

help wanted

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help wanted

by [rosesaints](#)

Summary

You were coming out of college with an engagement ring, a spotless portfolio, and an impeccable internship, courtesy of your fiancé and a little help from his family. Your beloved sat in the stands of your university's stadium at graduation, alongside his family and yours, the very picture of spotless suburban perfection straight off the pages of Good Housekeeping. You let yourself smile and believe that this was it.

Dear god, how could you have been so clueless?

Suddenly, you're back at your childhood home and without a job or a fiancé, forced to use your degree to babysit for a single father living next door. The kicker: you fucked Miguel O'Hara at a club the night before.

(Set before the events of Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse.)

cruel summer

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Thousands of dollars in debt later, you were officially graduating from college one degree hotter—that's right, for one, blazing moment of glory, you got to gloat about your fancy new degree on social media and flaunt your newfound education to all of your followers, popping champagne and exchanging clueless smiles with the other soon-to-be alumni in your graduating class as if you all spent even a single dime actually learning something useful.

Nevermind the fact that over half of your followers were meddling friends of your parents from your hometown's PTA, insistent vultures that kept tabs on you from afar despite your repeated pleas that *no, Sharon, you did not want to date her deadbeat son, no matter how good you claim he is at Madden*. The point was, you had a tight and secure future within grasp.

You were coming out of college with an engagement ring, a spotless portfolio, and an impeccable internship, courtesy of your fiancé and a little help from his family. Your beloved sat in the stands of your university's stadium at graduation, alongside his family and yours, the very picture of spotless suburban perfection straight off the pages of *Good Housekeeping*. You let yourself smile and believe that this was it.

Dear god, how could you have been so clueless?

You met your fiancé during your first year of college at a required gen-ed, while he served as a Teacher's Assistant, three years your senior. At the time, like a fool, you let the red flags pass you by. He was attractive, ridiculously unattainable, and somehow you maintained his interest. Six months of dating passed you by, and suddenly you were moving into his place and agreeing to a joint bank account at the mature age of 19.

Slowly, you let him take over your life and for all that you gave to him, he still wasn't satisfied. Nevermind the fact that you were completely—emotionally, physically, financially—dependent on him, he had to drive the knife so much deeper into you.

It sears and burns the pits of your stomach—your future coming aflame right in front of you.

The evidence was littered all over the entryway of your shared apartment with your fiancé. Little red pumps that were two sizes too small for you. You imagined her prancing about your doorway in those heels, giggling like a little teenager as your fiancé murmured words of affirmation into her ear.

On the counter, an equally tasteless purse. It was all just so insulting.

From your spot in the kitchen, you could hear, clear as day, her pathetic little mewls and praises and the way your stupid, stupid fiancé would pant loudly right before he was about to finish. Looking back, you had no idea why you let that slide.

Your fists clench at your sides.

The clock kept ticking on the wall across from you. *9:06 PM*. Only six hours after your graduation, after he pushed you off towards your parents and insisted on you having the night off with them. Your parents had gushed and remarked how lucky you were, how truly blessed to have such a thoughtful and kind partner.

For one moment, you deliberated upon the next best course of action. You imagined several scenarios in your head. Your first instinct was to barge in sobbing, yelling words of betrayal and anguish at your partner, hurling that ugly blue purse of that wench's at his face and reveling in the tragedy of it all. Your next instinct was to get his parents on FaceTime and show them what a little bitch their son was.

Suffice to say, you decided upon the latter and things, decidedly, did not go very well.

From there, it was a blur of screaming, crying, and yelling, from all parties involved. Blue kitten heels girl began covering herself up upon your entry, covering her face in shame as your fiancé started panicking and scrambling to get his shit together, clearly shocked by your early arrival. His parents were blowing up your phone's speaker as he urged his side piece to leave and let him explain.

An hour later, you were out on the streets with your belongings.

Apparently, he had been waiting for a proper time to break up with you for the past few months, some unintelligible nonsense about how *the spark just isn't there anymore, you're just... not fun anymore* and how he felt *taken advantage of and only felt like you were using him*. Nevermind the dubious way in which you met while you were a freshman and he was some upperclassman blowing through his trust fund, giving you attention only to take it away hastily.

You ended up moving back to your parents' place with no money, no prospects, and no friends. Whatever friends you had at the beginning of your relationship with your ex-fiancé were long gone—the consequence of having a partner who insisted that they were all you needed. In hindsight, you realize that his insistence on staying in and watching movies with pizza instead of going out with your friends were not actually all that romantic. He mostly sat on his phone while he scolded you for even considering going out.

Your fall from grace became well documented on your parents' social media, as your mother regretfully laments how her *precious baby girl* lost it all and was forced to move back home with her tail between her legs. It just made the sting of losing everything all the more worse. Your mother's friends no longer slid into your DMs with their sons' contact info.

Several days in your childhood bedroom were spent watching rom-coms and throwing various objects at the screen, decrying false promises of eternal love and pointing out the stupidity in so many of the main characters. It was actually quite therapeutic. You let your hair remain unkempt and your room to pile up with takeout orders, courtesy of the engagement ring you had pawned off in a fit of rage after the breakup.

Your ex's texts about the whereabouts of said ring was your future self's problem.

On the tenth day of your self-isolation, your mother had had enough and barged into your room, opening all your curtains and dragging you out of bed to join breakfast with the rest of the family. You knew that this discussion was coming, dreading the inevitable conversation where your parents poked and prodded you for information about your next job. Your student loan bills were waiting, despite blocking it out and pretending they didn't exist.

The energy in the dining room was tense and strained, silence hanging thick in the air as you prepared a bowl of cereal. Your parents looked at you expectantly, as if waiting for you to come up with a brilliant proclamation that you were going to move out of their house. Instead, you let the silence hang thicker in the air, awkward silence stretching impossibly long.

Finally, your mother cleared her throat. "So--"

"I'm heartbroken," The half-rehearsed statement dripped lazily off the tip of your tongue before she could continue further, as you took a spoonful of stale cereal. "I just need more time to recover."

"We don't doubt that at all, sweetheart, you take all the time in the world that you need," Your mother exchanged a nervous glance with your father before continuing. "But we thought it would be beneficial for you to... get out of the house for a little bit. Maybe try running some errands with me or helping out around the neighborhood? There's a new family that moved in next door, the O'Hara's, and I believe that they're looking for a babysitter! Think about how impressed they'll be with your fancy degree!"

"As wonderful as that sounds, like I said, I'm just not ready." Glancing back down at your bowl to avoid your parents' gazes, you couldn't help but swallow down the disappointment that threatened to overcome you. Your degree was now being relegated to a babysitting gig. You feel small, like a child being scolded at dinnertime. The rest of breakfast was a relatively fast and uneventful affair, save for the pitiful looks being thrown your way.

Oh, how the mighty have fallen.

More days pass, and for the most part, your parents have eased off your back. Your feelings towards your engagement had soured and festered the longer you stayed within your room, and your fingers itched to call an old flame from high school and get the rebound stage out of the way, but you didn't know if you could handle that amount of shame in such a small period of time.

Two glasses of wine pushed you to hastily get ready on a Friday night (stirred by the shame of how quickly you became buzzed), you resigned to finally get out of the house and do some prowling around your hometown. There were only five legitimate places to go at night around the area, only two of which you'd deem acceptable, as in, trashy and good for

dancing. The time it took for you to decide on an outfit came close to being embarrassing, but you ultimately decided on a short, skimpy dress that you were sure to attract some eyes.

A little ego boost certainly wouldn't hurt your predicament at the moment, as you applied some dark lipstick and shimmery eyeshadow on your eyelids. You hadn't gotten ready on this scale for such a long time, as a result of your ex rarely allowing you out, and the experience only furthered the uninhibited spirit you hoped to exude tonight.

One last glance at the mirror, and you smiled. Dressed to kill, indeed.

Fifteen minutes later and your Uber drops you off at the steps of a dingy and busy nightclub. Too late to back out now, you thought, as you hastily pulled the hem of your dress down, avoiding the furtive gazes of some people you knew from high school standing close by the entrance.

Some trendy pop song was blasting at full volume as you walked in, bass reverting immediately throughout your skull, as you giggled and made your way to the bar. You ignored the fact that the last time you had taken a Fireball shot was during your freshman year, and you resolved to remedy that, ignoring the searing burn down your throat as you finished your first shot of many for the night.

Slowly, but surely, you got reckless.

You lost yourself soon in the swirling vortex of bodies, moving in synchrony with the next trashy song that had been queued up, dancing with strangers all around you with no mind to the way your dress rode up to expose more of your thighs, thin spaghetti straps slowly coming down your shimmering shoulders.

Across the room, in the midst of dancing, you caught someone's eyes. His gaze locked onto yours, as if daring you to look away. *Look away, little girl.* A small smile played at his lips, as if daring you to look away from those intense, almost dark black eyes that you swore gleamed red in the lights of the club. Tall, brooding, and *definitely older than you.* He wore a tailored button-up that perfectly accentuated his downright criminal waist (swallowing down the immature jealousy that rose in your chest) and the broad expanse of his shoulders, seemingly dwarfing the people close to him at the bar in comparison.

Striking and distinctive from everyone else you had seen at that point, he was just the right remedy for the night.

Foolishly, you maintained his gaze under half-lidded eyes, beckoning him to come closer, closer, just a little bit. *Catch me if you can.* One raise of his eyebrow, watching as he downed another shot, and you were game.

Mustering up the confidence of your glory days, you swayed and shook your hips to the current song that blasted through the speakers, mesmerized as he began coming your way with confident, almost arrogant steps.

Taller, almost towering over you as he looked down at you from underneath long lashes, a small smile still playing at his lips. "You don't look like you're from around here, *hermosa*."

“Oh? I could say the same for you.”

Under closer inspection, you could see that a five o'clock shadow adorned his defined jaw, adding a touch of ruggedness to his otherwise clean-cut appearance. His hair, jet-black and sleek, screams business, accentuating the contours of his face in the red and purple lights, while a few rebellious strands occasionally fall across his forehead. Even in the midst of a heavy dance floor, his hair remained *almost* meticulously in place, a testament to his unwavering composure. He did not look like someone who would frequent this part of town at this time of night, but all the better for you.

Impulsively, you reached up and locked your hands around his lean neck, starting to rock and move along with him to the music, ignoring the goosebumps that overcame your skin as he started running his rough, calloused hands down your waist, down to the small of your back.

You didn't mind it one bit, finding yourself leaning into his touch with impressive ease. “What's your name?”

“Miguel.”

Your smile grew deeper.

Feeling his hands begin to explore farther down, taking more initiative, taking control. Letting him set the pace as you both plunged deeper into the night, giggling and spinning as Miguel hummed lowly into your ear, hot breaths fanning your face.

Your senses were overloaded by the smell of him; bergamot and crisp green leaves, patchouli and vetiver. It was intoxicating.

One of you leaned in first after what seemed like hours of orbiting each other's faces, looking down at your lips, glancing up at his dark eyes; there was a blur of movement and all you could focus on was his hand around your throat, one around your cheeks, cupping you like delicate china and kissing you deeply, truly. There was no one else but him, at that moment.

Pulling away, briefly, as he lets out a low chuckle. “Keep your eyes on me, *hermosa*.”

He nudged your thighs apart with his impossibly large legs, holding your chin with one hand as the other slowly traversed your waist. “Do you want this, *cariño* ?” He had murmured lowly into the shell of your ear as he continued to rock your body with his, forcing you to move exactly to his rhythm. Here you were, straddling and riding the line of public indecency in the middle of your hometown bar. Of course, you wanted it.

You wanted it so, so bad.

Miguel's hands traveled back down to the small of your back and before you could even think twice, the words were tumbling out of your lips and onto his attentive ears, “What do you say we leave this dance floor and go somewhere else?”

His hand was so much larger than yours as he led you out of the middle of the bar, looking back at you every so often as if to make sure you didn't disappear. He felt like your secret,

your own treasure, all yours.

It was well past 2 AM at that point, but you couldn't find it in yourself to care as he pressed you up against the cold tile wall of the bathroom, giggling, and asking if he even locked the door. He hummed in response to your neck, indifferent, before licking a searing stripe up your neck to bite the lobe of your ear and you moaned, nails clutching his white button-up like a lifeline.

Dear god, he was gonna eat you alive.

Rough, calloused fingers made its way underneath your dress and the room suddenly felt a lot hotter as he grinned wolfishly at what he found beneath. "My, my, my. Who's got you all excited like this?

"You, Miguel," You wanted him to fuck you now, fuck you fast and hard. "Only you."

"So good," His voice dropped an octave. "Good girls like you deserve a reward, hm?"

You could only nod as you felt the pads of his fingers trace your hipbone and then squeeze your thigh, waiting in anticipation as he finally hovered one finger close to where you needed him the most, so fucking warm and wet and eager for him. "Jesus christ, you're soaked. Wanna make you feel good. Do you wanna feel good ? Use your words, you can do it."

Empty pleas and whines escaped your lips as he laughed, almost cruelly if it wasn't so goddamn hot, teasing and rubbing you through the soft fabric of your underwear. Miguel pushed the fabric aside like it was nothing and suddenly he was pushing in, until one finger was completely buried inside you. Hot, you felt so fucking *hot* .

You shuddered and looked over his shoulder at the mirror, and the scene in front of you was just downright criminal, moaning, despite yourself. His back seemed to ripple in his white button-up, muscles tensing as he worked your body exactly how you needed him to. He used the opportunity to add an extra finger to your sopping wet pussy, murmuring low praises and Spanish in your ear.

His palm applied rough pleasure to your clit as he began to suck and bite at your neck while you whimper, completely at his mercy. You can still feel him chuckling into your skin. "What do you want *chica*?"

"Want you—Want you so bad, Miguel, need you to fuck me."

"You'll let me take you in this bathroom right now?" Miguel tutted. "What a filthy, nasty girl you are."

You roll your hips faster onto his hand, chasing what you were so close to. Heated and heavy under his gaze, squeezing your eyes shut as you came, him letting you ride out your high until you were panting and recovering from your orgasm. *Filthy*.

As the haze starts to dissipate from your vision, you take a moment to look at him. Miguel brings his fingers to his lips and *moans* . You're —looking at him with wide, expectant eyes.

You're hanging onto every one of his actions with your desperation dripping off his fingers. "Got you all ready, *cariño*. You ready?"

Nodding, you watch as he slowly positions you to bend over the cold, porcelain sink, nerves coming on fire as you watch the scene across from you in the mirror. Miguel's a mess—and you are too, hair in a flurry around your shoulder, dress at the verge of ruin, just barely hanging on but what you can't stop focusing on is his heated gaze, pupils blown wide and looking down at you with something akin to hunger. Your throat tightens when he grazes his fingers over his hard dick through his pants, slowly unzipping and revealing himself to you. Getting dizzy as he peers at you through dark lashes, stroking his cock as if appraising your reaction.

"You're so big," you murmur despite yourself, and Miguel sighs, so hard and hot as you reach out and wrap your fingers around it, swallowing the lump in your throat. "I need you inside me right now."

(You're not sure if you'll be able to take him—all of him—but you still want it bad, so bad you could taste it.)

Time slows to a crawl as he spits onto his cock, spits on your clit and begins pressing the head of his cock to your entrance, other hand slithering around your waist to begin his attack on your clit again. Skin to skin, messy and filthy, and you couldn't have asked for more.

"You're gonna feel me in your stomach, *dulzura*," Miguel's low voice seemed to echo in the tiny bathroom, words weighing heavily on your shoulders. Was it a promise or a threat? "No turning back now." *God, you wouldn't even dream of it.*

When he pushes the throbbing length of his cock forward, it feels like something within you has shattered, both of you moaning in perfect unison, pupils blown wide and crooning under his touch. He's barely in yet and you're gritting your teeth, it's like you didn't just cum a few minutes ago.

Miguel watches you struggle to keep your moans contained, has to gloat as you melt around his cock. "You like watching me stretch it out, don't you? Say it."

You can only babble helplessly in response. "Yes, yes—yes, *please, God—*"

When he pulls his cock all the way out, it feels like a breath you've been holding has been released. And then he's plunging back into you, fucking you harder, fucking you faster, and you can see the way your pussy starts dripping around him uncontrollably, one orgasm blending into the other, squeezing your eyes shut—

You feel a rough hand cupping your jaw, forcing you to look at the mess you made in the mirror. "Don't look away." He slips in deeper, *so sensitive*, and you can hear him groaning from above you, just a constant flurry of Spanish, praises, and *oh Gods*.

All you can do is bend over the sink and take it as he pounds into you unrelentingly, fingers stimulating your clit ceaselessly. It's so intense and your pussy squeezes around him, only asking for more.

Your breath fogs up the mirror as you whine and Miguel gets more careless, growing wild from above you. Can't give up on pulling back, and pushing back in, determined to give you all he has. And then—the curve of his cock hits just right and you're splitting in two, tip reaching that sweet and delicate part of yourself not even your fingers could reach, and suddenly he's pulling out and cumming, pulsating as he strokes his dick above your back, massaging your hips. *You took it so well, you were so good, mi hermosa.*

The world around you blurs into insignificance, as you and Miguel slowly come down from your highs.

You relish in the warmth and the silence, heavy breaths mixing with his as you look in the mirror to meet his gaze. For a moment, the world stills.

And then he turns you around to sit facing him on the sink, and you wonder how his smile is so sharp, a menacing row of perfect white teeth as he nuzzles your neck, brushing his teeth on the skin. By now, your body must be littered in bruises and love bites, but somehow, you don't mind.

The both of you recollect your senses side by side, and you let him slip the spaghetti straps of your dress back up to your shoulders—which you're sure is falling apart, but who cares?—let him tug the dress down your thighs, ignoring the warmth that spreads when he kisses you once more. “Gorgeous.”

Smiling wide when he rests his hand onto the small of your back yet again as he guides you out of the bathroom, ignoring the one or two people that have been waiting in line outside the bathroom. You feel like you're on top of the world. He holds you in his chest as you wait for the cab that he's picked up for you by the side of the street, his chin resting on top of your head. You feel safe, you feel warm, and you want to stay in this moment forever.

As the cab arrives, he's careful to guide you into the back, kissing the back of your hand as he lets you go. “Sweet dreams, *cariño* .”

You wake up in your room in one piece, having effortlessly snuck back in without bringing attention from your parents. God knows what they would've done if they had seen you in your current state, looking like the losing end of a brawl. As you inspect the damage in the mirror, you can't help but smile. The bruises will darken and likely become sore in the days to come, but that was an *otherworldly* experience.

There's a pep in your step as you saunter into the kitchen, greeting your parents with the most cheerful of *good mornings*, ignoring how they glance at each other with optimism as they watch you fill up a cup of coffee for yourself. It was going to be a good morning, you could feel it.

