

Kissing Rohan Mitra, my delectable boyfriend of seventeen days, fourteen hours, and some miscellaneous minutes that I was above counting, was my new favorite addiction. Didn't matter if it was a soft brush of lips, a quick, almost absent-minded peck to the corner of his mouth, a hot fevered embrace, or long, slow, drugged kisses like now, in a shadowy corner of Neon Paradise, our high bar chairs pushed close enough together for our knees to touch and one of Ro's hands on the small of my back, pulling me toward him.

We'd mastered the art form under a variety of conditions: stolen in the hallway of the chapter house, between the order and pick-up windows of a Starbucks drive-thru, hell, even high off a demon kill. Those were especially delicious.

And sure, I'd been skeptical. Not being emotionally up for kissing anyone for over a year could do that to a girl. But Rohan Mitra was worth every second of waiting and more. I never wanted to break this kiss.

Oxygen, that demanding element, had other ideas. I pulled back and draped my arms around his neck, ruffling his locks that fell like dark silk through my fingers. Planning on a quick lungful before going in for more.

Then the darling boy spoke. "I didn't think you'd be any good at kissing."

I slapped the tall, lacquered table. "Boom. Officially hitting pause."

Rohan raised an eyebrow. "On what?"

"Your boyfriend status. What could possibly have led you to believe something so deluded?"

He rubbed his nose against mine. "I figured the reason you were so dead-set against it was because of some deep-seated kissing insecurities. I was prepared to have to educate you on the subject. At length."

I clicked my tongue, though hours of kiss education with Rohan honestly didn't sound so bad. "My mouth is a marvel, Snowflake. It would behoove you to remember that."

He leaned his elbows back over the top of his chair, pulling the fabric of his short-sleeved linen shirt tight around his biceps. "Behoove?"

"Yes. Not only am I astoundingly kick-ass, I am also highly erudite." I'd gotten this Word of the Day app that I was putting to good use, unlike the running app the Brotherhood made me download for training purposes. A little intellectual self-improvement never hurt. Besides, Rohan's last girlfriend was a hair away from getting her Ph.D in physics and I didn't want to

lower the bar too much. “Reiterating the marvel part now since that’s what you should be focusing on.”

His gold eyes crinkled in either confusion or amusement. “I see.”

“You doubt me?”

He rubbed his head. “One of those PDs we took out earlier really clocked me. My short term memory is spotty.”

“Apparently, since you’ve forgotten that we’re now calling them half-demons, not Practice Demons, out of respect for Leo. Also, shame on you. Blaming those poor spawn for your own shortcomings.” Tsking him, I slipped my fingers into his belt loops and tugged him close.

Five minutes later, I pulled away from his mouth with a nip. “Are my stellar abilities coming back to you yet?”

Wearing a slightly glazed look, his chest rising and falling rapidly, Rohan nodded like he’d forgotten how to form words.

I patted his cheek. “Good man.” I grabbed my emerald satin clutch off the table where it had fallen between his half-finished G&T and my glass of water and slowly edged myself out. Time for another circuit of the dance floor. “Be right back.” I pushed my water glass at him. “Drink this so you’re not all headachy tomorrow.”

“Hey, wait.” Rohan caught my wrist, eyes hot and insistent. “Restart the clock, Sparky.”

I smiled, then mimed smacking it again. He raised the glass in cheers. What a guy.

Leaving the boy to regroup, I skirted the packed dance area. The floor pulsed from the baseline of Jamiroquai’s “Canned Heat” cranked to eleven, with everyone pulling out their best *Napoleon Dynamite* moves. Glittery disco starbursts illuminated arms thrown up in abandon, the dancers having a blast with the “hits from the 90s to today” that were on tap tonight.

Along the far edge of the floor, pleated curtains framed by multicolored spotlights illuminated cozy booths. Suppressing a smile at the dismayed groan that went up from the dude-bro group over by the pool tables, I curved around the sleek bar, restroom bound.

I charged into the middle stall, locked the door, and sank down in sweet relief. This rare night out was so precious that I’d stayed totally sober to remember every moment of it. But all the dancing I’d done had required copious amounts of hydration and I’d drunk an ocean of water tonight. I peed for so long I must have been pissing out stored reserves. On the plus side, I was so well-hydrated that my skin glowed like I’d been airbrushed.

The marathon urination gave me a chance to catch up on the scrawled graffiti. In neat red ballpoint above the toilet paper holder, someone had written: *You're a solid 8*. Underneath that in pink glitter pen it read: *Fuck that. I'm a 12½*. A sentiment I applauded. Red pen then chimed back in with: *Your ego certainly is*. To which glitter had replied: *All women are a 12½ out of 10. At least*.

Black sharpie rounded out the exchange with: *\*fist pump\* Sisterhood*.

If I was going to be stuck in a cubicle peeing like a crazy person, it was nice to be in one with a compatible philosophic leaning and not “all girls be bitches.”

Someone else had drawn a wishing well in the center of the stall door. Responses alternated between lewd comments carved into the wood, initials drawn inside hearts, and requests of cash, designer clothes, and Hamilton tickets. It was all very silly, which was why I almost didn't add the tiny snowflake to the bottom of the list.

