

I stayed hidden in my room for the rest of the weekend, subsisting off snacks I had bought and hoping to hell that I didn't bump into Lianna during the few times I left the room. Although, I did find a few excuses to go out, but definitely not so that I might bump into her. I knew it was all fruitless anyway because we'd see each other first thing on Monday, but my anxious mind didn't give one crap about any of that.

Instead I couldn't stop thinking, what if she hated me even more now? What if she decided that she had hated the kiss and didn't want anything to do with me? What if she was like Aimee and only vaguely attracted to women, and now that she was sober she wasn't interested in me? Oh no, but we had to crit each other's work! We would have to talk!

The worry in my gut did not abate as I left my room on Monday morning and trudged warily down the stairs and out into the warm but overcast day. Even the clouds and their ever changing aesthetics didn't keep my attention long enough to halt the continuous stream of worry. I mean gosh, I had absolutely no experience with any of this! It was like ever since she'd kissed me, my brain had been both enlightened and scrambled. I was like... sacred scrambled eggs or something.

The walk over to class turned into another mess, as I got so caught up in my whirling thoughts of Lianna and how I was about to see her that I got completely turned around. Then, the cherry on top, the clouds opened up and began to pour down, forcing me to dash from cover to cover in a vain attempt to stay dry. Thank gosh I had bought a waterproofed satchel, at least my drawing stuff would stay dry! It was a nice bag too, normal sturdy fabric with a water repellant chemical somewhere in there.

My clothes on the other hand, were not waterproof. I'd worn a big baggy T-shirt with a thin flannel and jeans. Which meant everything was clinging to my skin in the most embarrassingly revealing way, and I knew I was going to get a few stares. I was also late, and everyone would be looking at me regardless as I came in. They would all see.

It took me more than a few moments to psych myself up, but I pushed the door open and glued my eyes firmly to the floor, only allowing myself a quick glance to see where the seats were. Lo and behold, everyone was sitting in the same seats as last time, which meant I was next to Lianna again. I couldn't make myself meet her eyes, the uncertainty of where things stood between us combining with the fact that I was soaking wet meant that I was a ball of anxiety and embarrassment.

I sat down on the stool with a squelching sound and waiting for the girl next to me to say something. Anything! She didn't though, and I had to chance a quick look up to see what she

was doing. Her eyes were definitely somewhere on my body when I first looked up, but as soon as I met them, she hurriedly looked away. Gosh, she was cute even when she acted like this, and... wait, was that a blush? Oh my gosh! She was blushing!

I'd just caught her staring, and now she was blushing! The sound of incomprehensible excited screaming filled my head as I tried to figure out what this meant. Did it make me feel good that she was blushing because I'd caught her staring? Dang, did I actually *want* her to stare at me like that? Because if so... gosh! She looked so pretty today too, which wasn't a surprise because she always looked pretty, but it was like she'd eaten a lightbulb or something, because she was glowing.

"I'm wet," I blurted lamely, anything to start a conversation.

Her eyes bolted back to my face and went wide, her mouth falling open slightly as she whispered, "What?!"

I just gestured to myself in response, it was fairly obvious right? I'd just run through the rain and now I was soaking wet, my clothes clinging to my body all embarrassingly.

"O-oh!" she nodded, her head bobbing just a little too quickly as her eyes skipped across that same wet body I had pointed to.

She was acting all skittish and nervous, but all that my dumb confused brain could think was that she was really damn cute.

"You still look pretty," I mumbled, looking down and away as I tried to get myself a little dryer by shaking my arms vigorously.

"Uh, thanks," she said quietly, and there was an incredibly long pause after that as I continued to try and shake the wetness off myself.

Then a small towel plopped itself in my lap, and I looked up in surprise at Lianna.

"What? Forecast said it was going to rain, so I packed my towel," she said defensively, her brows scrunching up a little in a way that I suddenly realised I found very cute.

"Thanks," I smiled, picking it up and toweling myself off. The shaking hadn't really been all that effective, all I'd done was jiggle things around.