Your mother, always the opportunist, takes the time to clear her throat. “Honey, I mentioned this before, but the O’Haras next door, well, Gabi is this *cutest* little five year old—you know, the one who always rolls her soccer ball into our backyard—anyway, his old babysitter can’t work any more days next week and he’s asking if we can help.”

The cheery mood in the room sours just slightly, and gears are turning in your head about how to best let your mother down. But then she hits you with a scolding look that says, *we’ve given you enough time. Go be a dear.*

“Of course, mom,” You relent, sighing in your chair as you take a sip of your coffee. How bad could it be? You had seen Gabi learning how to ride a bike or kick a soccer ball around during a few occasions down the block, seeing the vague outline of her dad coaching and directing her. They seemed harmless enough. “I’ll pop in after breakfast.”

Your parents flash you a megawatt smile. “Great!”

That’s how you found yourself at the front steps outside of the O’Hara house, along with a plate of muffins your mother insisted that you brought along. You fiddled nervously with the collar of your turtleneck. Not even your best concealer could cover up the marks from last night and you had given up altogether, despite the fact that it was 80 degrees out and searing. You just hope that whoever Mr. O’Hara is, he buys into your excuses.

You ring the doorbell with a resigned sigh, mustering up a well-rehearsed smile as you wait.

The door is answered by a little girl, who has to be less than five (you’re not entirely sure, you’ve never really been that good at guessing), gingerly opening the door slightly ajar as she raises an eyebrow at you, your turtleneck, and the plate of blueberry muffins you held. “Can I help you?”

“Hi! Yeah, I’m your neighbor, I live just next door and my mom sent me over to bring these to you guys. You like blueberries, right?” You sneak a peek at the house behind her, curiosity getting the best of you as the small child begins salivating at the sight of the plate. “Is your dad home?”

Big, doe eyes still focused on the muffins, Gabi nods. “Dad! Someone’s here.”

“Gabi, what did I say about opening the door to random strangers—Oh.”

Your heart drops in your chest and you’re hit with the urge to run. *It’s Miguel.* Miguel is the single father your mother has sent you over to babysit for.

No fucking way.

Chapter End Notes

to heather, who began my oscar isaac brainrot seven years ago. i love you :)

bloom later

Chapter Notes

you asked, i delivered.

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

Your first job was working at an ice cream store over the summer when you were sixteen.

All things considered, it was a relatively easy job and the pay was decent. Take an order, cash the customer out, and scoop. Rinse and repeat. The owner was this sixty-something old lady who had been running the stand in your hometown for as long as you could remember, and was the only employee until that summer when she decided to retire. Your mother had bargained hard with her to get you the job, drastically exaggerating your very limited work experience and bragging about your many, many achievements, *“My daughter is just such a go-getter, she won’t let you down!”*

She was very generous and mostly left you to your own devices, so you were free to blast your music and get free ice cream. How hard could it be?

One hot summer day proved you very, very wrong. There was a line out of the door, the owner was nowhere to be seen, the A/C had died on you very early on in your shift, and the ice cream grew runny and unpredictable under the scorching, July heat. You vividly remember the feeling of melted ice cream running down your hands, serving some very lopsided cones to a group of middle school girls as they looked you up and down. You remember the shame, the embarrassment, and the urge to run for the hills. Ice cream dripping everywhere.

You know the feeling tightening in your chest all too familiarly.

Miguel O’Hara and his daughter are looking at you expectantly, and the words keep getting lost on the tip of your tongue. Admittedly, you had never planned on seeing Miguel again after last night. It was a brief moment of confidence and clarity for the first time in weeks, and you don’t even remember the last time you had felt so hot, so wanted. *So, so utterly destroyed.* You woke up with a pep in your step and felt ready to take on the world.

You make eye contact with Miguel and the memories come rushing back like wildfire.

He watches you struggle to keep your moans contained, has to gloat as you melt around his cock. “You like watching me stretch it out, don’t you? Say it.”

Every instinct in your brain was telling you to scurry back to your house and lock yourself in your room for the rest of the summer. You were halfway through formulating a plan on how

to best avoid your next-door neighbors when you realize you're still standing on their porch with a plate of blueberry muffins.

Miguel, on the other hand, seems completely unaffected, maybe even a bit smug. He's looking at you expectantly and with the composure of someone who *didn't* just rail you in a random bar's bathroom. "Can I help you?"

Your mouth dries and you can feel your palms sweating under his gaze. "My... my mom sent me over with some muffins. Blueberry. Really good." *Oh my god.*

He raises an eyebrow and leans forward to look over at your house next door, cocking his head just slightly in realization. "You're the daughter I've been hearing so much about? I thought you were still at college."

"Y-Yeah, I just graduated."

"Oh. Congratulations," Miguel looks down at his daughter earnestly, smiling and gesturing to the plate of muffins on the verge of falling over in your hands. "Gabi here has a sweet tooth, and I'm afraid I'm not that good of a baker. Your mom's been a huge help since the day we moved in."

The only thing you can do is nod in futile agreement, of course, your mom is just *so* helpful. Practically a saint. You're going to need to have a long talk with her later about being too neighborly and offering *your* help to people. Gingerly, you hand the baked goods over to Miguel and prepare to excuse yourself with a long-winded explanation about how you really should go, they must be so busy—

He beats you to the punch. "So I heard you're interested in babysitting."

You swear that you can feel your heart dropping to your stomach. You knew that you could very easily refuse, turn around and go home to pretend this interaction never happened, but then you imagined your mother's disappointed gaze, returning empty-handed without even considering his offer, thinking about the fact that your parents have been letting you crash at home for free and that this was the only thing they had asked from you to do in weeks. You hardly believe the next words that come tumbling clumsily off your lips, unsure and unsteady. "I... am?"

Miguel grins. "Do you want to come inside and talk about it?"

It's, quite frankly, a terrible idea. But not nearly terrible enough to stop you from accepting with wide, doe eyes and bringing your feet forward to enter the O'Hara home.

There are a few things you notice when you walk in: his house is spotless. The decorations are few and in between, but they're classy and timeless. A couple of soccer balls float around the hallway, and it looks like they were working on a puzzle just before you got there. On the walls, there are many, many pictures of Gabi in various areas of the house, Gabi cuddling with a soccer ball when she was less than a year old, framed canvases of Gabi's past birthdays with cake smeared all over her face, lots of selfies from the infamous Facebook mom angle, but it's endearing. You can feel the love pouring out from every single one.

Not a single photo with a wife, thank god. You don't know how you could come back from that one.

You're led into an even more impressive kitchen as he gets Gabi settled into her breakfast, fruit loops with a side of Dora the Explorer as you hear him ruffle her fluffy, brown hair. *"Espérame un momento. Sé buena, conejita."*

Miguel walks back into the room and you wonder what the next best course of action is, where you could even start. *Thanks for fucking me into next week, it was really good. I don't know why my mother is so insistent on me becoming your babysitter.* He's even taller than you remember, handsomer too, and you take the time to revel in just *how* handsome he was. Warm daylight cast a soft glow on his features, long lashes fanning his high cheekbones, reminiscent of some Roman god you've seen in a museum once before—

He's looking at you with something akin to amusement and you have to quickly pull it together, embarrassed of having been caught missing the last thing he said with your ogling. "I'm sorry?"

"I asked what made you wanna babysit. Your mom told me you have an internship with the Daily Bugle and a few things lined up. I was wondering what made you wanna jump ship all of a sudden," He smiled lightheartedly, and the room felt a little less tense, a little less fraught on your nerves "Babysitting's not nearly as glamorous as working with J. Jonah Jameson. Just a little bit similar in terms of the temperament, I guess."

"Oh," You feel embarrassed. How does someone explain a failed engagement and the root of your lost prospects to a one-night stand and potentially your future boss? *Yeah, my ex-fiance may have gotten me blacklisted from most of the multi-media companies in the tri-state area. Gotta make do with what you have.* "You know how it is. Tough job market nowadays, and my mom insists since you guys just moved in. She adores Gabi."

"She's a handful," He laughs, warm and husky and it's addicting. You can't help the smile that blooms across your face and he looks endearingly over to the living room. "I actually would really appreciate the help. Her old babysitter's going abroad this summer and I've been searching for a while now for a replacement. If you're interested, I can tell you more about what I'm looking for?"

"Yes! I mean, yeah. I'm... I'm thinking about it."

"Well alright," Miguel's smile grew, and you felt your heart swell at his approval. Focus. "Can you give me your phone?"

Your brain short-circuited at that moment. "For what?"

"So you can text me when you've decided," His eyes shine with something mischievous, but it feels genuine. It was an innocent and harmless request, and you couldn't argue with his logic. You probably would have needed his number if you accepted, anyway. "And so I can ask for more muffins in the future."

He's tapping his name and number down on your phone, listing out some expectations and requirements for the job that you should probably remember. At that point, you contemplated whether or not he even remembers the events that occurred the night before, wondering how he was acting so casually and discussing the rates of pay of a babysitting job (\$30 an hour was pretty damn good), as he hands your phone back to you.

You thought you were in the clear, ready to make your leave, until you took your phone from him, and something in his gaze shifted, more heated and hungry.

Miguel murmurs your name, so close all of a sudden. Goosebumps lit your skin on fire as he brushed your hair back, examining the turtleneck you wore. His hand brushed the side of your neck in a manner that was anything but innocent, scrutinizing the fabric with the pads of his fingers and you start to crumble, frozen as all you can do is stand there. "This is different from last night."

This was the man you had fucked the night before . "I couldn't... couldn't let my parents see."

He hums in acknowledgment, but he continues to mess with your collar, pulling the fabric down just a little bit, just enough to see the assortment of purple and red bruises that marked your neck. His eyes darkened ever so slightly, as he pulled the fabric back up and met your eyes again. "You missed some."

"What?"

One of his hands drifted down, and you resisted the urge to turn around and check that Gabi was still busy, hoping that she was still wrapped up in her cereal and her show. His hand is rough, calloused, and hot. *So, fucking hot* . Miguel's hand stopped suddenly just past your skirt, squeezing the soft skin of your thigh. "Here."

As you looked down, you noticed that he was right. You could see a vague outline of his handprint beginning to bloom in red on the skin of your thigh, and your breath gets caught in your throat. His smile was sharper, then, more dangerous and he let you go.

"I'll be waiting for your decision."

You were lightheaded and half-delirious as you made your way out of his house, wishing Gabi a quick goodbye as she grins at you happily, thanking you for the muffins with a full mouth of cereal. The entire walk back to your house, you could still feel him staring, still feel his fingers around your neck, how *impossibly full* you felt from those hands only the night before—

You didn't dare to look back.

Practically stumbling through your front door, your heart raced as you faced yet another surprise for the day. Your mother had been waiting in anticipation by the door, wearing an expression of hope and optimism that seemed oblivious to the fact that she had just dropped a bomb on your summer plans. A whole summer with that man? Panic set in as you wondered how on earth you were going to survive this ordeal.

"Well?" your mother asked impatiently, her eyes brimming with curiosity. You glance at the clock and realize you'd been gone for quite some time, leaving her imagination to conjure up all sorts of scenarios. None of them probably held a candle to what *actually* happened. "How did it go?"

Taking a deep breath, you began to respond, "I told him I'd think about babysitting—"

Before you could even finish your sentence, your mother's squealing interrupted you, a sound that rivaled the exuberance of a lottery winner and surpassed even the joy she displayed when you graduated college, hell, even when you told her you got *engaged*. Her enthusiasm was infectious, and it left you both bemused and slightly apprehensive.

"Emphasis on thinking about it," you quickly interjected, trying to temper her soaring expectations. "Don't get your hopes up just yet."

But your mother brushed off your cautious words with a dismissive wave of her hand. "Don't be silly, hon," she asserted, her voice overflowing with conviction. "How could you possibly say no?"

How could you possibly say no?

Of course, there was only one reasonable course of action to take once you made your way back to the privacy and security of your room, far from your mother's overwhelming positivity. You looked up "*Miguel O'Hara*" on your laptop immediately. Your research proved fruitful and abundant, as only a handful of his names were in your area.

For an hour, you found out several things: Miguel O'Hara attended Stanford University nearly nine years ago, played soccer and track on a full-ride, and majored in their Bioengineering program with a minor in Ethics and Society and Spanish. Since then, he worked his way up the ladder starting as an intern for Alchemax International, and was currently one of their lead geneticists, with about a dozen awards and articles about him with lofty descriptions like, "A genius in the field of genetics."

Before Gabi, his Instagram was sparse, with soccer game photos, picturesque screencaps of Stanford, and updates about his genetics research here and there. Five years ago, it felt like he came alive, a million vibrant little photos and updates of Gabi and her penchant for soccer spreading to every corner of his feed. There were bright, wide smiles on every slide, and you could tell that she was the light of his life, the focus of all his efforts.

Still, no wife in sight, and you release the breath that you didn't even know you were holding.

Diving deeper, you saw that he also coached your hometown's little league girls' soccer team and you briefly smiled at one of his posts with all the girls and their new trophy, with Gabi at his shoulders and flashing toothy grins at the camera. There's so much pride, so much joy in just one photo.

And then as recently as two months ago, they had moved into the house next to yours. It explained why you had virtually heard nothing about them when you were in college, too

caught up in the haste of graduating and setting up your internship, setting up a life with your fiancé—

There's a nervous, pregnant pause as you remembered the life you were on the cusp of just a month ago. At that moment, you were supposed to be interning at the Daily Bugle, accompanying reporters to events and press conferences, diligently editing and proofreading, and hauling ass through the bustling streets of New York, clutching cups of coffee in your hands—This dream that you used to fantasize and romanticize for the longest of times, and all you feel is hollow.

Instead of bustling around a lively apartment that wasn't entirely *yours*, discussing wedding plans over takeout and Netflix, you were sitting alone in the familiar confines of your childhood bedroom. Cross-legged, you contemplated how you allowed yourself to be swept up in someone else's plans, losing sight of your desires along the way.

The past three years replayed in your mind like a worn-out tape, each day blending into the next as exhaustion seeped into your bones. The weariness, the constant drain of energy, was your constant companion as you followed the path your fiancé had paved for you.

But now, there was a flicker of realization that ignited within you— *didn't you deserve a break? Didn't you deserve some fun?*

Your eyes hazily drifted back to the laptop screen before you, illuminating the room with its gentle glow. You think of bergamot and crisp green leaves, a summer well spent at your neighbor's house, blueberry muffins, soccer fields and dark, dark eyes. The answer seemed clear as day.

No use in lingering in something as foolish as what could have been, when you had something right in front of you.

At dinner, the room was filled with the sounds of clinking silverware and the gentle hum of conversation about each other's days. Dinner was a familiar meal your mother had fretted and labored over for the better part of the day, something warm and distinctively comforting from your childhood. The sun's just barely setting outside, casting the room in a warm, orange glow and everything feels normal, less daunting.

It's *nice*, you had been forgoing dinners with your parents in favor of takeout in bed with your favorite trashy reality show during your first few weeks with them. You had forgotten that despite the way that your life had been abruptly upended in recent memory, you had managed to resurface with relative ease due to their support.

But glancing across the table at your mother, you felt a little bit *less* supported, her face contorted in what she *believed* to be subtlety, struggling to contain her curiosity and eyes

brimming with unasked questions. She was trying to feign nonchalance, attempting to appear casual while her anticipation was clear from across the dining table.

Finally, unable to resist any longer, she seized the moment. Her voice carried a hint of hope, laced with the yearning for a resolution. "So are you done thinking about it?"

Caught off guard, you momentarily froze, your mind scrambling for a response. You mustered a reassuring smile, trying to cloak whatever lingering uncertainties you had left. This was the woman who had been your biggest cheerleader, who had picked you up off the side of the road after you lost your first job at the ice cream stand, took you to Ben & Jerry's straight after, and cut off ties with your old manager like it was nothing. You smiled. "Yeah. I think I'm going to take up Mi-Mr. O'Hara on his offer."

If your parents noticed any slip-ups in your wording, they don't mention it.

"You know, isn't it just *delightful* that there's no Mrs. O'Hara in the picture—"

"Mom, we have got to talk about boundaries. Seriously," You nearly drop your fork into your food, aghast by what your mom just implied. "He's our neighbor."

It was late at night, bolstered by a surge of courage, when your fingertips danced hesitantly over the screen of your phone, lingering above the name "*Miguel O'Hara*." You consider your first text to him heavily on your lips, testing the weight of each word as you typed and re-typed over and over.

Hey! So, I've made up my mind—I'm in for the babysitting gig!

Not quite.

Guess what? I've decided to accept your babysitting offer!

Not quite satisfied with that either, you take a deep breath and decide to go for a more straightforward approach.

Hey Miguel! I've been doing some thinking, and I'd love to babysit Gabi! Just let me know when you need me, and we can work out the details.

With your heart racing, you pressed the send button and watched as the message turned blue. The dots of his reply began immediately. Stopped. Began and stopped again. Then:

Can't wait :) I'll see you on Monday?

You could have thrown the phone right through the wall. Oh, you were down *bad*.

Shaky fingers gripping your phone, you're filled with a mix of excitement and nervous anticipation, reading and rereading his response. You haven't felt this giddy since... forever. The smile on your face grew wider with each passing moment, and you couldn't help but feel the same surge of confidence you felt the night before coursing through you.

He's everywhere, all-encompassing. You feel him along the shell of your earlobe, whispering something absolutely shameless and incorrigible to you. It has the desired effect, your heart stuttering with desire and your sweet cunt tightens around his cock in anticipation. He places a finger on your lips and his, slick with your arousal still, and beckons you gently to still. Be quiet.

Then his teeth are sinking into your skin, hard.

"Look at you," Miguel murmurs, drawing tight circles over your nipple as you cry out silently. "Shameless."

Your hands are entangled in his, reaching every which way, and you babble, mindlessly, without a thought of decency as you scratch your fingers through the lean skin of his back, mouth watering at how perfect he is for you, how his size fits inside you like a glove. Running your tongue over the long muscle of his neck, tasting the salt and cinnamon and and sucking a bruise in the same spot where he had kissed and suckled the night before.

His dark and heavy lashes flutter; his head dropping impossibly close to yours, and then he's begging for something against your jaw, thrusts growing uncontrolled, his hips catching as his cock twitches in you.

You can't say anything back. Your breaths come out ragged and strained, crooning until he hits something deafening inside you, and then the feeling spreads across your body like wildflower and it's so hot, it's searing and you just want him to move, unable to function with the way he just holds there right up against that spot and lets you both feel each other like this for a second.

You don't want him to stop; you never want this to end. It feels so good being full of you, you mumble.

"Let me taste you, cariño," His voice is filled with need, to the point of growling. It's different

You can't help the whine that escapes your breathless lips as you wake up in a hot flash, realizing that you're still within the confines of your bedroom.

