

He smiles and the corners of his mouth create a crescent moon, his eyebrows crinkle like shooting stars. His hair is always unkempt. I'm blushing now so I look away. A faded blue bag breezes by my eyesight and my body jerks in reaction.

"There, there, there!" I exclaim. I'm jumping and moving around strangers, careful to not bother them. He slides through the windows between people, and his string bean arms retrieve my little blue bag. He returns to me, and I'm a little further away from the crowd now.

"Thank you," I say.

"Of course," he says. I reach for the handle, but he moves it slightly out of reach. I look up at him to see him smiling, but his eyes are straight ahead. Edward takes his free hand to hold mine again. *I've missed this*. He looks down at me.

"Does a shower sound okay for when we get home?" Edward's eyebrows scrunch together slightly, creating creases in his face. He fiddles nervously with the handle of my suitcase as we walk.

"Please," I say. "I could've used one ten hours ago."

I throw my head back and wrap my arm around his shoulder, weighing him down. I'm being dramatic because I can be, but he still squeezes my hand to help steady me. I look up to see a small smile as we walk to his Lancer. I unwrap my hold on him, grabbing his hand normally. I pull his hand up to my lips and kiss the knuckles one by one.



The shower is warm, not lukewarm, but a comfortable warm. He knows I don't like hot showers. I stand underneath the water directly, and let its warm rain wash away the dirt of yesterday.

“Can I wash your hair?” I hear. I open my eyes, but water blinds my vision. I nod in response and close my eyes again. I feel rough hands gently detangle my hair and smell my fruity shampoo. I can never figure out exactly what the smell is supposed to be.

“You said you don’t know if you love me,” I say. My voice is steady, but the words shake my spirit. I hear him sigh and I open my eyes. I blink rapidly and can see him through the blur of water. His eyes look watery and his eyebrows are pressed together; he’s staring at me.

“I didn’t mean to say it like that,” he says. “I never meant for it to sound like I didn’t know if I love you. I wasn’t sure of my romantic feelings, because I hadn’t been with you for so long.”

I open my mouth to say something, but he adds on to his statement quickly.

“That’s on me, that’s not on you at all,” he says. “I haven’t been talking to you.”

“Yeah--I mean--that’s the only way we can stay in touch, Edward,” I say.

“I know, and you’re right,” he says. He moves me out of the water and takes my place. He grabs my hands, and I let them hang lifeless. His grip is firm as he looks at me.

“I’ve been freaking out because the Navy doesn’t know what to do with me in three months, and so basically I don’t know what’s happening in my future and there’s nothing I can do about it. I’ve shut everything out, but I should never have shut you out.”

“No, you shouldn’t have,” I say, “and I feel like you just *know* that I’m just always here for you.”

He shakes his head, and his dark-amber eyes peer into mine. He shakes his arms, but since he’s holding my hands, my arms shake too. I stare at the “Family” tattoo on his chest.

“No,” he says, “I never know what you’re going to do when I fuck up.”

“And,” I add, “I sent you Stitch for Valentine’s Day! You didn’t even mention him, and I drove all the way to Disney World to get that! You actually told me to stop sending you things.”

“Stella, I told you I didn’t want to celebrate Valentine’s Day,” he sighs.

I look at him and roll my eyes. *So?* I bite the tip of my tongue as I shake my head to the ceiling. I side-eye him and realize he hasn't stopped watching me. My hands remain in his. The water hits his back and sprinkles on me. I stare at our hands, mine looking dainty in comparison.

"I loved Stitch, though," he interrupts my thoughts. "It's right out there on my desk."

"I am so good to you," I whisper. "I don't need to be feeling unappreciated."

"You are, you are," he whispers back. "You're the bestest. You're too good for me."

"You need to talk to me more," I say. I purse my lips and glare at him.

"I quit playing Siege," he whispers, "so I can have more time for you."

"Really?" I ask. This catches me by surprise. I open my mouth and close it, my eyes meeting his. His eyes shift downward and he nods. I bite my bottom lip and watch him.

We stand there together, underneath the mercy of the showerhead, and maybe even God. He's borderline obsessed with his videogames, so this softens me. I think about that night I cried in my papasan chair. I think about how I love being with him. I think about how I hate how I'm going to be gone in a week. I look at his pained expression. I look at our hands.

"Do you want me to stop holding you?" he asks. I refrain from rolling my eyes because this is serious, but I shake my head. His grip tightens as he waits for my voice.

"I don't want you to reassure me and then in a week when I'm not here anymore, get upset because you're not talking to me," I say.

"I'll talk to you everyday, and we'll have a Snapchat streak again," he says. "It might not be full-on conversations *every day*, but I will talk to you."

"Do you love me?" I ask him. I feel stinging in my eyes, and warmth in my chest. He looks at me now, and he looks as if he's going to cry.

"You're the person I care most about in this whole world," he says. "I love you so much."

"I love you, too."

I pull my hands away from his, and wrap them around his back. I pull myself into him, letting the shower water soak my hair and body. His arms immediately wrap around me, and we stand there. He squeezes me tightly, and I sigh. I move my face so that the side of my head leans against his chest. I feel his body shake slightly, and I wonder if he's crying. My thumb moves in circles along his shoulder blade, and we hold each other. One of his hands gently grips a fistful of my hair, and the other holds the curve of my hip. Love is so complicated until it's not. I smile as I think about a quote I read about how souls don't understand the absence of one another. It basically said that souls only know separation, not duration, so they don't know if an absence is only temporary or if it's forever. Apparently, this is why we miss our loved ones so much. I close my eyes and breath him in, trying to exist in the present moment while I can. It feels so good to be home.

## 2

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**08/16/2018 - journal entry**

(I had a good day today, I went on the helicopter at my work. But here I am in bed at 23:10, getting worked up.)

He hasn't tried to hold a conversation with me at all since he's been back from the boat. I feel like if we weren't together anymore, he would be relieved.

No, I can't say anything, because all I do is cry. I told him I would try to stop being so emotional, and me trying is killing me.

He said I *need* attention, and yes. Humans are social creatures and getting validation from your partner that they enjoy being with you and want to talk to you would be nice.

I haven't cried in weeks, I feel.. But right before he left and as soon as he got back, I can't help it. I can only distract myself so much of the day. I want someone who shows me that they care about me, not even love me, just care about me. Someone who wants to listen to my problems I'm dealing with. Not, "I'm sorry to hear that. Also, I'm pretty drunk I'm playing video games."

I bring this up, though? It will get turned around about how he's going through something he hasn't told me about, and how I always bring up the same shit. Or even better? *Why didn't you ask?* I don't feel like I'm with someone who cares about me. Sure, you can love somebody, but what am I?

He brings up my insecurities and says they're forms of guilt (or something) according to his friend, and that I have them because I'm guilty of doing those things. But then he ignores me. Oh, no...he doesn't ignore me? He replies to me three times a day with maybe a sentence? Wow, he really gives a fuck.

My whole body is shaking because I'm silently crying so Ana won't hear. I've been ignoring my feelings about this for a couple days, and telling myself I'm being crazy if I get irritated with how short he's been. But you know what is so funny? I'm not actually crazy, I'm just sensitive and actually empathetic and can't handle this form of ..... I can't say it.

Fine. You can cry all you want to, bitch. But, bitch, you had better be listening to your inner self. He wants to not try to talk to you? Fine. Don't hold a conversation with him. Why should you try, honestly?