”

There, Alex knew running away from the person he loves isn’t fucking worth it. Without hesitation, Alex pulls Henry into a crushing hug, letting out an exasperated sigh. “C’mere, you dickhead. I’m not going anywhere.”

Alex goes back to the beginning.

Not literally. If he could, he’d go back to fourth grade, when his teachers told him to complete one hour of silent, sustained reading every day, for years. It was impossible—Alex *knew* it was. Something was awry when Alex couldn’t tell his teacher what he had read five minutes ago. Or when he lost his place so easily even when he placed a stubby finger along the lines and dragged it past each word he silently read. He saw the concern—the quirk in their eyebrow as Alex incorrectly detailed a paragraph. To rectify it, he quickly learned that mouthing the words as he read helped him compartmentalize. If his mouth could repeat the words, he could focus on what he was reading. The quirk in the eyebrow—lowered. The judgment—gone.

It’s the first time Alex remembers being a people pleaser. How mere improvement in something as simple as reading thwarted any negative attention. It’s what he *knows*.

Alex wasn’t faking anything. The techniques he acquired to hamper any concern or doubt toward his intelligence or competence were, well, skills. When he was ten and couldn’t remember every chore his mom asked him to do, he compiled a list and something *clicked*. After that, Alex never forgot what he had read if he had formatted it in list form, and it followed him. Every study guide he made? Written down as a list, question and answer. When he turned 16 and Oscar tried to take him out driving, he couldn’t remember the order of operations being repeated in dead Texas parking lots. So, Alex went home that night and researched thoroughly—formulating the perfect instructional list of what to do when he entered his vehicle. It helped him pass his driver’s test on the first try.

The rest is self-explanatory.

Reconciliation with Henry is self-explanatory as well. Their first fight since moving in together blows over so quickly; they end up on their backs in the bed they first made love in (Henry is truly rubbing off on him), staring up at the ceiling in silence.

While he mulls over the last 21 years of his life, he catches glimpses of Henry looking over every so often in his peripheral vision. It's difficult to be going through a crisis while the man he loves, the most immaculate—although at times obtuse—person he knows, watches him crumble. But Alex keeps his eyes on the ceiling, reflecting, calculating, and trying to put together the incompatible, mismatched puzzle pieces of himself.

Alex flips the key on the chain around his neck over and over, until Henry places a hand placidly over his.

“Tell me what you’re thinking?” Henry asks.

“I’m thinking... I’ve known something was different about myself for a long time, and denying it has been easier than confronting it. I’m wondering how no one, not even my parents, saw it but you did. Even worse—I am trying to understand why I’ve chosen to live with this and not get help. My pride? Inflated healthcare costs? The stigmas?” Alex shrugs and closes his eyes. “I feel like I’ve failed myself and everyone around me.”

“Hm. Have you ever considered that you weren’t denying it, but instead managing it on your terms?” Henry suggests, tapping his finger along the back of Alex’s fist. *Managing*. Alex never thought of it that way; managing his differences made it sound like he at least was confronting them in some way instead of running away from them.

Henry adds, “I don’t think you give yourself any credit for how far you’ve come and it’s a damn shame. You’re so smart, Alex; I’ve never met anyone like you. Someone passionate, who bloody cares about everyone before himself, so much so you’re willing to manage instead of thrive—I can’t imagine a person who does that *ever* failing the ones they love. You should be lenient in your criticisms of yourself; I’ve met many daft blokes who think they’re special and they aren’t even a fraction of the good person you are.”

It’s everything he needs to hear, to let go of the guilt and shame, and accept what he can’t change. Alex has ADHD. It never made him less of a person or defective; it made him the Alex Claremont-Diaz he is today, someone good *enough*—someone who did his best.

Alex turns over and Henry’s smiling at him, classically handsome, his blonde hair soft and rumpled against the pillows. It’s an image he wants to be seared into his brain for the rest of his life, the one face he wants to wake up to every day until tomorrow ceases to exist. He reaches over, stroking his thumb across the high point of Henry’s cheek, and then traces a finger along his jawbone, stopping at the corner of his mouth to press against that perfectly placed mole he’s come to love so much.

“Why did you bring it up now?”

The corner of Henry's mouth twitches, tugging into a smile. “*An Incomplete List: Things I Love About HRH Prince Henry of Wales.*’ In conjunction with your beautiful gift serenading me, I’ve been watching you, love. Every day, you wake up, put yourself to work, study for classes that have not started yet, stretch yourself thin, and then throw yourself at me. You’re killing yourself, Alex. I don’t think you’re lacking attention but rather you have an abundance of it, and if we don’t get you help, eventually you might crash and burn.”