Monday couldn't come fast enough.

after much deliberation, i've extended the length of this work! the progression from three chapters to five chapters to eleven chapters was definitely a choice. this chapter was a lot of building tension and establishing backstories, and i just felt that three was nowhere near enough. i settled on eleven for now, but i've mapped out this series in its entirety and more changes will likely be made depending on how i'm feeling xoxo (view updated tags for a glimpse of what's to come; it's nasty)

as always, i'm easily bribed to write faster with kudos, bookmarks, and comments <3 this is my first, major multi-part work and i'd love constructive criticism/suggestions and ideas for other works. i'm also currently searching for a beta reader, message me on tumblr @rosesaints

peppers

Chapter Notes

this was, without a doubt, my most favorite chapter to write. enjoy a longer chapter for the wait, i hope you like it just as much as i do.

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

There's no comprehensive and all-encompassing instruction manual for parenting. You could make a point about the parenting books that you could easily snag off the bookshelves of your local library, but they're not always effective.

Every child is unique, and what works for one child might not work for another. Parenting manuals often provide general advice and strategies, but they don't always address the specific needs, temperament, or circumstances of an individual child or family. Parenting is also a deeply personal experience, and different parents have different philosophies, values, and parenting styles. What one parent finds effective or important may differ from another.

You took a quick glance from the comfort of your living room over to your next-door neighbor's front yard and see that they'd progressed from soccer to softball and now... volleyball, it appeared, in the course of one Sunday morning. Little Gabi O'Hara seemed to have boundless energy and a penchant for the most active range of hobbies a five-year-old could possibly have, and it was only ten in the morning.

She was receiving, diving, and scrawling around the grass frantically, happy as can be, as Miguel set the ball to her side of the yard, steadfastly coaching and guiding her through the motions. Faintly, you overhear him yelling words of encouragement, and when Gabi saves a particularly difficult ball, you watch as he runs excitedly over to her to pick her up about his shoulders and whooping in glee. "*¡Qué orgullosa estoy de mi hija!*"

You fought the urge to celebrate along with them and tried to concentrate back on what you desperately needed to get done before Monday sneaks up on you. You're not a parent, but if you were going to be in charge of watching, protecting, and caring for Miguel's pride and joy, you had some reviewing to get done.

Miguel O'Hara probably didn't need a manual or a guide to learn how to parent. It came naturally to him, took hold, and became second nature. It's evident in the way Gabi hangs onto him like a lifeline.

Now, you know deep down that you wouldn't be able to replicate what made him a good dad, wouldn't even dare to try, but it was a good thing you only had one job: to babysit for a summer. And manuals and guides for babysitting happened to be a lot more useful and concise about what to expect in your new role.

Forty-five dollars later, you were signed up for an online Babysitting & Advanced Child Care Certification. You were well aware that this course was usually reserved and taken by eleven-year-olds, took it yourself almost ten years ago, but desperate times called for desperate measures.

You didn't take it half as seriously back then as you did now. (*It was really not that deep.*)

As four hours passed, you gradually checked off lessons in basic first aid and CPR (*Stayin' Alive by the Bee Gees was a very good point of reference*), developing age-appropriate activities (*though you probably could've just looked out your window to see more of what Gabi was interested in*), behavior management (*she was also an avid fan of your mom's blueberry muffins*), and business and professionalism skills.

Now where do you even *begin* with your last lesson?

Your mother had done the brunt of negotiating this job for you, overselling you and your skills heavily, so you were covered in the marketing aspect of the "business." Everything else in the lesson were skills you learned early on in college and through common sense, so you felt confident in that aspect. The real struggle was under the bullet point:

Professionalism.

The memory of him was still fresh; red marks just beginning to turn purple on the flesh of your skin as you replay the way he told you he would wait for his decision with a patient and composed tone, but his hands betrayed him, drifting down low to your thigh, the downright *inappropriate* way in which he looked down at you, intense brown eyes that seemed to intensify in a reddish hue.

Uncertainty bloomed in your chest reluctantly, concerns beginning to fester like wildfire.

Now, unfortunately, since the course was designed for pre-pubescent individuals, you were a little bit at a loss. What exactly was the proper etiquette for working with what was meant to be a one-night stand?

Googling "what to do if you slept with your boss/neighbor accidentally before you start the job," ended up being fruitless since most of the searches came up with *oversleeping and arriving late*, attempting to salvage it with a quick, additional search through r/AITA: "what to do if job included taking care of one-night stand's daughter," and then frantically looking up: "how does someone become good at three different sports in one afternoon" in a panic-induced haze.

There was no right answer, it seemed, other than to wait it out and see. That last question was a long shot anyway.

You ended up passing your certification with flying colors with relative ease, sighing with relief as you finally shut your computer off for the day. By the time you finished, the sun had begun its descent, warm daylight receding quickly from the living room you had locked yourself into to try and get the exam done. At that point, Gabi and Miguel had concluded

their front yard practice hours ago and you let your mind wander, thinking about how summer was going to go.

Last summer, you were barely home, too preoccupied with thoughts about your future and your engagement, and your internship. The world seemed impossibly vast, and everything was going so fast, way too fast for your liking but you made yourself push through it.

Sitting cross-legged in your living room, listening in on your parents bickering over the right seasoning proportions as you thumbed through a babysitting certificate, you found this was a lot better. Peaceful.

Sleep came easily and softly, this time with no dreams of your next-door neighbor.

When you knocked on the door of the O'Hara house for the second time that week, you felt a bit more prepared, but your fingers still fiddled with the hem of your dress. Your room currently looked like a warzone, having spent a good chunk of your morning deliberating on what to wear, and you had settled on a well-worn and familiar dress, but you were starting to have doubts.

It was early—cars were only just beginning to pull out of their driveways, rushing off to work and you could still feel the mist lingering in the air. Miguel had texted you the night before and told you to pop in around 8 AM before he headed off to work an hour later.

You considered knocking again before the door opened, and Miguel lit up at the sight of you. Compared to you, he looked relaxed, eyes crinkling softly around the edges as he invited you in. “Come on in, Gabi’s still asleep.”

Gingerly, you followed him through the house with padded footsteps, careful not to make any noise as he leads you into the living room. He gestured for you to sit as he walked back into the kitchen, and you were left to examine your surroundings. Once again, spotless—and was that a signed guitar by Llewyn Davis?

Miguel returned with two mugs of coffee and some cream and sugar, chuckling as he noticed what you were staring at. “I see you’ve noticed the infamous guitar. I don’t really play all that often anymore, because of work and Gabi, but it has good memories.”

“It’s gorgeous,” You sighed breathlessly. “How in the world did you get it signed?”

You spent a few minutes going back and forth with him about music, “*you* were in two punk bands in high school?, ” to which he rolled his eyes, but you didn’t miss the small smile that lingered as he brought his mug of coffee back to his lips, “I had a lot of pent up tension back then.”

There were a few other things you went over with him, like Gabi’s bedtime (he usually tried to be home by the time she had to go to sleep but work sometimes prevented him the opportunity so he makes sure to stay until Gabi woke up in the morning), potential allergies or dietary restrictions, if she could go over to your house, visits with Abuela, and little lessons and habits that he had picked up in the five years as Gabi’s dad.

One thing you learned was that he was very thorough; there were phone numbers stuck to the fridge in the event that anything went wrong, emergency contacts a mile long being added to your phone, a list of preferred hospitals and clinics in the area, and maybe excessively, a list of soccer parents to avoid at grocery stores, playgrounds, and practices.

You had raised an eyebrow at that last point. “What, did you have an argument with a mom at Bed, Bath, and Beyond or something?”

“I might get a little too competitive when Gabi’s playing soccer.”

“Miguel,” You tried to resist the laughter bubbling up your throat at the mental image of Miguel going wild at a little league soccer game. “They’re five. How competitive do you have to be?”

When the hour was getting close to done, and after making more fun of Miguel to your delight, he looked down at his watch, eyes lowering slightly in disappointment. “It’s about time for me to head to work, and I wanna go wake up Gabi before I have to go,” Miguel stood up, and you couldn’t help but stare as he stretched, lean muscles rippling underneath the fabric of his button-up, shirt riding up just right as you caught a glimpse of tan, sunkissed skin—

Focus.

If he noticed you staring, he didn’t mention it, but you could see the small traces of a smug smile as he turned away from you to head to Gabi’s room. On the way, he pointed out other rooms, his office, where to go do laundry, and a guest bedroom if you ever needed it, though you reminded him that you did only live a good ten feet away from his house.

Before you went in, Miguel knocked softly, opening the door to a bright, blue bedroom. It’s a gorgeous room, filled with various posters of the sports and cartoons that Gabi loved, a bunch of toys that were still strung out on the floor, and there’s a picture of her and Miguel on the nightstand from Disneyland, with Gabi as a baby wearing lopsided Mickey ears as he beamed proudly at the camera.

He pushed in first, sitting down on Gabi’s bed then he leaned in closer, whispering a gentle “*it’s time to wake up, Gabi.*” The sound, barely audible, wafted through the room as she slowly stirred, warm honey-brown eyes still drowsy.

“Well, good morning,” Miguel greeted. “*¿Lista para empezar el día?*”

Gabi nodded as she sat up, still practically half-asleep, rubbing her sleepy eyes with tiny fists. When she noticed you standing by the doorway, she smiled, waving softly, but still focused her attention on her dad. “*¿Vas a trabajar?*”

Miguel hummed in response, and then looked back at you. “Promise not to cause too much trouble to your babysitter today?”

“No promises,” Gabi grinned and you thought Miguel might as well explode on the spot with pride.

You and Gabi stood at the porch as Miguel pulled out of the driveway, Gabi on your hip as she waved frantically, blowing kisses to the outline of his car as you waved too, laughing as Miguel blew his own kisses back to the two of you.

There was no trouble with getting Gabi settled with breakfast, having decided on a generous helping of eggs and toast. You got her meal ready as she started setting a volleyball back and forth, hands still clumsy and slippery with inexperience, but she asked you a series of rapid-fire questions as you flipped over her eggs.

“Do you play sports?”

“I used to, a long time ago, but I’m afraid I’m nowhere near as good as you are. I can set some volleyballs over to you later if you want,” You replied as you set the egg down on her plate. At that, Gabi cheered and made her way over to you, little hands reaching for her food.

“Last week, my dad hit his toe on one of my legos and he accidentally said a mean word. I don’t think he knew I heard him. Can you tell him that’s not appropriate?”

“I’ll relay the message,” You tried your best to stifle a laugh from her innocent, mindless questions. You’ll definitely bring that up with Miguel later.

“Can your mom make some more blueberry muffins?”

“You know what,” Your eyes lit up as a light bulb flickered above your head. “Why don’t we just show you?”

Gabi absolutely adored your mom—those two had latched on to each other more than you thought in your disappearance, and she was hanging off every one of your mom’s words as she explained how to prepare the muffin batter, as you took little pictures to send over to Miguel with flour on the tip of her nose and fingertips sticky with batter she was caught sneaking bites from. The last part was gross, but still, admittedly cute.

You had a mental checklist prepared (courtesy of your little certificate) of things you should prioritize when babysitting. The first one was responsibility: *Babysitters must prioritize the safety and well-being of the children in their care. They should be reliable and trustworthy.*

Of course, you had to rein in a few of your mom’s liberties as she snuck some more bites of the batter to Gabi, sighing exasperatedly as you had to explain the risks of salmonella to your *own* mom. Not that it stopped you from taking small swipes at the batter either.

Your first day was a soaring success, the day well spent with baking and a trip to the park in the beautiful weather, letting Gabi run around and cause havoc for a few hours before the sun began to set. Lots of photos and updates were texted to Miguel, another bullet point in your checklist, namely communication: *Effective communication with both children and parents is essential. Babysitters should be able to understand and engage with children, as well as provide clear updates and instructions to parents.*

Miguel responded to each of them in kind with personalized messages, watching with bated breath as he saved the one of you and Gabi grabbing ice cream by an ice cream truck.

Gabi was knocked out and tucked in by the time Miguel got home from work, and you were waiting on the couch, watching intently as he walked through the door, loosening his tie with a relaxed sigh. He settled next to you on the couch, voice velvety and smooth as he greeted you. “Hey. Did you guys have fun?”

There was a natural ease to your conversation, and you took the opportunity to ask him more questions about music, and his work, and let him try the new muffins Gabi had made while he asked his own questions in kind, about what you liked to do, what made you decide to go back home.

You were both halfway through laughing and snortling as you had explained the one time you had attempted to sneak into your university library, to no avail as the near-hundred-year-old security guard had caught you almost immediately.

Miguel’s eyes softened, the edges of a laugh softly settling into a smile as he gazed at you, the room feeling smaller, lighter. “I’m really glad you went back.”

“Me too,” You smiled in return, head leaning into the crook of your arm. “I mean, who else is going to make fun of you for getting *way* too passionate about five-year-olds playing soccer? Like come on, you did not have to get her minivan towed just because her kid sidestepped Gabi in a game.”

“Oh, I *absolutely* did.”

The rest of your week passed in a whirlwind. Gabi was a really easy kid to watch, you really couldn’t take that much credit. She took every activity you threw at her with the easygoing nature of a five-year-old with not many qualms, and it made things so much easier, but of course, you didn’t want to just barely do your job. Case in point, creativity: *Great babysitters often come up with fun and engaging activities to keep children entertained. They can think on their feet and find creative solutions to challenges that may arise.*

On your second day, you spent the day with her running around the block, showing her various sights and spots you had frequented when you were a kid, answering her curious questions in stride, and ending your little adventure with some waffles at your hometown restaurant. You delighted in the way Gabi practically squealed at the amount of whipped cream.

Of course, your next priority was patience: *Dealing with children requires patience, especially when they are upset. Babysitters remain calm and handle difficult situations with composure.* Gabi had a sugar rush the moment the two of you left the restaurant, and you had to deal with the fallout.

“Oh my god, Gabi, look both ways before you cross the street!” You didn’t think you could handle a lawsuit from her father.

The next couple of days were a lot more relaxed; as rambunctious and active she was, sometimes she could just use a day of lounging around the couch, binging various movies and asking you your favorite parts about them, eyes twinkling in curiosity as you explained the mechanics of some of the animation in the cartoons you watched.

Miguel would occasionally come back for lunch or return with some takeout after work, and you were able to cycle through various restaurants that had opened up in your time away from college, eager to talk through a lot of them and give him your opinions.

The whole time, he remained warm and welcoming, innocent glances across the dining table, a far cry from the man you had hooked up with a week ago.

At one point, your hands gestured wildly and your mouth ran on fire as you tried some spicy pozole that Miguel and Gabi urged you to try. You hadn't noticed the simultaneous way their heads had tilted to the side, flashing equally mischievous smiles.

Guzzling milk as you glared at the both of them (at Miguel, more than Gabi), as Miguel struggled to contain his laughs, breathlessly wheezing as he wiped some stray tears that had gathered in his eyes. "Did we not tell you there were some ghost peppers in there?"

"No!"

Friday came around much sooner than you expected, and at that point, you had settled into a routine.

The sun was starting to set, casting a warm glow through the windows as both of you plopped down on the couch. You were both exhausted from a day of running around and kicking a soccer ball in the front yard, and you had endured your fair share of kicking the ball and missing the goal by several feet for Gabi's sake. With messy hair and rosy cheeks, you had tucked Gabi in under a cozy blanket, flipping through the channels until you eventually landed on something that you had started just a couple of days before.

Before long, Gabi had fallen asleep, and you had moved her to her bedroom without much fuss, ready to go settle in the living room and wait for Miguel to arrive. On your way down, you noticed his office door was slightly ajar, and you went to close it until something caught your eye.

Against your better judgment, you pushed your way in, surveying the state of the room. There were books scattered everywhere, old files and papers haphazardly set around his desk. A few articles of his old works were framed on the wall, and in photos, he seemed more constricted. Less free, more serious, dark brown piercing eyes judging you as you walked around his office.

What caught your eye, in particular, was a photo of Miguel with two other individuals, one of them you could only assume was his brother, due to their similar eyes and smile, and in between them was a woman with blue eyes and brown hair, a similar shade to Gabi's.

Before you could ponder on the similarities further, you heard the door to the office crack open, and spinning around wildly to see Miguel standing at the doorway.

In your concentration, you missed the sound of a car pulling into the driveway and Miguel stood, blanketed by the light of the hallway, in sharp contrast to the dark that shrouded the room. You felt guilty, small like a child caught dipping their hand into a jar of cookies. To

your surprise, Miguel merely flickered the light switch on, eyes carrying the weight of fatigue. “Is Gabi asleep?”

You sheepishly nodded, folding your hands behind your back as you struggled to come up with an explanation. “Listen—”

“Come with me,” Miguel’s voice was calm, carrying none of the backlash you were expecting. “Let’s talk.”

In the kitchen, Miguel poured a couple of glasses of wine, offering one to you as you accepted. He let out an exhausted sigh before composing himself, back to the easygoing and light smile you had begun getting accustomed to that week. “How was she today?”

And just like that, the tense air in the room lifted as easily as it came in, as you went through the motions of the day, watching as he gradually lost the slump in his shoulders and the lines on his face that told the story of a demanding day.

Whatever it was, you didn’t want to pry, especially after having been caught looking through his belongings.

“You’re a natural, you know that?” Miguel’s eyes shined with admiration. “She adores you, tells me all about your days when you’re gone.”

Despite yourself, you couldn’t fight the smile that bloomed across your face, chest constricting at the praise. “Well, I really couldn’t take that much credit. She’s a really easy kid to watch, she practically lost it when I took her to go get some waffles the other day.”

He smiles, full and unrestrained this time, and you share a few more stories about your week, ignoring the flush in your cheeks when he would quip in with his own stories from when Gabi was younger. Gabi was his whole life and he adored her wholeheartedly; in pictures, before she was born, you could tell that something was lacking, something missing when his smiles wouldn’t reach his eyes.

“So, what’s your secret?” Miguel cocked an eyebrow. “How’d you get the hang of it the way you did? It took a while for Gabi’s old babysitter to get used to how active she is. I’ve never seen her latch on to someone so quickly.”

“I... I did a babysitting certificate online that was meant for middle schoolers.” *Thank you, Babysitting and Advanced Child Care Certification.* Your laughter spilled on in bursts without even thinking about it, and you gasped for breath about the absurdity of learning more things by completing a small babysitting certificate over your college diploma. “If you need a better manual for parenting, look no further. Those eleven-year-olds have it cracked.”

“Is that so?” Your laughter was contagious, and before long, Miguel had joined in.

You nodded, still proud of your little achievement. “*Mhm.* There’s four,” pausing to hold up four fingers. “Four key values.”

“Well, shoot, now I have to know. What are they?” Miguel leaned forward just slightly, and you ignored the way your heart swelled at the small motion, his proximity rapidly unthreading the small resolve you had left.

“There’s responsibility, then communication, creativity—that’s an underrated one—and patience,” Listing them off felt a little bit silly, now that you looked back, but you continued. “It’s like, the four commandments of babysitting.”