I wanted to talk to her more, I wanted to talk so badly that my chest ached for it, but I couldn't think of anything to say that wouldn't just sound completely stupid. Instead, I glanced over at her to see what she was doing, and caught her staring at me again. Just like last time, her eyes rushed to get away from mine, falling into the safety of her lap instead. Why didn't she want to look at me now? Did I do something wrong, or was she feeling weird about staring at my wet body?

I didn't get the chance to ask if I'd done something wrong, because at that moment our professor moved forward to speak to the class.

"Hello everyone! Welcome to your second life drawing session! I'll be handing out your first assignment at the end of the class by the way, so please stick around for that. I know some of you like to rush off as soon as your crit is done, but it's rather important," our professor told us, then turned to an older looking woman who was probably our model.

We all nodded in reply to signal that we'd pay attention at the end, and she continued, "This is Maggie, she will be our model this morning. She'll be draping that sheet over herself in various poses so that you all can have your first practice in drawing how fabric flows over the human body. Thank you Maggie."

The model took her cue, moving up onto the little stage made of wooden boxes. She moved around for a moment before taking a seat and draping the sheet across herself. I noted that this model was wearing underwear, although she lacked a bra. I was also very thankful that the old lady wasn't doing anything for me. It was like trying to see a flickering candle while you're standing next to the sun.

We got to work as we were given the same order of instructions as last time. Long ten minute sketch at the start, followed by increasingly shorter ones as time progressed. For my sketches, I decided that some of what Lianna had been saying was correct, I did need to improve my realism. Because at the end of the day, having a good foundation in just getting the shape of a subject right would go a long way towards allowing you to twist that subject into the abstract.

I still wasn't able to fully concentrate with Lianna next to me, but I felt more relaxed around her now, and so my work improved somewhat over last time. I did however catch myself glancing over at her from time to time to watch her draw. I couldn't really see her page properly, but that didn't matter, I wasn't looking at her work, I was looking at *her*. Gosh, and every time I did, a goofy little smile would spread over my face and I'd have to fight it, just in case she looked back over at me.

Now that I was looking for it, I loved watching her at work. The way she concentrated, her brows crinkling slightly as a tiny frown brought them together. The way she absently nibbled on the inside of her cheek, or poked her incredible tongue under her bottom lip when she was doing a particularly difficult line.

She moved around a lot too, tilting this way and that to get a better angle on a line and the like. I had a habit of doing that too, but it was really cute on her. She was just really cute in general, especially in the black jeans and black button down shirt that she wore today. She liked her black, that was for sure, but it definitely worked on her.

Then it was time for crit, and suddenly my earlier giddy calm was replaced by heart thudding anxiety all over again. I had to actually talk to her now! Sitting next to her and drawing? That was easy, nice even, if I could get my silly brain to stop salivating over how pretty she was. Actually talking to the object of my fascination was another matter entirely. Things just felt so awkward between us now! Even more than when we'd hated each other!

We moved our chairs together so we could sit and look at the drawings from a similar angle, and then promptly began to avoid looking at each other even harder than before. I failed pretty quickly, and flicked my gaze up to meet hers, and then felt embarrassed and quickly looked away. Gosh, what a mess this all was!

"U-uh, I guess I'll go first," she said quietly, placing her first sketch down on the ground in front of us.

"You did yeah," I nodded, then slapped a hand over my mouth when I realised just what I'd meant. I tried to cover it up by smiling and nodding like an idiot. "I mean, yes, you go first this time! We'll alternate!"

She sat there and gaped at me for a few moments, her face flushing to match mine. Then she reached down with shaking hands to straighten the sketch, even though it didn't need straightening. Unfortunately, she overcorrected and messed it up further, moving it too far in one direction, then the other.

Giving up with a sigh, she shrugged sheepishly. "It's going to stay like that I guess... Um so, what do you think?"

"It's... pretty," I mumbled while I stared at her and tried to get my bearings. She looked nice, especially with her blushing cheeks and the lack of full on scowl. We were so close too, I could just lean over and kiss her. If I had the guts to do it anyway.

“You’re not looking at the page,” she whispered, her eyes wide and searching mine.

“O-oh!” I squeaked, turning quickly to look down at her sketch.