Alex thinks about the handwritten list that he gave Henry for Christmas and thinks about numbers five and eleven; all things he understands about himself now because of Henry and how much he cares. It rings especially true now, as he realizes he’s been walking on the edge of a cliff for some time, and Henry is reaching out to pull him away from the edge.

To be loved in his most fragile state, is the moment Alex knows Henry loves him in the same capacity as Alex loves him.

“What did I ever do to deserve you?” Alex whispers, his throat tight and overcome by emotion. “Like, where have you been my entire life, Hen?”

Henry kisses the pad of his thumb, laughing lightly and sliding over until Alex is comfortably locked in his arms with his head on Henry’s chest.

“Why, I’ve been waiting for you, my love,” he replies, kissing the top of Alex’s curls.

As if Alex is given permission, he finally lets himself cry in Henry’s arms. Crying not because he has ADHD; but cry because he felt like he ever had to hide it.

Afterward, he rubs his eyes with the back of his hand, nearly knocking his glasses off. “Fuck, I am so tired. I can’t believe I let you see me cry. And I don’t even know what to do now,” Alex groans.

“You’ve seen me cry before, so it’s only fair. And, well, we can start with therapy. See what a professional says and take it from there. We don’t have to plan everything out—just see if there’s room for improvement in how you’re managing things,” Henry murmurs.

Improvement meant talk therapy or medication, Alex knows all of this. He isn’t sure if he’s ready for all of that. But, God, with Henry around he feels like he has to at least try for himself—for them. He’s always felt like he was “too much,” but now looking from a different perspective, Alex thinks, maybe, it’s not him that was too much. Maybe he’s taken on too much in life, and it’s time to step back and try something different.

“When I’m ready, I’ll consider it. I just need... time to process this. I need time to accept it completely, so I don’t end up thinking I’m one of those people who are *cured*. Ugh, I can’t believe it. Bisexual *and* a developmental disorder all in one semester. One semester of prerequisites—smooth sailing. Yet here I am, predicament after predicament, all fucked up,” he laments.

“You’re not fucked up. Besides, aren’t those self-discoveries typically considered characteristic prerequisites though? After we met, all of this feels rather... inevitable,” Henry says.

“Inevitable, huh?” Alex drawls out, swinging a leg over Henry’s hip and climbing on top of him to straddle him. Henry leans up and cups the back of his neck, pulling him down until their noses and foreheads are touching.

“Are you making fun of me?” Henry blinks up at him.

“The exact opposite.” Alex is laughing at Henry’s belief in fate, knowing that they would always be together. He’s laughing at how he never changes; everything he loves about Henry is consistent and repetitive throughout, even in small ways. “I’m laughing at how someone who’s been through so much terrible shit can be such a romantic and insinuate that we were *inevitable*,” he mimics Henry’s accent with a shit-eating grin.

Alex waits for a snarky reply, but instead, Henry slides his fingers into his curls and tugs him down into a kiss, sighing as Alex’s teeth graze his bottom lip. They kiss open-mouthed with Henry clinging to him, legs tightly around Alex’s waist, until Alex wills himself away from Henry’s plump lips.

“What was that for?”

“It’s midnight on the first of January. I’ve never had a New Year’s kiss. I took what was mine,” Henry admits with a coy smile.

“Baby...” Alex smirks and returns for another kiss, but Henry pulls him back by the curls. “Ow.”

“I love you, darling, but you must get a haircut before we go to England. Propriety, impressions, grooming and such. Yes?”

He rolls his eyes, and blows a fallen curl away from his forehead with a steady stream of breath from his mouth. Alex knew it was time for a trim but doing it for the sake of the Crown made him want to do even less.

But Henry is right. From the moment they locked eyes, Alex had fallen in love with Henry, both unraveling metaphorically and physically under each other’s touches. Even when they’re apart, regardless of the circumstances, he craves Henry’s comfort and companionship. Everything that has happened this semester has been for a reason—it feels like fate. This is the Alex Claremont-Diaz he is—in love with the Prince of England, better known as his former English TA, Henry Fox.

“We are in this together, yeah? You’re not going anywhere and neither am I?” Alex asks.


“Yes, always. Nothing will ever change how I feel about you; even if you or I tried to walk away. I now know that all it would take is for one of us to stay is to say ‘don’t go.’”

Alex grins, tilting his chin up to kiss him.

“Well, I know I am going to stay forever.”

“You and me both,” Henry agrees.

Chapter End Notes

Yes there will be a sequel to "say don't go"--coming December 2024! Henry pov chapter imminent. Thank you again. 

End Notes

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