“So which one do you think is the most important?” He looked down at you, and everything seemed heightened, more focused. Dark brown lashes fanned his cheekbones, skin warm and dusky against the contours of his face as he stared back at you. “Responsibility, communication, creativity, or... *patience*?”

You knew the implications behind his words, this line that you were dangerously close to crossing over. “Patience.”

Miguel’s pupils dilated then, humming his approval at your words. At that point, the sun had fully set and you had lost track of the time. Without thinking, the words came tumbling out before you could even stop and consider the weight of them. Recklessly and impulsively, you took the leap. “Do you remember what happened a week ago?”

“Of course, I do. You think I’ve forgotten about you?” Miguel’s eyes darkened, voice dropping an octave as you suddenly felt very, very hot. “I haven’t been able to get you out of my head, *cariño*.”

He stood before you, all broad expanse of shoulders and muscle, and you’re reminded of the events of last week all over again, remembering how *strong* he felt underneath your fingertips. “What do you want?”

You didn’t need to answer, just leaned in and took his lips in yours, long wait finally over and you were falling apart like honey in his arms as you felt him push you against the cool marble of the counter, his warmth in sharp contrast to the cold pressing against your back. He tasted exactly the same, bergamot and crisp green leaves, patchouli, and vetiver. Fuck, you were addicted to it.

Your moans filled the quiet of the kitchen as his mouth moved lower, light and feathery kisses peppering the side of your neck, going over the bruises mapped on your skin left just a week before, sucking and kissing new ones in his wake.

“I wanna see you fall apart,” Miguel murmured, hot breaths fanning your neck as if in a trance. “Wanna watch you cum on my fingers again, wanna taste you.” All you could do was nod. Yes, yes, please—do whatever you want.

He returned to your lips, needy and unconstrained. You let your hands wander, disappearing into his neat, put-together curls just as Miguel bit down on your bottom lip, the sudden pain making you twist your fingers into his hair and tug. A low, rumble sound vibrates against your mouth, his fingers pressing harder into your hips and then he’s hoisting you up on the counter.

One of his hands makes its way underneath your skirt, fingers skirting along the edges of your underwear as you *whined*, pleading for him to touch you where you needed him. You could feel his mouth nip at your skin and you clammed up like putty, as he pushes your complaints back down. "Patience," he chastised, going even slower than before.

Minutes feel like hours as he held you there, hand cupping your face as if you were his salvation, proof that he wanted, no, needed this just as much as you did, had been crippled with thoughts of each other since the moment you had walked into his house. "Good girl. That's it. You going to keep being good for me?"

Shaking your head yes, unable to formulate words at the way he gazed at you, definitive and ready to take the pleasure he had just begun if you stepped out of line.

Slowly, he knelt in front of you, slithering down your body and you feel exposed, goosebumps rousing in your skin as he kissed up the length of your thigh, grabbing onto your underwear and tugging it down with an easy confidence.

Miguel's breathing adoration into your cunt and you felt like you were *on fire*, going crazy with his greedy back and forth, not quite reaching you where you needed him. His voice was clear and definitive, a stark difference to yours. "Tell me what you want."

You're babbling, words merging and rolling off your lips with an uncontrolled force, and you're not even sure if you're making any sense, not entirely sure if you even cared. "Please. Please, Miguel, I'm begging you, do something—"

His thumb started to draw slow circles as he slowly stroked the lips surrounding your mound. You were sure that you were positively dripping, going slick around him as you keened under his touch. His mouth watered and Miguel decided quickly that using only his fingers simply will not do, nowhere near enough.

Something in your brain snapped as he pushed your skirt up, looking *ravenous* as he inspected you, still teasing, not quite playing with you just yet. And then, you felt his hot mouth exactly where you needed him, licking one strip, from base to top of your cunt, just to taste.

Oh my god.

You were leaning back on your shoulders, struggling to hold your body weight as he continued to explore you, and you just allowed yourself to *feel it, really feel it*, and let him do whatever he wanted to you with his tongue—letting him lazily slide it over your clit, tracing the soft skin of your inner thigh with his canines, occasionally allowing you the pleasure of letting it migrate inside your cunt, tasting, feeling, wandering around until you were dizzy and delirious.

The kitchen sounded absolutely filthy, filled with the sound of the slick of your pussy and the criminal way that he ate you out, moaning and groaning when he knew he found a spot that just wrecked you. Praises fell from him in short, Spanish increments, taken with the way you begged and leaned your cunt closer to his face as if *you* even had any remote say in his demonstrations.

His hands snaked around your hips, pressuring you to move even closer to him, leaving you with no room to escape, not that you would ever even want to, no. Not with the way he was fucking you on his tongue, not with the way the rough skin of his five o'clock shadow stimulated you further, forcing you to feel everything *so much more*.

There was nothing innocent about the way he growled into your cunt, then, "Cum for me, baby, please. I wanna taste you. 'M starving. Just look at you."

And then you were crooning, gasping as he went faster with his ministrations, wondering how in the world he had *so much vigor, so much stamina*, and then you gave him what he wanted, legs shaking and tightening around his face as he only held you harder, working you through it.

"Oh my god," You let out another breath, head still spinning. "Miguel—"

His tongue was still hungry when it slipped back into your pussy, still desperate and needy for the taste of you as if you didn't just cum mere seconds ago.

"I can't— I can't—"

Everything was so heightened, so close in such a short time to the pinnacle that he had you pinned under for what had felt like hours. This time, he was rougher, more impatient as he plunged two fingers inside of you. You resisted the urge to scream, biting down on your palm as tears well in your eyes, too taken with the pleasure he was lost in.

"You can't? Oh, I think you can. Give me another one, *dulzura*."

And then you were rolling your hips, frantic as you sobbed, practically riding his face and you whimpered in ragged and staggered breaths. But once he pressed his rough thumb to your puffy clit, your eyes rolled to the back of your head as you came apart for the second time that night.

Slowly, you regained your bearings, pushing yourself up from the counter as you looked down to see Miguel still licking, cleaning you off. To your surprise, he was grinning, satisfied with only giving you a brief reprieve. "You didn't think we were done, did you?"

This was not in your post-grad plan, but honestly? You were starting to warm up to it.

Chapter End Notes

this was originally intended to be a three-parter, and i am so excited that we're going to surpass that! I honestly had no idea where i was going to go with this in the beginning,

like a lot you, i was just thirsty and wanted a tall glass of o'hara. like c'mon, i know you all saw that man double cheeked up in the movie theater.

i was very concerned that you guys wouldn't like the mom character/reader's backstory and romantic past and i'm so glad you've been having as much fun with these parts like i am!

i knew i wanted to prioritize the fact that the reader is a grown adult but i didn't want to just stop there. they have had a few life experiences, and as sparse and kind of tragic they end up being, they do have a solid support system. the reader was also in a long-term relationship and knows her expectations, boundaries, and are a lot less receptive to manipulation or being left vulnerable. reader is in her early 20s and miguel is in his late 20s, early 30s, but there's still the fact that he has a full-fledged career and has a daughter. i also wanted to make it clear that gabi is, and always be his first priority. there is still a big difference in maturity and i tried to address that briefly in this chapter, and it'll be explored more in the future. (see: angst tag above)

anyways, thank you for coming to my ted talk. please know that i've read over every single comment and every single one makes my heart so full.

something just beneath

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Mornings are sacred. It's quiet; in those early hours, there's still a tranquil placidity that envelopes everything. The sun was only just beginning to timidly peek over the horizon, casting gentle hues of pink and gold across the room you were currently in. Between the hours of five to nine, a sense of clarity and purpose came with greeting the day, that rushing feeling of being one step ahead while the world was still catching up.

The world seemed hushed as if holding its breath, and you lazily peered over at the clock on the nightstand, eyes glazing over when you saw the time. 5:24 AM.

You hated mornings.

For the longest time, you had prided yourself on being a night owl, having grown used to the frenzied sprees of all-nighters throughout your late teens, reminiscing fondly on the late evenings at your campus library cramming for exam after exam, the sheer, weightless freedom you experienced the first time you stayed out past curfew, and the relief of standing still after a long day.

Mornings came with dark circles catching up to you, messages left unopened, waiting for your ex-fiancé to come back from wherever he claimed to be. You remembered the nagging, sinking feeling in your chest during those mornings, the hot tears that fell on your cheeks when the sun would rise and your bed remained woefully cold and empty.

Looking back, the red flags were clear as day.

Those hours were always uncertain, a continuous back and forth of wondering if he would make it in time to walk you to your next class, sitting frozen at a restaurant as he bailed on another one of your brunch plans.

At first, he had brushed off your concerns with empty promises of *later*. And then *later* turned into very painfully public arguments at your quad, dismissing the tears and the uncertainty you felt like it was something *stupid, irrelevant, why would you even bring that up?* You excused his actions when the person you loved would come back at night with rehearsed declarations of love, half-genuine apologies ringing in your ears before you were persuaded to accept with open arms.

With Miguel, you found that there was none of that uncertainty.

There was no uncertainty in the way he had easily, carefully plucked you from the kitchen counter, looked you over, and *smiled* as he carried you up to his room.

In the short time you had spent around him, you found that Miguel had a knack for locking eyes with the person he was speaking to. His gaze was almost always unwavering and

focused, making you feel like the center of his attention. He had this impressive way of making it seem as if he can see into your soul, picking up on the subtlest of cues and making you feel truly seen, truly heard. It should scare you, but it *doesn't*.

You don't dare to name this *thing* that lingered in the pit of your stomach, but you think that maybe you could relish in it, stay in it for a while.

His footsteps were quiet as he climbed the stairs, head nuzzled into the crook of your neck, an unexpected moment of gentleness after his actions. Of course, that was before he had tossed you easily onto his bed and began pressing open-mouthed kisses down the length of your neck, down your torso, and made you cum once, twice, *three more times* on his tongue and eager fingers late into the night while murmuring praises into the skin of your thighs.

You felt the hot flashes of something taut *snapping* inside you, near delirious as he glided over the softness of your skin with the upper row of his teeth, impossibly sharp and leaving marks you would surely feel in the days to come.

"*Dios,*" Miguel had rasped out in between your orgasms, pupils dilated as he hungrily took in the sight of you. "You taste so fucking sweet. Can you give me another, *querida*? *¿Por favor?*"

You were spent, lying in silk sheets as he ran those eyes over your thoroughly satisfied body, limbs splayed out in exhaustion and yet you hung onto every word, every indolent drag of his tongue over your skin.

"*Dando tanto por mí, sé que lo necesitabas tanto, cariño.*"

You had shivered, then, putty in his hands as Miguel moaned in turn, feeling his rough fingers drag across your pussy after the crux of your orgasm and gathering the absurd amount of wetness that dripped onto his hand, making you watch as he had gasped, *so fucking sensitive and reactive*. You could only watch with wide, doe eyes in admiration as he began pumping himself in earnest with the evidence of your arousal around him, intense brown eyes groaning and looking at you, *nowhere else*.

He looked possessed, eyes rolling back as he came with your name tumbling out from his lips, dripping with need and want and so many things you hadn't felt in so long, warm white ropes hitting your stomach. Utterly wrecked.

It was easy to fall asleep in his arms after, body going slack and lazy while he had cleaned you off with a warm washcloth, humming more words of praise about *how good you were, just perfect*. "*Lo hiciste tan bien, mi dulce niña. Puedes irte a dormir ahora.*"

You hated mornings. But as you stared at Miguel's form, body bathed in golden rays of sunlight, you were faced with the terrifying, rushing feeling that maybe you could come around to them.

There was something endearing about how Miguel's regularly neat and styled-back hair came undone in tousled waves as he slept, reminiscent of warm and rich brown rivulets as they

splayed across the pillow and the way that even deep into sleep, his forehead crooked in thought, occupied with things you could never possibly know about.

As if he could feel the weight of your stare, he turned around to face you on the bed, sunkissed arms automatically interlocking around the small of your waist and pulling you closer. He groaned when you shifted, squeezing you tighter around him with easy, lackadaisical strength.

“What time is it?” Miguel murmured into your skin, voice still raspy and rough around the edges while you resisted the urge to cup his face then, kiss away that drowsiness, and then *some*.

Another languid glance at the alarm clock. “It’s almost 6.”

He hummed in acknowledgment but showed no signs of letting you go. If anything, you could feel the arms snaking around your waist grow tighter.

“Miguel, it’s time for me to go,” Though you only half-meant it, far too comfortable in the position he had you in. “Before my parents wake up.”

“Just go later.”

This man was *unbelievable*. “Miguel,” You whisper-shouted in the most serious voice you could muster despite the fact he had draped the full weight of his body on top of yours, and you could feel the rough outline of his mouth curving into a drowsy smile on your neck. “It’s time to wake up. I have to go—”

“Few more minutes,” He had pulled back then to face you, and any protests you might have had died on your lips. Miguel looked gorgeous, half-lidded eyes still blinking away the remnants of sleep, but this early in the morning, and they were already glinting with desire, shining with the confidence of someone who knew they were on the precipice of winning. “Let me make you feel good before you go, *gatita*.”

It was closer to seven when you actually managed to make your way out of the O’Hara home and out of his grasp, fighting down the colossal need to stay when he looked at you in just the right way, dark and heavy lashes fanning his cheekbones as he looked at you and cleaned off the remnants of your climax through heady eyes.

God, he was going to be the death of you.

You ignored Miguel’s self-satisfied stare as you practically stumbled to the front door. “Be back later for coffee,” He called out, to which you responded with a prompt glare over your back. He had smiled then, raising his own mug of coffee. Unbelievable.

Outside the door, you were positively triumphant. You felt like you had just jumped off the frames of a shampoo commercial, breathing in the crisp morning air in gleeful delight, drinking in the elation that had leaped out of your chest at the realization of what you did. It was a sharp contrast to the way that you looked much closer to the *after* photo of someone on the losing side of a bar fight.

So you walked down the street with a little bit more lightness in your step, giddy and lightheaded as you bounded the corner to your house and *skipped*.

Unlocking your door was half the battle, careful not to make any sound as you twisted the doorknob, and breathed out another sigh of relief when there was no creaky resistance as you pushed the door open.

Bypassing the threshold of your kitchen without drawing attention was easy enough, wincing when you realized your mother was well past awake and already making breakfast, singing along to some cheesy pop song from your childhood. You were almost, *just barely*, setting foot on the first wooden step of the stairs before you heard the distinct clearing of someone's throat behind you.

Your father stood at the doorway, raising a brow at your current, quite disheveled state and you felt your heart drop at the notion of being caught during your walk of shame. Judging by the cup of coffee in his hands and the *NYPD* keys hanging prepared at his side, you had been caught just before he made his long commute to work.

"Dad—"

With a heavy sigh, your father approached you, reaching out to fix your messed-up hair. The ill-conceived excuses you had prepared vanished from your mind, replaced by an unexpected tenderness. He spoke softly, his voice laced with resignation. "Go," he said, gesturing towards the kitchen. Your dad cocked his head at the kitchen. His eyes lowered to the floor. "Before your mom sees. You know she'll be banging down your door with questions if she saw."

Confusion mingled with gratitude as you absorbed the weight of his words. "Really?"

"Yeah," Dad smiled, small and steady as he shook his head at your shock. "Well, don't act too surprised. I don't wanna get bombarded with phone calls at the precinct by your mother *again*. Just let us know before you sleep over at the neighbor's, yeah?"

"No promises," You had laughed, brushing off his worries while ascending the stairs. You briefly considered the notion of something like last night becoming a reoccurring, regular thing that you could look forward to. You didn't think about it at the moment, too caught up in the fun you hadn't experienced in *so long*. "We'll see where it goes."

When you came back to the O'Hara household a short hour after gathering your bearings, you sat a very excited (and thankfully very rested) Gabi on your lap and went through your plans for the day as Miguel prepared breakfast.

It had become part of your little routine with them, creating a plan for the day over slightly burnt eggs and toast before splitting off in your separate ways, Miguel off to work at Alchemax and you off to adventure with Gabi.

Today, there was a slight change in your regularly scheduled programming, when he slid a mug of coffee down the kitchen counter over to you. Your eyes narrowed at Miguel in

feigned annoyance, but you relished in the way he hummed, the picture of innocence as his mouth quirked up in victory.

You ignored the way your heart tumbled then, brushing it off as a more pressing matter for *later*.

For Miguel, you found out quickly that there was no such thing as *later*; only *now*. You greatly underestimated just how much he wanted you, brushing off your concerns that this would be something fleeting with how insatiable his appetite became the longer you spent around him, and solidifying it with just how much he'd toe the line to public indecency to have a taste of *you*. His impulsivity quickly became *your* impulsivity, and it became easy to let this indescribable thing with him fester into something uncontrollable.

Not to say that it didn't get just a *little bit* out of hand.

But who could blame you? Not when Miguel would open his door to you at sunrise, a couple of hours before you were supposed to babysit Gabi, sweats swung low on his hips and pulling you in wordlessly as he knew. Neither of you needed to name it, what this palpable thing became between the two of you.

He found increasingly... innovative ways to fit you into the gaps and crevices in his routine, and you were all the more eager to tag along for the ride.

You began waking up at the crack of dawn to *join him* on his morning runs around town, ignoring the burn in your chest as you'd hopelessly try to catch up to his steady pace despite the fact that he had already slowed down three times for your sake. "Miguel," you panted. "How the fuck do you do these so easily?"

He had laughed, a sprinkle of his usual confidence. "Maybe you just need some motivation. Ever heard of a runner's high?"

Motivation, you did. But you thought, curiously, that your idea of a runner's high seemed different from Miguel pulling you into a private alcove in the park, a solid quarter of a mile away from any prying eyes, and pressing his lips to yours, hoisting you up easily and helping you lock your legs around his waist.

Your mind had blanked, then, as he entered you in one fell swoop, head reeling as he remarked on *how wet you were, how easily he pushed into you with more praises against your hair*.

(It actually did help, to your surprise. It helped to even the scales a little bit as Miguel became a little bit more winded after your rendezvous at the park.)

Over the course of a month, you quickly discovered that Miguel liked to multi-task—not that it meant he was good at it—brushing off your concerns about the bacon on the stovetop getting burnt to a crisp while he peppered needy and desperate kisses along the side of your neck, pushing your skirt and your legs up and leaning you against the counter and fucking you earnestly. "*Quédate quieta para mí, buena chica.*"

The result was blackened crisps of what used to be bacon on your plates much later, and you sheepishly had to swap out Gabi's breakfast for some cereal. "Yeah, I don't know how this happened," You muttered under your breath. "I think maybe your dad—" Narrowing your eyes at the tall, broad-shouldered calamity across from you, "--needs to take some cooking lessons, huh, Gabi?"

It didn't stop there.