I flushed the toilet and exited, bladder de-stressed. Though I had to wave my wrist in front of the tap's motion sensor about seventeen times before I activated it. Damn things never worked properly for me, and I kept feeling like I was a dead person or a ghost. Two women entered as I was lathering up and I peered at their reflection in the gold gilt-framed mirror. “Christina?” I squealed.

“Nava! Where've you been, girlfriend? Campus is so boring without you. I have no one to ditch class with on mental health days.” Chinese-Canadian in her mid-twenties, Christina rocked a purple pixie haircut, a sequined one-piece romper, and an astounding example of cat eye eyeliner. When I attempted that look, I always came off as an Amy Winehouse drag queen who'd been crying while singing “Love is a Losing Game.”

“Oh, you know. Life.” I rinsed off my hands, tearing off some dead tree from the dispenser. “It's so good to see you.”

“Nava.” The woman next to Christina, her blonde hair scraped into a straight ponytail worn low on her head, gave me a brusque wave. I doubted there was a sports bra under that swank suit jacket, and her pencil skirt failed to resemble the nylon workout pants I was used to seeing her in. She'd changed, but her presence was still a giant ugh.

I fumbled the toss of my paper towels, barely making the garbage can. “Naomi. You look...”

“Like she has a stick jammed up her white ass,” Christina said.

“Different.”

“I’m articling now.” Naomi brushed some imaginary lint off her navy lapel. “That’s a position in a law firm.”

She knew damn well that my dad, Dov, was a law professor at the University of British Columbia, since she’d had him for half a dozen classes. Clearly not much had changed besides the clothes. I jammed my hands into the pockets of my loose black trousers before either of them could see the spark of electric magic that jumped out of my fingertips. “You’re doing bitch work for the actual lawyers. Mazel tov. What are you two up to tonight?”

Christina held up a vial filled with tiny pink crystals that glinted in the light. “Sweet Tooth. Perfectly designed to give you the all-night euphoria of every lush depravity you can think of. Want in?”

“No, thanks.” There was only one thing I craved these days and it wasn’t some new drug. I rummaged in my small backpack purse for my hair clip to twist my sweaty locks into a loose chignon (and give Ro better access to kiss his way down my neck) when I noticed Naomi staring. “Yes?”

“Nothing.” She turned away, reapplying her sheer lip gloss. “You said we were going for a drink. One drink.”

“I lied,” Christina said. “You wouldn’t have left work otherwise.” She uncorked the vial releasing a burst of cotton candy scent. “One night to cut loose. ‘Life at Full Tilt,’ remember?”

Ten bucks said Christina was fighting a losing battle. Naomi was buttoned up so tight, cracking Level Fun required a set of lock picks, a tire iron, and some WD40. I patted my hairdo, waiting for their debate to end so I could get Christina’s new phone number. Reconnect now that my life was a bit more stable, which funnily, even with the demon hunting addition, was true.

“I’ve got to finish up some research for a court appearance.” Smug tone, nose in the air, Naomi hadn’t lost her infuriating knack of making everything she did sound sooo verrah verrah important.

“Minor court appearance,” I muttered. She was articling, not trying grand jury cases.

Christina tapped her finger against the vial a couple of times to dislodge powder from the sides. “Shut it, or I’ll key both your cars.”

I mustered a smile. “All dropped.” Christina had always been good at follow-through. “Hey Chris, I don’t have your current—”

“The lawyers are fast-tracking me to making associate. There’s every expectation of me making partner in record time.” Naomi ducked her head, her voice dripping with false modesty. “I don’t want to mess any of that up. I can’t. This is too important to me. Sorry, Chris.” The longing glance she shot at the vial was quick, but I caught it.

I dug my nails into my skin. Here, I’d do my one good deed for the night. “It’s okay to relax every now and then.”

“I’d imagine you’d know.” Naomi turned away from her reflection to peer at me with bullshit sincerity. “Still on a break from school?”

Between the annoying men I hunted with and my mother, Naomi was amateur hour. My smile stayed in place. “I’m in the security business,” I said. Savior of humanity, me.

“Like mall cop? Good for you.”

Okay, so not so much savior of *all* humanity because if a curupira was trying to suck her brains out right now, I’d totally point out the best spot to dig in.

My smile widened, teeth bared.

Christina muscled in between the two of us, smacking my hip in warning. “You can finish all your lawyer work tomorrow.” She dumped half the crystals into her hand. “This shit is like the best fuck and best chocolate all at once.”

“Careful Nava doesn’t steal it.” Naomi popped the cap back on her gloss.

“Jesus, Naomi, get over it. I didn’t steal Sean. You weren’t dating him or even sleeping with him.”

“I spent every weekend with him and I liked him.”

“You spent every weekend with *all* of your weekend warrior group. Besides, it’s not like his flirting was subtle. If you’d had a problem with us leaving together that night, you could have used your words.”

“As if you’d have listened.”

“Enough.” Christina held a hand up. “Naomi is an uptight bitch and Nava is a party whore. Have I settled it?”

“Like Nava limits the whoring to one area, but sure.” Naomi wiped a trace of gloss off the corner of her lip.

My magic slid through my veins, whispering sweet nothings like *eviscerate her*.