I was too vigorous in my movements however, and almost fell off my stool. Almost fell off... except Lianna was there in a flash, holding my upper arm to keep me up. Her fingers gripped tightly, and she didn’t immediately let go when I was back upright. I stared at her hand on my arm, then up at her.

“You okay?” she asked, removing her hand in a rush.

“Um, yeah. Thanks. Sorry, I’m really clumsy... I’m good at like two things in life and neither of those are sitting straight or um, looking where I’m going, I’m sorry,” I apologised, hoping she got my full meaning. I still hated the fact I’d broken her laptop.

“I’ve guessed that much,” she smiled ruefully.

Oh! Did that mean she wasn’t so mad at me for it anymore? Could we be nice to each other now? Wait, I should be nice about her drawing to get the ball rolling.

“Right,” I smiled shyly, then looked down at her sketch... and my eyes went wide.

I leaned in further to get a closer look for a moment, then glanced back up at those gorgeous dark eyes of hers. “This is abstract!”

She didn’t say anything, but her nervous nod said enough, and suddenly I wanted to kiss her again. Well, I didn’t ever *not* want to kiss her nowadays, but I was struck by the crazy wild idea to just kiss her right here. I didn’t, but the idea was all up in my head.

Instead, I gave her drawing a better look. It was simple, and I saw right away that her lines were too neat and tidy. She was trying, but she was too hung up in getting the perfect line to realise that a lot of the time, the perfect line was the one you did first, the one your mind subconsciously wanted on the page.

Any art teacher might call that a load of crap and they would probably be right, but for me, I put my music on and I turned off my brain, just letting my subconscious mind do as it would. That’s what I meant when I got the emotions out, because it was my emotions that drove my hands

while I zoned out. It was good though, she'd done incredibly well regardless, for someone usually so stuck in capturing the realism of a subject.

"I like it! I like how you got the flow of the fabric down, it looks like a waterfall!" I said happily. "Oh, and her hair too!"

"Thanks, I uh... the hair was hard," she said, her tone a little anxious. "I had trouble getting the shape right without going through and defining everything like I normally do."

"Yeah, you completely ignored initial lines," I nodded, my eyes roaming across the paper and charcoal.

"Um, what about the other thing?" she asked leaning in beside me. Very close... oh gosh, I could feel the intoxicating warmth of her from here.

Her warmth reminded me that I felt a little cold with my damp clothing sucking away all the heat. I gave a little shiver and tried to ignore it. Wait, she'd said something.

"What?" I asked dumbly.

"We're meant to uh, say something bad," she reminded me, leaning back to look at me.

"I don't want to say anything bad," I mumbled quietly, feeling anxious again.

I didn't want to make her upset and have her all angry at me again. That would be way too much. I couldn't do it.

"Ah... well... what can I do to improve it then?" she asked, rewording the phrasing back to what the teacher had said last class.

Biting my lip, I paused for a moment as I tried to think of a way to say my crit as nicely as possible. "You're being too... precise with your lines, I guess. You need to get a bit more gestural about it."

"Right," she nodded thoughtfully, squinting to look at her work. "I can see that. Thanks."

I might as well have been inspecting her face with a magnifying glass for all the intensity of my stare as I tried to figure out if she was upset with me again. I hadn't been too mean had I? She was still going to smile at me again?

She did, giving me just a little confused smile as she noticed my stare, but it was enough for me to feel a little relief. Phew, she wasn't angry at me!

"Sorry," I said anyway, because I'm a dumbass.

She gave me a quizzical look. "I'm trying something new, I expect to have areas I can improve."

Lianna was perplexing. How could she just outright kiss me like she had on Friday night, even while drunk, then blush about it when she saw me next, *then* go on to act so casually competent the next moment? I sensed an underlying vulnerability to her too, one that she tried to mask with cold anger, from what I had seen.

"Maybe it's your turn then?" she asked with that same calm competence, although it slipped a little when I smiled and nodded in reply.

My drawing was the opposite to hers, which I found a little amusing. We'd swapped styles this time around. I'd tried really hard to take her advice from last time and use whatever edge I could find on the charcoal, and it had sorta worked... but only sorta. My lines weren't the neatest, but I thought I'd done pretty well with the shape and perspective.