Of course, there were occasions when he was a little cut for time and you had trouble waking up earlier in the day, so a suitable compromise came with meeting him in the middle. Miguel gave you a key, "for emergencies," he had muttered as his hands roamed the expanse of your waist. "And to make things a little easier."

Your favorite moments with him were *after* his early morning runs, sneaking in when you knew he was close to home, and surprising him by pushing him flush against the cold tile of his shower. It was the rare instance of him allowing you to take over, raking your eyes and hands deliciously over the silky sheen of his water-streaked chest, shining impossibly beautiful under the skylight.

His shoulders would relax, eyes closing in relief when you would sink down and deliver on your promises to make him feel good.

He looked gorgeous and so, so needy when he begged you to move, hands scrambling for you to take him deeper, *anything*, and you would relish in the thought that he was experiencing what you had experienced from him many times before as you dragged your tongue lazily over the head of his cock.

At the back of your mind, you knew that a wiser, more reasonable person would ask questions, seek deeper meanings beyond these fumbblings around with him, but at the moment, you were content.

Who wouldn't be when he would take you into his arms after every single time, gentle and sweet and caring, and so, so genuine?

He'd make up for the runs with little energy drinks and piggyback rides up the hills that you deemed particularly difficult, began ordering breakfast from your favorite diners for you, him, and Gabi to avoid another burnt bacon scenario, and lathering your back with soap and kisses after finishing him off in the shower.

Selfishly, you hoped that these thrills provided just as much of an escape for him as they did for you.

If Miguel occupied your mornings, Gabi was a steady fixture in your afternoons and nights.

You and Gabi became fast friends during your time together and you discovered both the parts of her that were vibrant and unequivocally hers and the parts of Miguel that would shine through in her.

Her laughter filled the air as she chased after a soccer ball, her untamed curls bouncing with each eager step. Her enthusiasm was infectious and it was easy to get caught up in it, to get lost in the whims of a five-year-old.

"Watch this!" Gabi called out, her voice bubbling with excitement. She expertly maneuvered the ball, her small feet moving with surprising agility. With a sudden burst of energy, she kicked the ball toward you, her eyes gleaming with anticipation.

Admittedly, your morning runs with Miguel had increased your capacity to actually join in with Gabi while she played sports. You made a mental note to thank him for that later.

You rose to your feet, mirroring Gabi's excitement. As the ball approached, you extended your foot, connecting with it in a gentle sweep. The ball soared through the air, its trajectory guided by your shared energy. Gabi's laughter filled the air once again.

As the two of you played soccer together, an unspoken bond began to form. Gabi's sense of humor was a breath of fresh air, a stark contrast to her dad's *lack of a sense of humor*. Although she was five, she had a way of finding joy in the simplest of things and you both grew a knack for making Miguel's life just a little bit more unruly, aiding and abetting Gabi's little plans when he would come home after work.

With each passing day, you discovered more about Gabi—her dreams, her aspirations, and the depth of her imagination. You found a surprising amount of solace in your hours spent together, watching as she'd go through every activity and game you'd throw at her with a rushing feeling of pride.

Gabi had this way of sharing her thoughts, her dreams of becoming a scientist (geneticist was still far from her vocabulary), and the secret hideaways she had created in her vibrant imagination. You would always listen attentively, your heart swelling with pride at her unwavering determination and contagious enthusiasm.

The day had finally arrived – her first soccer practice. You had heard from Miguel that days like these were always a bit shaky and filled with nerves. So you approached her bed, a hairbrush in hand. Gabi was fidgeting with her soccer uniform, her eyes reflecting a mix of anticipation and uncertainty.

You tried your best to smile reassuringly, fingers gently combing through her dark curls. "You're going to do amazing, Gabi," you said, your voice filled with genuine encouragement. "But first, let's make sure you have the coolest soccer braid ever!"

Gabi's eyes lit up at the mention of a braid. Guessing by her reaction, it probably wasn't a common occurrence.

There was something tender about the small notion of doing something for her that your mother had done for you so many years prior. As you carefully separated her hair into three sections, you began to speak softly. "You know, I was always really nervous before my first practices too."

"Really?"

“Really,” You laughed, beginning to twist and turn a few strands. “I was a wreck. My coaches always complained about me, because my mom had to hold my hand all the way down to the field.”

There was a pause. Gabi shifted, anxiously turning around to face you. “Would you walk me down to the field?”

“Of course,” You couldn’t help the way your heart leaped out of your chest then. “Of course, anything for you, Gabi.”

As the final strands fell into place, Gabi began to get excited, itching to run her palms through it. With her hair neatly braided, you stood back, marveling at your handiwork. She clumsily ran from her spot on the bed, twirling around to catch a glimpse of it in the mirror. When she didn’t say anything at first, you began to worry, but then she came bounding back to you with her full weight, hugging you with a surprising amount of strength.

Once she finished getting ready, you gathered her soccer gear, guiding her towards the car as you texted Miguel that you were on your way. He probably got there about an hour before you guys did, setting up the field and trying to cool down some energy drinks and snacks from Costco.

You braced yourself at the mental image of Miguel, in all his 6’9 glory, as serious and sometimes stubborn as he was, trying to coach eight or so little girls in soccer. In past conversations, you had poked and prodded him with questions about his coaching style, and the closest you got to a response after asking if he was more of the “Yoda” or “Kenobi” type of mentor was an exhausted roll of his eyes. Definitely Kenobi.)

The drive was light-hearted enough, sharing more stories from your own childhood in an attempt to distract Gabi from any lingering anxiety.

As you arrived at the field, a flurry of activity enveloped you. The sound of children's laughter and parents yelling after them filled the air, creating an atmosphere buzzing with anticipation. Gabi clung to your hand, her grip tight, her nerves quickly resurfacing.

Finding a quiet spot, you crouched down, meeting her wide eyes. “Hey,” With a gentle squeeze of her hand, you offered a reassuring smile. “Remember, Gabi, you've got this. I'll hold your hand every step of the way if you want.”

Gabi nodded, taking a deep breath as she absorbed your words of encouragement. Her fears began to dissipate, replaced by a renewed determination. Miguel approached the two of you under the shade, whistle hanging low around his neck and baseball cap calming the mess of curls you had grown used to seeing in the morning, looking absolutely delectable—

Focus.

“You ready?” Miguel beamed at both of you, mirroring the determination that was presenting itself in Gabi’s eyes. It was in moments like these that you noticed just how alike they were physically and temperamentally.

With a nod from her, you released her hand, watching as she made her way toward the field with Miguel, a newfound confidence radiating from her every step.

As she joined her teammates, you stayed nearby, observing from a distance. The initial nervousness gradually transformed into enthusiasm as she embraced the camaraderie of the sport. With each touch of the ball, her confidence grew, and her smile widened.

You couldn't help but feel a swell of pride as you watched Gabi blend into the rhythm of the game. The braid you had stayed up the whole time, and whatever nerves you didn't even realize *you* had shaken off the longer you stayed. Miguel also had a way with coaching, despite how intimidated a few of the kids on the younger side were at first. Having seen how easily Gabi latched on to him, however, that quickly disappeared.

Despite your teasings of him earlier, he was a natural. You could tell he loved coaching—loved putting them to work and operating as a unit, taking the time to listen to them and change whatever was necessary to get them comfortable, but still getting them to the point where they were actually in a place to succeed.

In another life, you internally remarked, *Miguel O'Hara would've run a society like the Navy.*

Too deep into your thoughts, you failed to realize that the aforementioned coach had approached you on the outskirts of the field. Miguel sat down next to you sooner than expected, breathing out a sigh of terse relief. You quirked an eyebrow. "Aren't you supposed to be coaching?"

"Sharon, one of the soccer moms, started to complain about *the conditions of the field*, said I was pushing them too hard," He grumbled at the last statement, dropping his head in defeat. "We've only been twenty minutes in. I sent the girls on a water break."

"What, you?" you said, your tone laced with disbelief. "Pfft. If anything, you should be pushing them harder. Gotta get them started young, become a kid's villain origin story," you teased, a playful smirk on your face.

"Ha ha."

The two of you sat there for a while, taking in the view.

"I know you don't work tomorrow, but," Miguel's eyes stayed fixed on the grass as he awaited your answer, his voice carrying something undetectable. It almost seemed like he was nervous. "Gabi and I are going out for dinner sometime tomorrow night to celebrate our first practice and we'd love for you to join us."

"Yeah," you said with a smile, the corners of your lips curling upwards despite your attempt to contain your emotions. "I would love that."

After practice, Gabi sprinted toward you, drenched with sweat and grass and positively *radiating* with pride. It was contagious, swelling with pride as her dad joined the two of you. Miguel scooped her up effortlessly into his arms, lifting her onto his shoulders.

"¿Quién es mi estrellita?" Miguel exclaimed, his voice filled with love and admiration, as Gabi giggled with pure delight. Her small hands clung to his head, her laughter echoing across the soccer field.

You joined in the laughter, following closely behind the father-daughter duo, carrying their soccer gear in your arms as you let them relish the moment.

But to your surprise, Miguel gently tugged you along, drawing you closer to them, closing the physical distance between you. "Well come on, don't stray too far from us. We don't bite, do we, Gabi?"

Gabi grinned at you then, with all-consuming joy and genuine happiness, and the realization washed over you like a sudden wave.

It caught you off guard, the warmth of it spreading through your chest. You had become more than just an occasional presence in the O'Hara home; you had become an integral part of their lives. It had happened so organically, so subtly, that you hadn't even noticed it taking hold.

The car hummed with a peaceful silence as Miguel drove you home, Gabi fast asleep in the backseat.

One of Miguel's hands tapped lightly on the steering wheel, a quiet rhythm that echoed the beat of his thoughts. The other hand found its way to rest on your thigh. When he rolled to a stop in front of your driveway, he seemed to pause, mulling over what he wanted to say. Instead, you beat him to it. "You sure you don't want any help tucking her in?"

Miguel's gaze softened, his eyes reflecting the depth of his appreciation. He reached out to gently touch your hand, his touch a silent reassurance. "It's alright," he replied. "I think we've kept you long enough, and it's late."

"I'll see you tomorrow?"

Miguel's response came with a gentle nod, his voice carrying a touch of warmth. "Yeah," he affirmed, a smile tugging at the corners of his lips. "I'll see you."

It was hard to walk away.

As you twisted the knob to your front door, you were expecting to find your house quiet at the late hour. But instead, as you stepped inside, the atmosphere hit you like a sudden gust of wind—tense and strained. Confusion knitted your brows together as you heard voices coming from the living room. Your heart skipped a beat, realizing your parents were talking to someone.

The elation in your veins turned into apprehension, and you cautiously made your way down the hallway. Each step felt heavy, uncertainty gnawing at your insides. As you approached the living room, the hushed murmurs grew louder, and the unease intensified.

With a deep breath, you pushed open the door, revealing your ex-fiancé sitting on the couch, engaged in an intense conversation with your parents. Their faces wore expressions you had

never seen before—a mix of discomfort and guarded politeness. Your ex-fiancé's presence here caught you completely off guard, a jolt of white-hot surprise shooting through your veins.

Silence fell as all eyes turned towards you, their looks a blend of relief and tension. Your ex-fiancé's smile faltered, his eyes widening slightly. Your parents' expressions shifted, an unspoken apology hanging in the air.

“What are you doing here?”

Chapter End Notes

thank you for waiting! life (nursing school) got in the way a few times and prevented me from updating sooner than i would have preferred but please expect at least one chapter every week! i fully intend on finishing this story by early august.

special thank you from the bottom of my heart to those who have sent so many kind comments, you guys make my day! i also want to thank the people who commented on and corrected my spanis in previous chapters. if you notice any more mistakes/see better ways to word a certain sentence in this chapter and future chapters, call me out on it! for this chapter, i used deepl, but if you know of better resources, i'd love to hear!

this chapter would not have been possible without the gracious and blessing hands of heather (tumblr: ladysanjo) and sierra (tumblr: kuroosgreasyweave) ily both eternally.

come haunt me on tumblr: rosesaints.

true blue

Chapter Notes

sorry for the wait! stick around near the end to hear me ramble lol

trigger warning(s): brief violence towards the end, it's sequestered into its own little section and can be easily skipped through!

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

You've pictured this scene unfolding before you a thousand times since you left that apartment with him.

There were a few scenarios in your head where you stood your ground, played the role of the confident and amazing, ridiculously successful ex-fiancee. They're the ones you most preferred; walking past him on a busy street with a fully-fledged career, a new blowout, looking better than you ever had before. Saying *I'm so much better now that I'm without you*.

Of course, there were other scenarios where you caused chaos. Flipping over tables, screaming all your frustrations out on him, making him hurt the way he made you hurt. Relishing in the confusion and hurt and stress that your imaginary self would've caused. Not as practical, and a lot more likely to get you on a quick trip to the police station, but it was nice to wonder nonetheless.

Reality is much more somber.

All eyes were on you and at that moment, you didn't know what the right course of action was. With all of your different scenarios and imaginary confrontations, you hadn't pictured it coming to fruition so soon. You knew you were grasping for straws, fiddling with time, but you had gotten lost in how weightless you had felt during the past month.

You thought of two pairs of brown eyes across the dining table, crinkling around the edges, laughing as you tried to swallow down milk after their little ghost pepper surprise. You thought of green grass and hot, sunny days and the smiles that would shine down above and below you as you hoisted Gabi into your arms.

They were a factor you didn't account for—or even expected, in your little scenarios. But somehow, you thought, you would've much rather been standing there instead of whatever this was, with your fiancé looking at you expectantly and your parents lost in confusion.

Instead of letting the silence hang further in the room, your fiancé stabs at the moment. "It's good to see you."

You resisted the urge to laugh. "*It's good to see me?* That's what you're opening with?"

“Well—”

“If you’re here for the ring, it’s gone,” Surprisingly, you remained calm, but there was something bubbling to the surface every second he stood in *your* living room, taking up space. “I don’t have anything that you would want.”

“I’m... I’m not here for the ring,” He looked sheepish, looking down at your floor shamelessly and you wondered how the hell you were able to stay with him for so long. Here he was, playing the part of the doting and devoted boyfriend gone down a wrong path, here to make amends, but for the first time, you weren’t buying it. He murmurs a silly, stupid pet name he had called you in college. “Come home. I miss you, my parents miss you, and it’s not the same without you.”

For the first time, you looked at your parents. Something rolls around in your chest and you had to keep your composure. As the words left your lips, you couldn’t help the way your voice trembled, however. “Can you give us a minute?”

Your mother looked like she wanted to refuse, to stay and say some choice words about him but you wanted to deal with this on your own. You looked at your dad and he nods, ushering her out.

Once they left, you didn’t bother hiding the flux of emotions that rose up your throat.

“You have no right,” The volume in your voice surprised you, but you didn’t stop. “No right to come back here, and—and asking me to come home. You’re insane. After what you did?”

The more you remembered, the more the red-hot anger threatened to take over. This guy took away your apartment, your career, your dignity, and now he was trying to take away the one singular moment of peace you had had since you graduated. Maybe even since the moment you met him.

“Why are you really here?” You couldn’t help but ask. It was selfish, but you wanted to hear it, to hear the final nail in the coffin and set him loose.

“I know that it’s really sudden and out of the blue, but I just couldn’t stop thinking about you, and I broke up with her, she’s gone,” He paused, pondering then, taking his glasses off and rubbing an exasperated hand through his hair. “She couldn’t keep up with her part of the lease, and—”

“You’re kidding. You’re fucking kidding,” Unbelievable. Of course, the new, shinier model, you remembered her—barely out of her freshman year of college—couldn’t keep up with her side of the rent. “Get the fuck out of my house.”

“Come on.”

“Don’t ever bother coming around here again,” Without any ceremony, you gestured at the door. “I don’t want to see you ever again. I mean it.”

It felt like forever until he finally left the view of your living room window, rolling out of your street and disappearing into oblivion. There's a weight that you didn't even know rested heavily on your shoulders, and you knew that you should've felt relieved, or felt proud for handling that the way you did but something lingered, and you suddenly felt so out of place within your house.

At that point, your parents had joined you at your little stoop by the window. Hushed and apologetic explanations fell haphazardly over your deaf ears, "*he insisted on talking to you, we tried to get him to leave but you got home before—*"

You needed to leave. The overwhelming desire to leave and go somewhere, anywhere, took over and you were picking up your shoes and your bag and your car keys and rushing out of the door before you could fully process what happened, what exactly took over you in that moment.

Outside, you thought, that it should have been raining. It should have been pouring cats and dogs, thunder and lightning all around you, but instead, there was a sky full of stars. The rain would've been fitting, it would've paired well with whatever was brewing inside you, but all you were met with was an incomparable silence, a bright night sky, and the sleepy lull of your hometown.

You wanted to get out of it.

You had never, ever, wanted to force yourself out of this homey, suburban image. So you hopped into the car. It's a scene straight out of a rom-com (minus the rain), and you would've resented the comparison, but then you were sobbing and screaming along to some cheesy breakup mix, something from thirty years ago and driving around without anywhere to go.

There were a few stops along your little impromptu road trip, a gas station, a Target (walking around aimlessly was admittedly, very therapeutic despite the stares you got for going around fifteen minutes before they closed), and your old high school. It all felt wrong.

None of it felt as right as when you reached for your phone, typed in *Miguel O'Hara*, and pressed call.

It only rang once, twice before he picked up. "*Hey. What's going on?*"

"H-Hey. I'm just," You choked out a sob, despite trying so, so hard to keep it together. "I just wanted to... to check in on Gabi. See if she got to bed without any—any issues. She's been having some trouble going to sleep, so, so I just wanted to... to make sure."

You heard a pause from the other line, some shuffling, and then his voice became clearer. He said your name, soft and gentle and it made your shoulders relax. "*Is everything okay?*"

The question should've been simple, and on any other day, you wished that you could've responded like you usually did, all lazy smiles and easy confidence while the sunlight bore down on you on those mornings when you made him stay in bed a little bit longer. You realized then, that you wanted to come home. "No. No, I don't think's everything okay."

“Hey,” Miguel’s voice reverberated throughout your dark car. “Lo que sea que esté mal, podemos hablarlo. Tú y yo.” *Whatever’s wrong, we can talk about it. You and me.*

“Can I come over?” An exhausted laugh escaped you then. “It’s a long story.”

“Of course,” There was no doubt or hesitation. Just Miguel. “Do you want me to come get you from your house? It’s pretty late.”

Suddenly, you were hit with the realization that you were probably a good fifteen or twenty miles away. “I’m actually—um. I hopped into my car and I’m fine, don’t worry, but I can be there soon. Just give me some time.”

You could hear him rustle, abrupt static coming through your speaker as you heard him stand up. Worried. “Are you sure? Where are you?”

“Yeah. I promise. I’m just a few minutes away, I’ll be there as soon as I can.”

“Okay,” Even through the phone, you could picture him, running a hand through his hair. “Could you send me your location, just in case? I just want to make sure you get back safely.”

With some more reassurance on your part to Miguel, you sent over your location and said goodbye with the promise to see him again soon. “I’ll see you in a few minutes. Swear.” When your hands touched the sides of your steering wheel, is when you finally let yourself fall apart, resolved to let it all out and get it out of the way before you saw him.

It must have been close to midnight when you finally drove into your street, quietly and carefully pulling into your driveway before making the trip just a couple steps over to the O’Hara house.

Before your hand could even reach the door to knock, it was opening in a flurry, and you were suddenly face-to-face with a very concerned Miguel. There were lines on his face you’d never noticed before and a curl in his eyebrows that you wanted to crease away.

This time, it was different. There was no rushed and hasty pretense to pull you in by your waist, peppering you with kisses, and pulling you into his bed. Instead, he’s wrapping you up in a hug you didn’t know you sorely needed, watching the rise and fall of his chest as he visibly relaxed in your arms.

You were aware that you probably looked crazy, besides yourself and having broken down multiple times in the few hours you had been away from them. “I’m sorry,” You croaked out weakly, but Miguel was quick to shut down any of that.

“Don’t be,” He murmured into your hair, and it was so easy. So easy to lose yourself in the vibrato and timbre of his voice, to forget what just transpired in your own house. “Come in. It’s cold.”

Your shoes went where they usually rested, next to his and Gabi’s near the doorway.

The house was quiet, and you were glad for the silence, listening around you to check that Gabi was asleep. You didn't want her to see you at your lowest point, not after the nerve-filled day that she had already had. She was a sensitive kid, and way too smart for her own good, and you didn't think you could've kept it together with her and Miguel in the same room.

It was easy to sink down onto the couch, even easier to lay your legs over his and look up at the ceiling in defeat. The moment felt unusually intimate, and a hopeful, most likely foolish part of you internally remarked that coming home to this wouldn't be so bad, wouldn't have minded doing this for years, but you brushed that thought aside, just content to sit there for a while.

Then you were breathing out a deep sigh that had been begging to be released the whole night since you left your house in a haze, and then the words were tumbling out, clumsy and unprepared off your lips as you began. "My ex-fiancé came by today."

You didn't dare to look over at him, afraid and apprehensive of what you would see, so you kept going.

"He came by and he asked me to... to come home," A pause. "And I just couldn't do it."

"When we ended things, I thought, oh my god. My life is over. Just hours after graduation and I was out of a fiancé, a home, a career," You let out a hoarse, dry laugh. "He got me blacklisted from the Daily Bugle. He took everything from me and then it was just like, I had to get everything figured out right away, to just rebound and resurface and come up so quickly."

"I was able to forget about it and to push it down, and it finally felt like I could breathe again, and then he came by and really just," You mimicked an explosion with your hands, then you dropped them by your sides in loss. You felt embarrassed with your rambling, but when you finally mustered up the courage to look over at him, eyes drifting to his with uncertainty, all you saw was anger. A seething anger that loomed dangerously close to engulfing him. "I felt really lost."

Your words hung in the air, and Miguel deliberated on them, meticulously weighing his replies. Finally, he spoke, his words coming out ragged and barely contained. "Did he leave?"

"Eventually. Not without any fuss, but he's gone."

"Good," Miguel's eyes searched yours for any hurt, softening when he saw none, offering a gentle smile that spoke volumes of relief and reassurance, but there was an edge to the next thing he said. "We'll keep it that way."

A question had been lingering at the forefront of your mind, patiently waiting for the opportune moment to be asked. So you seized it. "How did you juggle it all? How did you just... know your place in life and get it all figured out?"

"Well, for starters, a lot of self-reflection and time," He shook his head, almost like he was in disbelief. "It wasn't too long ago, and I was scared shitless after graduation and I didn't know

what to do.”

Despite yourself, you had a hard time believing him. Miguel was one of those people who just seemed like they were *born* to be a parent, with every careful and overwhelmingly supportive touch of his actions with Gabi. It was something that you had admired, a sense of purpose, and just true, undeniable belonging. “*Nuh uh. The Miguel O’Hara, genius geneticist, incredible father, one hell of a little league coach, didn’t know what to do?*”

“Shut up,” He grinned at you, with no malice seeping off his words. The next thing he said was more gentle, more genuine. “But yeah, it... it took me a while. I was so angry for a long time. I didn’t really give too much of a damn about anything. When I graduated, I thought that there was only one path for me, and I was just this overly ambitious, uncaring jerk with nothing else going for him than science.”

“It was all I had. Until I had Gabi.”

You eyed the photos along the wall, of Gabi and Miguel in various states of suspended happiness and you realized, in every single photo that you had seen without her, there was something missing. Miguel often looked mismatched and lost, until she came along.

“Alchemax wanted me to imprint genetic codes into human physiology. It was experimental, groundbreaking technology and we were on the very precipice of it,” Miguel looked down at his hands, searching for something that was long gone. “I could’ve been famous, *fuck*, maybe even won a Nobel Prize. But then I thought of Gabi and it just couldn’t compare. I wouldn’t trade a single thing to come home to this every night.”

The next thing he said made your heart leap out of your chest.

“Your plans will get derailed. People will come and go through your life, but sometimes, sometimes you just have to let things happen. Let people crash and burn your plans. Who gives a shit about *what’s meant to be* anyway?”

“Just do what you want.”

It was quiet while you digested the impact of his words, and without even thinking, your hands reached across the couch to interlock with his. From the corners of your eyes, you could see the faint outline of his shoulders coming undone, his hands confidently and easily clasping yours with just as much clarity. You let them remain there, and it felt right.

“I guess now, I should add an amazing motivational speaker to the list—”

Your name falls off his lips in teasing disbelief. “That’s what you take from my whole spiel?”

“Hmm. That wasn’t all I took from it.”

The next time he said your name was like a revelation, like gospel. His eyes searched yours, and somehow you knew.

And then you closed the gap between the two of you, hands reaching for him like absolution to a sinner. *He's gasping your name once more*, hot breath fanning your face and then he was grasping the skin of your thighs and pulling you on top of him, groaning as you slotted in perfectly on his lap.

You writhed on top of him, moaning in barely concealed satisfaction as he deepened the kiss, cupping your face like he couldn't bear to let go of you. When you pulled back, his eyes are completely dark with desire, pupils dilated and lashes falling heavily onto his high cheekbones, regarding you with so much admiration and need.

Those eyes.

His hands were everywhere then, on your thighs, your waist, your neck, your chest. You could feel him beginning to roam the outskirts of your shirt, teasing and playing with the hem. A ragged sigh of relief forced itself from somewhere inside you when he finally bunched up the fabric and touched your skin, hands reaching around your back to undo the clasp and then your lips were returning clumsily to his, biting and suckling on his bottom lip and relishing in the almost pained, but deeply attractive growl that left him.

You kept your eyes locked intently on his while you helped him with removing your top, fingers going over his, watching as his gaze shifted from your eyes to somewhere lower. "*Ni siquiera sabes lo que me haces, dulce niña.*"

You wanted him, *all of him*, couldn't stand to go even a second without it, and then you were pulling his shirt up in turn, breath catching in your throat when you felt how warm he was, enjoying the sculpted terrain of his chest and abdomen as his hands went to yours once again, pressing you closer to him.

"Do you want this? I need to hear you say it, *cariño*, want you to tell me how much you want it."

You were nodding, half-delirious and it wasn't even a question, without any doubts and you told him exactly how you wanted him. "Yes—yes, please, please, I just want *you*. Need you inside."

There was no grace or patience in the way you both hastily peeled the rest of each other's clothes off, and then there was the slow drag of his cock against your folds, teasing you, letting the anticipation hang further in the air just to torture you a little bit more—until you were practically begging for it.

"Shit, baby," Miguel groaned lowly into your ear when his attempts to enter you were hindered by the wet squelch of your pussy as he tried to bottom out. "You gotta relax for me a bit, okay? Don't know how much longer I can hold out with you like this for me."

All you could do was nod mindlessly, trying your hardest to stifle the urge to just sink down, and with a gasp, you jerked forward, eyes widening in pure, unadulterated pleasure as you took all of him inside. Miguel gasped, reaching for your hips.

This was so different from all of your previous rendezvous with him. You weren't complaining, not with the view below you of Miguel falling apart inside you.

"Look at me," In this light, Miguel looked downright heavenly, eyes drifting between you and where you were connected with him, murmuring his agreement. *Anything, anything you want.* You sat in delicious realization as you had the reins. "Don't look away."

It was unspoken and evident in the warmth and desire he followed your words closely, never once breaking eye contact. *I'm all yours.*

You began rolling your hips in earnest, starting off slow and cautiously with up-and-down movements, your hands gripping his shoulders for stability as you teased him, almost mocked him similarly to the way he'd edge you in past times, making you feel every depth of him and forcing you to stay stuck in his pace.

Suffice to say, while you had learned the tolerance and patience of playing this long game with him, biding your time, Miguel was very close to falling apart.

There was no telling how long your sickly sweet torture of him lasted, gushing and clenching around him to the point that he had to lay his head back on the head of the sofa, breathing heavily and closing his eyes at the feeling of you around him.

You could've done this all day, watching intently as the vein connecting his shoulder and neck throbbed with need, but then he was slurring endless praise for you to keep going, to use him just how you wanted him. You almost felt bad, until you began rocking faster so suddenly that it must've given him whiplash, effectively ending the prolonged

"*Dios.* Don't stop, please, *gatita*—"

His hand snaked in between your legs, pressing hard against the hood of your clit and then you were coming around him, whiteness bursting across your vision as you moaned and writhed on top of him, riding out the throes of your pleasure.

You slumped, but you remained on top of him there, far, far from over.

"Miguel, 'm tired, help me," The next words that left your lips were foreign, but it was also the clearest inclination that you had ever felt the whole night. "*Want to feel you cum inside.*"

Miguel froze below you as if assessing the weight of your words. "Are you sure?"

"Please. I want to feel it."

How could he have possibly said no to that?

The next course of events that transpired was enough to make your brain short-circuit, as the hands on your hips fell to your ass, more demanding, reclaiming the control that was rightfully his. Another pause, The way he kissed you was so gentle, you were almost lulled into a false sense of security—but then he was slamming into you with the force of his whole body, his hips touching up and hitting something within you that made you see stars.

Oh my god. Oh my god, oh my god—fuck.

“You think,” He growled out through gritted teeth, moving from your lips to the side of your neck and sinking in with teeth that felt so much sharper. “You can just get away with saying something like that? Like it wouldn’t do something to me?”

He tutted, shaking his head and meeting your eyes with the same confidence and danger that he had shown you from across the bar during that first night. “No, no. That just won’t—God, fuck,” Miguel’s head was thrown back when you moaned around him, unable to respond with coherent words. “That just won’t do.”

“I’m going to make you feel me for *days* .”

You whimpered, keeling under his touch as you let him fulfill his promise, merely going along for the ride and realizing, *no, you were never fully in control in the first place.*

His hips began to stutter as he plowed his hips against yours a few more times, each thrust growing progressively sloppy and uncontrolled, moaning out your name and other things you couldn’t possibly comprehend in your dazed state. “*You rode me so good, yeah? Going to show you just how grateful I am.*”

When you felt the warmth spreading around you, all-consuming and so, so right, you thanked whatever lied in the heavens above you for leading you to him.

You laid in his arms, content and sated and *giddy with happiness* as he rode out the rest of his orgasm, his head nestled into the crook of your shoulder.

The room felt hot and heavy. The two of you were *fucked out*, your breaths intermingling with his own as you rested your forehead on top of his, smiling in a tired way that he was elated to reflect. “Let’s go to bed.”

Miguel found it hard to leave.

He insisted on tucking you into bed, despite your tired insistence that you could stay awake. His hands roamed the soft fabric of *his* shirt that you were now wearing. Sleep came to you easily, resting with a content smile as you faced him with only mere inches separating the two of you on his vast, California King bed, the day’s troubles slowly wearing off your form in lines as you rested into a deep slumber.

It was two in the morning, and most places were already shut down, all except for one. And he knew he had to do something.

See, he lied to you earlier. His anger never quite, fully went away, just lingered beneath the surface. Waiting.

And it surged at the mention of what your ex-fiancé had done. It rippled when he heard your voice, unsure and lost, through the speaker of his phone, threatened to boil over when he

listened to the full extent of just how he ruined your prospects and learned the full reason for why you were back home.

He tried his best to hide the way his fists clenched at his side, figured that maybe it was best to let bygones be bygones and let you handle it, but then he saw the way you had curled into yourself on his couch, on the verge of breaking.

Now, that just wouldn't do.

Sometimes, Miguel made concessions for his actions. There were times when he let his anger fester and seep into his consciousness in rare, opportune moments and he knew that when it did, there was no stopping what he was about to do.

He convinced himself that he had pushed down that part of himself a long time ago, abandoned along with his ambitions at the first floor of Alchemax, but it drove him to the same bar you met him anyway, watching from across the street as your *ex-fiancé* pounded back shots with two women draped across his shoulders.

The recognition rang true in his mind as he reminisced on some of your mother's Facebook posts about the two of you. It was him, no doubt about it.

Miguel looked at himself in the mirror then and allowed himself the time to reconsider, to drive back to his house where you and Gabi remained asleep, blissfully unaware of what he was about to do.

He saw your ex-fiancé laugh, victorious and unassuming, and decided in that split second that there was no going back. Not for you.

It was too easy to lure the guy into an alleyway with the false pretense of *fucking drugs* — and on a regular occasion, he would've laughed about how cliché it all was, how stupid this guy was for following him into danger—but he had a greater goal to accomplish.

Miguel didn't feel any remorse as he watched his target crumple to the ground, wheezing and shielding his hands up to him, and that's when Miguel laughed as if that would have possibly done anything to stop what he was about to do.

"I'm sorry—I'm sorry, I don't know who... who you think I am but I'm from out of town, you've got the wrong guy—"

"Oh, I think I've got just the right one," His voice grew lower, his mocking laugh dying off the edge of his tongue as he tilted his head at the simpering mess beneath him. "I'm not the one you should be apologizing to."

His desperate attempts and pathetic pleas to get him to stop fell on deaf ears as Miguel continued, cool and composed, barely breaking a sweat even as he delivered more blows upon him.

"Go home. Fix yourself up. Get her that internship back, along with anything else you could've possibly lost her, or I swear," He forced your ex-fiancé to look up at him then, and

lets his words hang menacingly in the air. Doesn't feel anything as he sputters out an agreement through raspy breaths. "You'll have a lot worse coming for you."

Miguel stopped at his office on the way home, stripping off the remnants of his actions and washing off the blood that had accumulated on his hands and beneath his fingernails. He made sure to be meticulous, fixing the collar of his shirt and rolling up his sleeves as he pulled out of the parking lot and put in directions to a 24-hour diner he knew that you and Gabi adored.

He ordered a dozen doughnuts and a breakfast pizza for all of you to share in the morning, leaving a hefty tip as he pushed out of the drive-through and headed *home*.

The house was still as he left it, carefully peeling off his shoes and placing them next to yours as he made his way to the kitchen, setting down your breakfast for the next day and fixing up two quick glasses of water for himself and for you before he made his way upstairs.

When he pushed the door open, his breath caught in his throat.

It seemed, that in the time he was gone, Gabi must've had a nightmare. There were some nights where, despite her best attempts to act grown-up and mature, she would still make her way to his room and would huddle close to him in the dark.

Gabi had migrated to his bed in search of him but instead found you. Your arms lazily draped over her, fingers still caught combing through her hair as one of Gabi's bedtime books lied abandoned next to the two of you, fast asleep and snoring softly as they waited for him to come back.

In that instant, Miguel knew that he was in deep, deep trouble. He was screwed, there was no other way about it. It was you. *It had been you, all along, all this time.*

Chapter End Notes

hi! i'm so sorry about the long wait, i fell victim to a failed situationship with my ex of three years that ended very abruptly on sunday night (yk what they say, the greatest minds of our generation have been destroyed by six-month long situationships 😊) and that sapped out all of my motivation to write. this was also written in a time crunch, so i'm going to try and smooth out minor mistakes when i come home from work, but i hope you liked this one! the next chapter will be from miguel's point of view and it's already half-written, so expect an update to come much sooner than this one.

i've also posted this fic on tumblr (rosesaints) and i have a lot more goodies in store over there, so far i've posted a playlist but i also plan on posting more in-depth explanations

for miguel and the mc's actions over there! come slay the day away with me over there :)

thank you so so much for all the kind words and the support. they brighten my day every time.

let the light in

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

In the year of 1999, Miguel O'Hara's world came into focus for the first time. He was six years old, and the world was blurry and still too large for him to even begin to comprehend.

His mother, Conchata, was an eccentric woman. When he was younger, he believed that it was just her unique charm, a puzzling and unpredictable quality that drew her to pull him out of class to run to the fair at the last minute or speed through a silent grocery store on a shopping cart. It was unbecoming of a scientist's wife, but as she rolled him faster down the condiment aisle, he was still too young to care, and it was still just him and his mom in their own little corner of the world.

"How come papa never joins us for dinner?" He had asked his mother once, a long time ago, across a table that was too long and empty for just the two of them. The words pushed themselves off the tip of his tongue clumsily and awkwardly, but something pulsed within him too loudly to ignore.

"No te preocupes por eso, Miggy," Conchata replied between bites of the frozen food they had picked out at the store earlier. "What if we went to the science center again tomorrow? Just the two of us?"

"Mama—"

"No más preguntas," Her response was brisk and cold, unlike the way she would usually speak to him. When she saw how Miguel's eyes retreated to the floor, her voice softened. "Please. Let's just enjoy this."

After that, it helped to balance out their family, he reasoned, having found comfort in the spontaneity when his father would often disappear from the picture altogether.

1999 was when Gabriel was born. Gabriel was a gift, an undisputed blessing from the moment he was born, and for a time, Miguel had to admit he resented him. Resented the way his father looked at him with more pride and joy than he had ever cared to shine his way, resented the way his mother nervously glanced from him to Gabriel to him again, resented the way he was forced to sit alone in the waiting room while their relatives and family friends came to visit the rest of his family at the hospital.

Holiday photos became strained; he would remain on the outer corner of images, always, on the opposite side of his father and Gabriel.

There were a few times when he resolved to get to the bottom of it, to force his father to look at him and see him and give him just a little bit of the attention that he gave so easily to Gabriel, but to no avail. There was always this unexplainable distance, a rift that grew miles long between them.

But then Gabriel's first word was "Miggy." Not "mama," not "papa." Miggy.

The resentment toward Gabriel didn't last long at all, making way for something easier and lighter. Suddenly his mother's shopping cart became a little more crowded, and finally, he had someone else to share the rush of evading the manager at the grocery store with, as their mother pushed through tight corners and raced faster down the aisles.