The smile that bloomed on her face when she saw my attempt to keep my sketch realistic caused all sorts of excited fluttering feelings within me.

"You did the opposite to me!" she blurted with delight.

When she turned her eyes on me, all glowing with laughter and happiness, I almost fell backward off my stool like I'd been shot. My gosh, she was so pretty. I could only try to swallow the lump in my throat and nod like a silly person. How was she suddenly affecting me like this? How was she turning my limbs all noodly with a single smile? This was incredibly strange!

Turning back to my drawing, still smiling, she said, "You tried to do the neat charcoal lines thing, it looks pretty good for a first attempt too. Also, you can do perspective and shape well when you put your mind to it. I guess I was being a little judgy earlier, because you're clearly a skilled artist."

“T-thank you!” I gaped, my heart simultaneously stopping and beating at a million miles a minute.

She’d just full on complimented me! I had no idea how to process this. We’d spent an entire week and a half growling at each other like angry dogs, and now suddenly she was throwing praise at me. Maybe we should have kissed earlier, if it would have fixed everything like this.

Finally recovering, I remarked on the wording she’d used too. It was a pet peeve of mine, and she’d worded her compliment around it in a way that made me think she held the same peeve. “You used the word *skilled* instead of talented or gifted too, which means like, that was an extra compliment!”

She rolled her eyes and nodded, “Yeah I know right? Like, no, I’m not gifted. I put in hours and hours each day for most of my life. It was hard work the whole way. Makes me incredibly angry when people wank on about how all my hard work is just something that was given to me like some sort of genetic thing.”

“Yeah exactly,” I sighed, thinking of my parents. “The only time my parents compliment my art, they use words like that. They just don’t get that I’ve worked really hard to get here. Gosh, they don’t even think of drawing and painting *as work* in the first place.”

At the mention of parents, Lianna’s face fell and she quickly looked away, down at the picture again. Oh crap, what had I said? I tried in vain to scan the angles of her face for clues as to what part of the stuff I’d said had upset her.

“Yeah. It sucks,” she said after a moment, but I got the feeling we weren’t talking about the same things anymore.

I knew when to change the subject, so I did, asking about her next drawing. I managed to cheer her back up over the course of the crit, finally getting a little smile out of her again at the end. Gosh, whatever I’d done had really hit a nerve.

As we were discussing my last drawing, a one minute mess of scribbles, the professor came over and smiled down at both of us. “You two seem to be getting along better this time around, that’s good. It seems like you two read through the material I sent you both.”

I blushed and looked away, because yeah we were getting along better, but it was because we’d drunkenly made out a few nights ago. I hadn’t even remembered she was going to send us



anything until she mentioned it right now. Oh gosh, I was a total mess, forgetting all sorts of things because damn Lianna took up most of my brain space right now.

“Um, yeah,” I heard Lianna cough from next to me, and I glanced over to find her doing the same thing I was, and oh dear I was yet again reminded of just how pretty she was when she blushed. It was something about all the black that made the red of her cheeks stand out that much more.

“Well, that’s good, because your assignment is to do a series of portraits. Your subject will be each other. Glade, you’ll be drawing Lianna, and Lianna, you’ll be drawing Glade. I want to see a large painting, a smaller painting and at least a dozen sketches. The style and other details are up to you,” she told us with a smile that hid more than a little laughter.

Oh crap... did that mean what I thought it meant?

“Do we get time in class to do the assignment?” Lianna asked quietly, her black eyes expressing a mixture of worry and excitement.

“No, this is to be done in your own time,” the professor replied.

My new assignment partner and I exchanged a look that held so many different overlapping emotions it was hard to parse what was going on. This meant we had to spend time alone, and alone meant we might potentially end up... exploring our subjects a little more intimately than the assignment required.

Unconsciously, I licked my lips and raised my hand, two stray fingers fluttering to a rest on my mouth. Glancing down at where my fingers were, Lianna snorted, choked on air, and looked away with a deep blush rising to turn her whole face red. Then I realised what I’d done, and what I’d been thinking of in that moment, and I felt my own cheeks light up just as bright as hers. Okay, so she did remember that part...

Our professor’s eyebrows rose by an inch or two as she said, “Have fun you two,” and left rather quickly.