But no matter how much Gabriel loved him wholeheartedly, like love was just something that deserved to be unconditionally given out, it made no effect on how tense and strained things became between Miguel and his father. While Gabriel was following him from the moment he could walk and step towards him, every day it felt like his father was walking farther and farther away.

A defining memory with his father took place a week before his fifth grade science fair.

Miguel remembered the day clearly, standing quietly beside his father on the subway while holding onto a railing, watching as other parents and kids held hands while the train would shake and rumble. His father kept his hands squarely at his side.

Conchata had begged his father to allow Miguel to accompany him to work one day at Alchemax, in order to gather inspiration for his project, a silly experiment that tested genetics among generations of fruit flies. It was a last-ditch attempt to connect with his father with something, anything.

As he stepped into the grand halls of Alchemax Headquarters, a twinkle of awe sparkled in his eyes, growing even brighter as his father guided him into his very own laboratory; His father allowed him to look over current and previous experiments without his usual, stern warnings, and like a fool, he believed that it was a turning point in their relationship.

He could still remember the way he shook in excitement, breathlessly cooing over vials and serums that rested on his father's workbench, so eager and glad to be a part of the one facet of his father's world that remained untouched by Gabriel.

"Miguel," His father called with a strained voice. At the sound of his name, he turned hastily to find his father facing an unfamiliar man. The room felt smaller, the air heavier, as Miguel approached the man standing beside his father. His heart pounded in his chest, a mixture of anticipation and trepidation.

"Come introduce yourself," his father urged, his hand resting on Miguel's shoulder. It was a touch he had still not grown accustomed to, one that felt like a vice, trapping him in place.

As Miguel drew closer, he couldn't help but notice the uncanny resemblance between himself and the man he was being introduced to. The stranger's eyes bore into him, reflecting his own features back at him. It was as if he was looking at a distorted mirror, a reflection that sent shivers down his spine.

"Tyler Stone," his father introduced, his voice carrying thinly veiled resentment. The weight of his father's hand on his shoulder seemed heavy, sharp nails digging into his skin that he couldn't wrench away from. He remained frozen, his eyes locked with those of Mr. Stone.

“This is my son. Miguel.”

The words hung in the air, a moment pregnant with significance.

The next words that came out of Mr. Stone's mouth were intended to be a compliment, but to Miguel, they felt like an unbearably cruel joke, a mockery of his existence. “Well. Don't you look *just* like your father?”

For the first time, Miguel saw his father the way his father saw him. It was as if a veil had been lifted, revealing the truth that had been hidden in plain sight all along. He saw the expectation and disappointment, the unspoken burden that hung between them during his entire childhood.

The anger came in droves soon after.

He stood parallel to his father on the subway back home hours later, fists squared at his sides as the train shook and rumbled on its tracks. No words needed to be said between them.

He had spent his childhood searching for validation, trying to prove himself worthy of his father's love. But that day, standing face to face with his own reflection in the form of Mr. Stone, he couldn't help but feel a surge of self-hatred. Every imperfection, every flaw, felt magnified, as if he had been carved from the same flawed mold.

Miguel clenched his fists, fighting the urge to lash out, to scream at the unfairness of it all.

A week later, it was as if his hands were moving at their own accord. His science fair, a day that he had spent so long preparing for, and he felt so—so angry. Fucking enraged to his core. He didn't remember when he picked up a baseball bat, didn't remember when he started swinging aimlessly. But he vividly remembered crying in the midst of a ruined fair, destroyed projects and mock volcanoes and dioramas as other parents and children watched in horror.

Most of all, he remembered his mother cradling him in her arms, cupping his face, and sobbing along with him. “Miggy—Miguel. Look at me, mijo. Lo siento. Lo siento. Lo siento.”

He had never felt so small, so insignificant before. Worst of all, his father didn't even bother showing up.

“Hey,” You snapped him out of the recesses of his dream, carefully pushing stray strands away from his face. “Did you have a nightmare?”

Blinking away the remnants of sleep, he became acutely aware of his surroundings. The first rays of sunlight peeked through the curtains, illuminating the room in a gentle glow. He was lying in bed, the warmth of the covers cocooning him, and the soft, steady breaths of you beside him, a soothing melody in the early morning silence. Next to them, nestled between their forms, laid Gabi, her cherubic face peaceful in slumber.

The lines of worry that had etched themselves into his face over the years seemed to momentarily fade away, realization flooding through Miguel like a cleansing wave. “No. No, it was nothing.”

“Is everything okay?” You looked at him with so much worry and care, and Miguel felt as though his heart might burst.

"Better now," Miguel whispered, his voice carrying a tenderness that seemed to envelop the room.

Subconsciously, his fingers moved of their own accord, gently tracing the contours of your face, fingertips grazing the softness of your skin. He was mesmerized by the way your lashes fluttered in the sunlight, the delicate rise and fall of your brows relaxing at his response, the way your fingers traveled up to intertwine with his. He noticed the way you paused at his bruised knuckles. "Don't worry about it . "

A warm smile tugged at the corners of Miguel's lips as he met your gaze. He wanted to ease your concerns, to make all your problems go away. “How’d you sleep?”

“Good,” You responded, a smile mirroring his. Your eyes drifted down to Gabi. “She had a nightmare in the middle of the night and decided to join me. Poor girl was crying and I just couldn’t resist. I hope you don’t mind.”

I just woke up with my two girls next to me. How could I mind that? “Of course. I don’t mind at all.”

There were flowers in the kitchen. Miguel didn’t remember the last time he got flowers, but he soon found out that it was yours and Gabi’s doing. A vase filled with daisies smiled up at him as he popped the breakfast pizza in the microwave. The room felt lighter; Gabi’s colorful crafts were hung up with lettered magnets on the fridge, your phone was blaring some Etta James song, and you were trying to coax Gabi to sing along with you.

“I want a Sunday kind of love,” You crooned to Gabi off-key, dancing around with her in your arms as she rolled her eyes and tried to fight a grin. “A love to last, past Saturday night! Sing along with me, Gabi!”

“Dad, make it stop,” Gabi giggled, spinning after you twirled her on her tip-toes. ‘Get me out of here.’

Miguel shook his head, chuckling softly as you swung Gabi around once again. “No, I think I’m good over here. Nice try, though.”

After the science fair incident, his father hardly spared any effort in sending him away. In a whirlwind of hurried arrangements, he found himself hastily boarding a train, his meager possessions in tow, journeying from the bustling streets of Midtown to a stately preparatory school nestled in the heart of the Bronx. He barely got to say goodbye to his mother or Gabriel.

Structure and Control, was the school's motto. No one approached him at the dining hall, having been dubbed a liability and a risk by the school staff. He spent the rest of his childhood stewing in the anger he felt that day, surrounded by four walls and people who didn't know him, mourning the loss of a father he knew and a father he didn't know.

But he wasn't a powerless child anymore. He was standing in the kitchen with you and his daughter, and you were dancing with Gabi on the vinyl floor, soaking up the sunlight that streamed lazily in through the window.

Eventually, you relented once Gabi's laughter died down, content to hum and sway along to the slow tune as she sat perched atop a tall stool, her hair falling in gentle waves around her shoulders as you began to braid earnestly. You looked across the kitchen table, grinning as he set the breakfast down in front of them. "You're a godsend. When did you even have time to get all of this?"

"I'm a ninja," Miguel mused, pulling up a chair next to them and grabbing some pizza in earnest. "Didn't you know?"

He knew that there were bigger responsibilities waiting for him, saw proof of it with the dozens of unopened emails and text messages on his phone, knew that there were bound to be some repercussions for him acting so recklessly earlier that morning with your ex-fiancé, but as you and Gabi beamed at him with so much unfiltered joy, Miguel knew there was no other way he wanted to spend his day.

It was easy to place his phone on "Do Not Disturb" for the day and even easier to set his undivided attention on his girls. "What's the plan for today?"

After breakfast, at Gabi's eager request, the day's activities seamlessly transitioned to the familiar haven of the backyard. Miguel laid a worn and cherished blanket on the verdant floor, the years of use visible in its fading print. He reclined on the blanket, a spectator to the impromptu game unfolding before him. A smile tugged at the corners of his lips as he watched you engage Gabi in a spirited round of soccer.

The twinkle in your eyes mirrored hers, your movements fluid, but clumsy. He couldn't help but chuckle as Gabi, fueled by the same, stubborn determination that coursed through his veins, effortlessly outmaneuvered you at every turn. With each triumphant goal, her excitement radiated, intermingling with the shared laughter that filled the backyard.

After a while, you crossed your arms and dropped against him on the blanket, heaving as Gabi kept running around the yard with her soccer ball. Miguel found himself gravitating closer to you, legs intertwining with yours on the grass. "Giving up so soon? You were doing so good."

"Shut up," Miguel ducked as you playfully swatted his arm in feigned annoyance, but settled closer into the crook of his arm anyway. "She's too fast and *way* too athletic for a five-year-old, no thanks to you. I barely even passed gym class in high school. It's a surprise I lasted any longer than I did."

“Don’t be too hard on yourself. You did slightly better than the other five-year-olds she plays against.”

“She’s growing up way too fast,” You turned to him, eyes wide with bewilderment. “Did you know she was telling me that she didn’t need my help anymore with tying her shoes the other day?”

“You can’t tell me things like that,” Miguel sighed, eyeing his daughter with a mixture of bittersweetness. “I’m just glad she still pretends to need my help.”

“Can’t be too long now,” There was something teasing in your tone, a mischievous glint in your eyes. “She’s going to realize she’s way cooler than you and start tying her shoelaces herself.”

“Let’s just hope that doesn’t happen anytime soon. I don’t know if my heart could take that.”

You hummed in response, the melodious sound resonating deep within your chest. "I don't think my heart could take that either," you whispered, your words carrying a gentle echo of shared sentiment.

Gabi scored for the umpteenth time that day, kicking her ball into an imaginary goalpost against the fence. Moments later, she bounded towards the blanket, breathless and sweaty and wide-eyed, joining your little cluster on the blanket. You were mussing up her dark curls, singing her praises and laughing and inviting him in, and everything felt so right, so unequivocally real.

As the day wore on, time seemed to stretch, as if honoring Miguel's silent plea for the day to last as long as possible. They lingered in the backyard as conversations flowed, intertwined with bursts of laughter and moments of comfortable silence.

It was distinctly summer; the scent of freshly cut grass mingled with the aroma of a distant barbecue. He could hear other neighbors milling around the block, but it all seemed to blur away.

As the sun set, signaling the approaching end of their idyllic day, Gabi's eyelids grew heavy, her energy spent from the day's activities. No matter how quickly the years passed, he still carried her like he did the day she was born. Miguel scooped her up in his arms, cradling her gently as he carried her to her room with you in tow.

He wanted to raise her in a way that was different from his upbringing, wanted her to grow up in a place that was overflowing with warmth and care, to feel his love from the soft glow of her nightlight that illuminated the room, to feel it when he tucked her into bed with the blanket he bought for her with his first paycheck. “Felices sueños, mi cielo.”

Once she fell asleep, a familiar sense of comfort guided him through the familiar paths of his bedroom, leading him to the bathroom where you patiently awaited his arrival.

“Let me take care of you,” Your voice was soft, laced with tender affection. “Just for tonight.”

With deliberate movements, he allowed you to undress him and guide him into the soothing embrace of the bathtub. The air was thick with tension and want and he needed to be closer – he needed every inch of your bare skin touching his and even then that wouldn't be close enough.

It'd been years since he's felt taken care of; delicate were hands running through his hair, humming "A Sunday Kind of Love" against his ear as you caressed the shampoo into his scalp. Miguel closed his eyes and leaned his head back onto your shoulder, and allowed himself the rare opportunity to let his defenses down.

You traced the contours of his back, his shoulders, all the way down his arms to the bruising, purple swells that emerged from his knuckles. He inhaled deeply, aware of the way you were examining him under a close eye. Wondered if you saw through the carefully constructed facade and the pain that rested just below the surface.

(He wanted nothing more than to spare you from the ugly details, countless meals and nights he spent alone after years of ceaselessly pursuing meaning in his life beyond his family, how often he slept nestled between the cold walls of his office and his cluttered laboratory bench, resting his head on invitations to important events that were sent unopened back to him. There was the fact that he hadn't seen his mother or father in almost a decade, how none of his family members even knew that Gabi existed. That Gabi was even named after Gabriel.)

"You don't have to tell me about it right now," A beat passed. "But I'd like to know when you're ready."

Miguel nodded, the lump in his throat dissolving as you enveloped him in that all-consuming way of yours.

When you stepped out of the tub, draping a towel between the two of you and ushering him back into the bedroom, he thought he could be content forever.

This was a dance that you had played with him many nights before, but every time, he couldn't resist staring in awe as you bore your body to him, as if recommitting you to memory for the first time.

His eyes fluttered, wonderstruck, and leaned forward first, but you were the one to deepen the kiss, pulling him down to your level and undoing the towel around his waist. You pressed him back for a moment, examining him with a breathless look before you winded your hands around his hair, water droplets be damned.

"Let go for me," Then you were pushing him down on the bed, descending upon him like a prayer. Shivers ran through his body when he discovered your next actions.

You started out so torturously slow. A kiss on his thighs, followed by your breath fanning his skin. Your mouth was a sharp contrast to the cold air, and your teeth brushed against his skin just so. He was tempted

to plunge himself within you, to do away with this game of back-and-forth, but the way you were playing with him was exquisite.

You licked one strip from the base of his cock to his tip, just to taste, and Miguel felt like he was short-circuiting. But you remained patient, attempting to hide the smile that you hid between his legs. He resisted the urge to roll his eyes back, shuddering as you showered him with praises about how good he tasted, how well he was going to fit in your mouth.

“So good, Miguel. Unwind for me, that’s it.”

His cock was straining in his arousal, unable to do much more than enjoy the feeling of the lazy spins of your tongue around his head, dizzy with the way you complimented him perfectly.

When you took him in your mouth after what felt like eons, hollowing your cheeks to try and take more and more of him, his breathing grew ragged. You *liked* him like this, at your mercy, and he wanted nothing more than to fall apart underneath you.

He vaguely registered the way your other hand rutted against your core, your praises fizzling into high-pitched mewls that sent low sensations reverberating throughout his cock. “Fuck—oh my god—such a sweet girl, takin’ care of me. *Dios.*”

Gasping out, he felt the outskirts of his orgasm approaching and his hands went flying, pleading with you. “Fuck me,” he begged, temple pressing against your head as his arms yanked you up, forcing you to straddle him with a low groan. “Let me in, amor, déjame terminar dentro de ti.”

To his pleasant surprise, you were soaked from taking him in your mouth, his eyes fixed on the wet shimmer of your pussy as he slotted himself in within you, cursing as you took him in one, fell swoop. His girl, always so sensitive to his touch, tight and pulsing in anticipation.

“Always taking care of me,” His large hand snaked behind your back, going lower until he could knead the supple skin of your ass in preparation. “Need to take care of my girl too.”

He snapped into action, working himself to the bone inside of you, strokes going faster even as your nails dug into his back in an attempt to ground yourself, delirious with the way he mercilessly pounded into you.

“Miguel, Miguel—Miguel, please.”

“You don’t know what you do to me,” He murmured against your lips, tasting himself on your tongue as his rough hands came around your back to pull you lower. “How much you affect me,” He relished in the way your breath hitched, sinking his teeth into the plush of your bottom lip to capture your sounds, but it wasn’t enough. “How often you cross my mind,” He was near delirious and his heart was soaring then, and it was an admission he’d make for you in every possible way. “The things I would do for you.” *The things I have done.*

“Miguel, I think I’m—” You didn’t get to finish your sentence as he snapped back, and you swore he was fucking you harder with each stroke. His hands ran up and down the sides of your waist, gripping your flesh so hard in a way that you knew there were going to be bruises in the morning.

“You’re gonna let me fuck more out of you, huh? You’re gonna let me give you everything you need?”

All it took was for him to stroke your clit one last time, and you were falling apart like putty in his arms.

His face dropped forward, drinking in the feeling of losing control as your back arched, lost in the way your walls clamped down on him, thrusts growing sloppy while you writhed and clashed your hips against his to make it last.

Miguel saw white and came with your name as a constant chorus on his lips, warmth painting your insides as he pushed rope after rope within you.

A slow, lethargic feeling overcame him, like a breath that he had been waiting to release all day.

In the darkness, Miguel stilled his trembling hand as he found yours, his thumb gently caressing your palm as he felt the rhythm of your breath gradually slowing. He watched you fall asleep in his arms and held you just a little tighter, a little closer to his chest.

He had lived his life by the principles of science. His reality laid in the tangible realm of facts and figures, where equations and formulas held sway. He believed in precision and unyielding logic, finding solace in their certainty and finality.

There was no certainty in your future together, didn’t know how long this thing with you would last, but the pessimistic scenarios that began running through his head paled in comparison to what he held in his arms.

He hadn’t felt this hopeful since Gabi was born and he was given the chance to begin anew. Not since he was a child, skating past grocery aisles on the rickety wheels of a shopping cart. What he held in his arms was tangible and real, and it filled him with hope that he hadn’t felt in a long time.

Chapter End Notes

hey. remember when i said this chapter would come faster?

my bad for the sudden two week disappearance, i was hit with a rather intense bout of writer's block and i really struggled to write this. as always, let me know what you think <3 i would love to know what you guys think of miguel's character so far. i loved getting to talk to you guys on tumblr (rosesaints) and i always, always appreciate all the kind comments. please know that i've read through every single one of them and i am so grateful. you guys rock 4ever!

love's a losing game

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

You wake to the smell of coffee and the sound of Gabi's laughter floating down the hall, sticky and sweet as honey. Miguel's not in bed anymore—just the dip in the mattress beside you and the faint warmth lingering in the sheets. You stretch, slow and reluctant, limbs heavy with yesterday's tenderness. The air is lighter than it's been in weeks. Heavier too.

There's a vase of daisies on the kitchen counter again. A new batch, probably from the same local grocery store with the chipped tile floor and grumpy cashier who always pretends not to recognize you. Gabi beams when she sees you, already mid-story about a dream she had where she was a mermaid and Miguel was a crab. She insists he talk like one, pincers and all, while you pour cereal.

For a moment, it's just that: sun through the windows, laughter, spoons clinking against ceramic. Domesticity so pure it aches.

Miguel doesn't check his phone once. You notice. You don't say anything.

Then, it's Gabi who suggests it.

"The beach," she says, like it's obvious. "We haven't gone since forever."

Miguel raises an eyebrow. "It was last month."

"Forever," she repeats, arms crossed and righteous.

You lean against the doorframe, arms still warm from where Miguel held you the night before, and give a small nod. "Let's go."

"Alright, I'm not gonna argue with my girls," Miguel says simply, voice caught somewhere between amused and resigned, like he knows he's already lost. His eyes flick to you again, barely masked warmth behind them. He's trying not to stare, but it's a losing game and you both know it. You're not dressed up, not trying. Hair braided back messily, thrifted tee and cutoff shorts, sunscreen smudged into the curve of your nose. But he looks at you like you've got the ocean lapping at your feet and the moon in your mouth.

And just like that, you're packing towels and SPF 50 and juice boxes she'll forget she wanted. Miguel lets you drive. You take the long way, windows down, music up, the air saturated with the kind of quiet joy that only lasts for a day.

Just one day, you think. One more.

You take the scenic route with the windows down. Gabi's in the backseat, already humming along to the playlist you made months ago and never got around to deleting—Fleetwood Mac and Sam Cooke and some rogue Olivia Rodrigo track she begged you to keep. The wind

turns your hair to chaos, but you don't care. Miguel's got one hand on the wheel, the other loose over the center console where your fingers rest, barely brushing. The sun's still high enough to spill over his shoulders, glinting off the lenses of his sunglasses, catching on the gold chain around his throat. He looks relaxed in a way that he rarely lets himself be. Like a man halfway convinced the danger is behind him.

You park close enough to hear the waves. The heat rises off the pavement in soft mirages. Gabi is out of the car before it even finishes idling, barefoot and beelining for the water with her little beach tote banging against her hip.

"Don't go in too deep!" Miguel calls after her, but she's already knee-deep, squealing at the cold.

You stretch out your towel beside him, shoulder to shoulder on the sand, sunglasses slipping down your nose. There's a breeze, and it smells like salt and coconut sunscreen, and Miguel's skin is warm where it brushes yours.

"She's turning into a little fish," you murmur, propping yourself up on your elbows as Gabi splashes around, victorious. "We'll never get her to leave."

"She's starting to get it from you.."

You glance over, blinking. "I'm not the athletic one, remember?"

"Still stubborn, though," he says with a half-smile. "Still got that same look when you're trying to act like you're not having the time of your life."

You nudge his arm with your knee. "You caught me."

He hums, eyes tracing the waterline, like he's memorizing it. Like he doesn't want to forget a single second of this day. Then, without looking at you: "You ever think about what comes after this?"

Your stomach dips. You're not sure if it's the question or the way he asks it—casual on the surface, but with something buried beneath. A ripple in the tide. You reach over and brush sand off his thigh, buying yourself a second.

"I think about it too much," you admit, quiet now. "I'm trying not to."

His fingers graze yours. A brief touch. Nothing more. But it anchors you.

"Stay in it a little longer," Miguel murmurs, voice low like he's saying it more to himself than to you. "This part. Just... stay in it."

So you do.

Gabi returns red-cheeked and soaked, flopping down between the two of you with her bucket full of shells and seaweed and some kind of small crab she swears is her new pet. You help her build a lopsided sandcastle while Miguel makes exaggerated sound effects every time she

adds a new tower. He's got sunscreen on his nose now—thanks to you—and he hasn't checked his phone once.

Eventually, Gabi dozes off beneath the umbrella, wrapped in a towel and using your leg as a pillow. Miguel's lying beside you, one arm behind his head, shirt balled up beneath his neck. The light has shifted; it's later now, the kind of golden hour that makes everything look cinematic. Like the world's been dipped in honey.

"Careful," you whisper, voice brushing the edge of teasing, "You're going to make me think you're enjoying yourself."

Miguel smiles with his eyes closed. "You caught me."

There's a long stretch of silence after that. The good kind. The kind you only get with people who really know you. His fingers find yours again. You squeeze once, light and sure. The waves keep breaking. The sun keeps sinking.

You want to live here, in this stillness, in this warm hush before the unraveling. You want it to be enough.

But of course it won't be. Nothing ever is.

So you press your cheek to his shoulder and whisper, "Don't let this day end just yet."

And Miguel, steady as the tide, whispers back, "I won't."

You love him.

You do.

And maybe you've known for a while now, somewhere between that first late-night conversation and the second time he made you laugh when you didn't think you could anymore. It's not fireworks. It's. It's the way he looks at Gabi like she's the only girl in the universe. The way he lets you sleep on his chest without moving, even when his arm's gone numb. The way he always knows when you're trying to hide something, and never asks more than you're ready to give.

The sun's mostly dipped by the time you're back in the car, streaks of gold and purple bleeding across the sky like someone smudged a painting with their thumb. Gabi's passed out in the backseat, her curls stuck to her forehead with salt and sleep, her mouth slightly open around the ghost of a stubborn protest. She didn't want to leave. You didn't either.

Miguel's hand is on the wheel, the other resting between you on the center console, palm up—open, waiting. Yours finds it easily. His thumb skims across your knuckles, slow and absent, like he doesn't realize he's doing it.

You tighten your fingers around his.

You don't want the night to end.

You want this car ride to stretch on until morning. Want to stay somewhere between day and night, between this feeling and whatever comes after it. Somewhere in the warm dark where nothing's asked of you except to stay.

You glance back at Gabi, curled up like a comma. You glance at Miguel, lit faintly by the dashboard glow, lashes shadowing high cheekbones, his hand still around yours like it belongs there.

"I'll text you when I wake up," you say softly. It comes out of nowhere. Not a promise, exactly. Not a question either.

He doesn't look away from the road, but you feel his smile, feel it in the shift of his grip. "Don't forget."

He pulls up in front of your house like he always does. Doesn't rush it. Doesn't reach for you when you unbuckle, just lets his fingers linger on your wrist for one last moment of stillness.

You press a kiss to his jaw. "Bye, Miguel," you say, soft and teasing, and you swear you feel him exhale into the word like it's home.

You walk toward your porch even though you don't want to. Even though your chest is doing that dumb, dramatic fluttering thing again. Your limbs are loose with contentment, high off of something no lab could replicate. You feel light. Anchored. Like you've been tethered to something real for the first time in years.

You don't turn around. Not until you hear his car engine start up again, low and patient. You glance back just in time to watch him disappear down the street, taillights blinking like a heartbeat.

You're still smiling when you dig your keys out of your bag, turning toward the door.

"Sweetheart?" your mother's voice calls softly from the other side. The porch light flicks on. "That you?"

You pause, blink against the sudden warmth in your chest. "Yeah, Mom. It's me."

The door creaks open before you can finish unlocking it. She's still in her robe, hair pinned up messily, a faint line of worry stitched into her brow. Her eyes skim over you once, then again, slower.

"You look good," she murmurs.

You let out a tired laugh. "I just spent the day chasing a five-year-old through tide pools. I probably look wrecked."

But your mom just watches you. Really watches. There's a softness in her gaze that unsettles you more than any concern. Not fear. Not disapproval. Just—recognition. Like she's seeing something shift under your skin.

“Nothing,” she says quietly. “Get some rest, okay?”

Your mouth opens. Closes. You want to say *so many different things*. Instead, you settle for a shrug. A smile that doesn’t quite land.

She nods, like she knows. Steps aside to let you in.

You drop your bag by the stairs, the smell of laundry and lemon-scented wood polish wrapping around you like a memory. Your mother goes back into the kitchen, humming faintly. She doesn’t ask where you’ve been. Doesn’t ask who you were with. You both know the answers.

But her words hang in the hallway behind you, clinging like salt on your skin.

You press a hand to your chest and wonder, for a moment, what it would take for that softness to stay.

There's a moment when all you can hear is birdsong and the low hum of the fan overhead. Your pillow smells like salt and sunscreen and Miguel’s laundry detergent. You stayed up too late scrolling old photos on your phone—ones with Gabi's drawings taped in the background, Miguel's arm slung lazily over the couch, the soft blur of a golden hour that still hasn’t left your chest. You hadn’t wanted to sleep. Sleep meant morning. Meant the dream had to end.

You blink against the light. Your phone buzzes.

Unknown Caller.

Your heart stutters. Not because you’re afraid. Just—off balance. Your fingers hesitate before answering.

“Hello?”

“Hi, this is Alice from the Daily Bugle. Is this—”

They ask you your name, heart dropping with every beat on the phone. The voice is polite. A little too bright for this early. You already know what she’s going to say. Still, you sit up slowly, fingers curling into the bedsheet like you need something to anchor you.

“We’re thrilled to let you know we’d like to offer you the internship after all. There was a... situation, it seems, but it’s been cleared. If you’re still available, we’d love to have you.”

You’re silent. A bird chirps outside your window.

“That’s... wow,” you manage finally. “Thank you.”

She confirms the dates, the stipend, the formal letter coming by email. You say all the right things. You’re polite. Professional. Not at all like someone who cried in Miguel’s bathtub three nights ago with his hands in her hair, singing Etta James off-key under her breath.

When the call ends, you just sit there.

The room is too quiet. You scroll to your messages. **No texts from Miguel.** No good morning. No check-in. No "how did you sleep, hermosa?" yet.

You don't text him either.

It's not on purpose. Not really. You tell yourself you'll text him after you brush your teeth. After you check your email. After you think about what the hell this means for your life now.

Instead, you read the offer again. Then again. The screen blurs a little. It's everything you wanted. Everything you worked for.

So why does it feel like someone's tightening a drawstring around your ribs?

The kitchen is too bright when you walk in.

You squint against the morning sun filtering through the lace curtains, the scent of fried eggs and laundry detergent hanging thick in the air. It's all familiar. Too familiar. The same mug in your hands you used in high school. The same half-cracked tile near the fridge. The same kitchen table where your mother once braided your hair before school while your cereal went soggy.

You sit at that table now, a little older, a lot more tired, in yesterday's hoodie and someone else's t-shirt beneath it. You're not sure if it still smells like Miguel.

Your mom doesn't say anything at first. She's at the stove, flipping something that smells vaguely like pancakes but feels more like obligation. There's an air about her—quiet, careful. Like she's afraid to set you off. Again.

You're scrolling through your phone aimlessly. No new texts. Still no message from Miguel.

You told yourself you'd text him. You still haven't.

"So," your mom says gently, too gently. The word lands like a pebble dropped into still water. "You got that call back from the Daily Bugle this morning."

You nod without looking up.

"That's great news."

"Yeah."

A pause. The kind that builds into something.

She moves around the kitchen with a bit too much efficiency—plates clinking louder than necessary, fridge door swinging open with a little too much force. You get the sense she's

working up to something.

“I know things haven’t been easy,” she says after a beat. “I know you’re still finding your footing again.”

The words are practiced. Not unkind.

You nod again.

“But I just...” she trails off, and when you finally look up, she’s watching you in that particular mother way. Like she’s been holding her breath around you for months.

“You seem different lately,” she says, softer now. “Lighter. Happier.”

The compliment doesn’t land the way it’s meant to. It catches in your throat like smoke.

“I didn’t say better,” she adds quickly, setting a plate down in front of you. “I said... different.”

You don’t know what to say to that, so you poke at your eggs. They look rubbery.

“You’ve come back softer,” she murmurs, almost like she’s talking to herself now. “Like something broke... and now it’s just healing different.”

You glance up sharply.

It’s not cruel. Not even judgmental. But it hits with precision. Like she’s been holding onto that one for a while and only now found the nerve to say it.

You laugh, but it comes out strange—more like an exhale that tripped over itself. “You always did love a metaphor.”

She gives you a look. “I’m your mother. I know what you look like when you’re hiding.”

You push the food around your plate.

“I’m not hiding,” you say quietly. “I just don’t know what’s next.”

Her expression softens. She reaches out, brushes a crumb off the table near your elbow.

“Then maybe just... figure out what you want. Not what we want. Not what you thought you wanted two years ago. Not what you think will impress your dad’s coworkers at the next barbecue. Just you.”

You want to tell her that you’re trying. That you *were* trying. That maybe you found something—*someone*—who made everything feel a little more breathable again. But then your brain flashes to the silence sitting in your inbox. To the way you haven’t heard from him since you left his car. To the weightless ache in your chest that feels suspiciously like missing him before he’s even gone.

You smile instead, polite and noncommittal. “I’ll think about it.”

She gives your hand a gentle squeeze before going back to the sink.

You stare at your plate, appetite gone.

The internship offer’s sitting in your inbox like a blinking cursor. Waiting.

And your mother’s words are still echoing quietly in your head.

You’ve come back softer.

Just you.

You hadn’t meant to go over the next day. Not really.

You could’ve texted to reschedule, used the internship call as an excuse, played the “so sorry—chaotic morning!” card and rolled back into bed to process everything in peace. But then Miguel texted a little after you got up— “*Got a meeting this morning. Think you could swing by?*” —and you said yes before you thought better of it.

You’re there by nine. Gabi’s already in her pajamas, wild-haired and bouncing on the couch with an energy that no child should reasonably have this early. Miguel’s in the kitchen, half-dressed, tie looped around his neck like an afterthought.

“Hey,” he says, voice already quiet with the wear of the day. “You sure you’re up for this?”

You smile. You nod. You don’t tell him that you’ve barely slept, that your mother’s voice is still tucked under your skin like a splinter, or that the Daily Bugle’s offer email has been sitting unread in your inbox for almost twenty-four hours now.

“Of course,” you say. “Go save the world.”

He huffs out a laugh, steps closer. His hand grazes your hip, tentative, like he’s not sure if he’s still allowed to touch you like that after the kind of night you had. You lean in a little—just enough to give him permission—and he dips his head to kiss your forehead.

“I’ll be back later,” he says against your skin, and something in your chest folds inward.

You don’t ask when. You don’t ask what time. You just watch him go.

Gabi just waves dramatically from the doorway, yelling something about remembering to bring home juice boxes, and then it’s just the two of you.

After that, braid her hair while she watches a movie you half-pay attention to, make peanut butter and jelly with the crusts cut off, draw chalk flowers on the cracked sidewalk outside the house. The summer heat rolls through in waves, sticking to the backs of your knees and making everything smell like sidewalk dust and sunscreen. She asks a hundred questions—

why is the sky blue, how do spiders make webs, what does your job mean—and you answer them all like it's your actual job, like this is what you trained for.

You love her too.

That's what surprises you most. How much you genuinely, unironically love her. Not in a *she's cute* kind of way, but in the real way. In the way where she sneezes and you instinctively check her forehead for a fever. In the way where you start to notice her tells: the curl of her lip when she's about to lie, the dramatic sigh when she's pretending to be tired so she can avoid math worksheets.

You love her in a way that hurts a little, because you know what that kind of love costs.

You sit on the couch with her asleep in your lap, one hand gently carding through her hair, and think about the email again.

The internship.

The one you worked for, sacrificed for, *bled for*, only to watch it slip through your fingers the second your engagement exploded in a mess of missed deadlines and blacklisted email chains. And now, out of nowhere, it's back. Gift-wrapped. A miracle. Or a cruel joke.

You'd be stupid to say no.

But.

But.

You think about Miguel. The way he holds her, the way he looks at you when he doesn't know you're watching. You think about the way your mother said you'd gone soft, like it was a warning. Like it was something to be corrected. And maybe it is. Maybe you are.

But you also remember how it felt when he pressed his lips to your forehead that morning, like a goodbye he didn't want to name.

And you think about saying it. Tonight. When he walks through the door.

I got the internship back.

It means moving.

I don't know what to do.

You hear the lock before the door. That familiar clink, the telltale shift of keys in his hand, the scrape of the latch catching just slightly before it releases.

You don't turn immediately.

You've just been lounging on the couch, Gabi tucked warm and heavy against your side, one hand still in her half-finished braid. Her breathing's evened out, deep and soft. She clung to you for the better part of an hour after dinner, too tired to fight sleep but too stubborn to surrender, until you finally coaxed her down with a story about a spaceship made of glitter and a princess who wanted to become a scientist.

When the door creaks open, you lift your head. Slowly.

Miguel stands framed in the hallway light, backlit and worn down to the bone. His shirt's wrinkled, collar slightly askew, sleeves shoved up in a way that suggests frustration more than comfort. His hair is a little messy. Not the kind you want to kiss, but the kind that says he's been dragging his hands through it all day.

Still, when he sees you, he softens. Just a little. Just for you.

"She didn't give you too much trouble, did she?" he asks, voice low and scratchy like he hasn't spoken in hours.

"She's an angel," you say, quiet, smiling because it feels like the right thing to do. "Taught me how to make a friendship bracelet out of yarn and cosmic dust."

He huffs out a tired laugh. "Sounds about right."

Miguel crosses the room in a few long strides, crouches beside Gabi, and gently brushes a curl from her cheek. You watch the way his fingers tremble just slightly before they settle. Watch the way his expression shifts, almost imperceptibly, into something too tender for words.

He lifts her easily, like she weighs nothing. Like she's made of something lighter than the rest of the world. You sit still, watching him hold her like that, murmuring something in Spanish you don't catch, low and rough, like prayer. Maybe it is a prayer. Maybe she's his.

Maybe you're not.

The words claw at the back of your throat. But you don't say any of it.

Instead, you rise from the couch. As if making too much noise might break whatever fragile thing is still holding this night together. He returns from the hallway, now empty-handed, a quietness settling over him like dust. He doesn't reach for you. Doesn't ask. Just looks.

You open your mouth. Close it.

Miguel tilts his head slightly, eyes dark and impossibly gentle. "You okay?"

You nod, but your throat's tight. "Yeah. Just tired."

He steps closer, and for a second—just a second—you think he might kiss you. That he might read between the lines and say *what is it, mi amor? What's wrong?* That he'll pull it from you like a splinter.

But he doesn't. He just rests his hand lightly on your elbow, thumb brushing the inside of your arm. "Thank you," he says, soft. "For today. For her."

You smile again. It's a little cracked around the edges. "Of course."

His touch lingers a second longer. Then he steps back.

“I’ll see you soon?” he asks. And it sounds like what he means is *please don’t disappear*.

You nod. “Yeah. Soon.”

And then you’re at the door, slipping into your sandals, bag slung over your shoulder. You glance back at him once, one last time.

The man you love. And the daughter who feels like yours.

But she isn’t. And he isn’t, not really. Not entirely. Not in the way that matters when things start to shift.

You open the door. Step into the hallway.

The air’s cooler now. The storm broke hours ago, and the world smells like pavement and night air. It should feel clean. It should feel like relief. But it doesn’t. You feel hollow. Not in a bad way. Not like despair. Just—empty. Like you left something behind in that apartment and don’t know how to ask for it back.

Like you’re walking away from something that already feels like it’s halfway gone.

Chapter End Notes

hey guys... did you miss me?

in all seriousness, i'd like to thank you all for waiting and to apologize that you guys have had to wait at all! it's been truly inspiring and jawdropping to see the outpouring of love and support for this little work. i never could've imagined it would blow up the way it did, and this work always kind of lingered in the back of my mind with everything else i wrote. life really got in the way the past two years, what with nursing school, personal reasons, and also just attempting to grow as a writer. this chapter was harder to write, just because 19 year old me had a very, very different idea of love and writing back then. i'd like to think i've improved and grown enough as a writer now to truly give this story the ending it deserves.

angst for now... but trust, we're locking in. stay tuned :)

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