



THE
SUM
OF THESE
THINGS



Emily
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CHAPTER 4

...

Claire smiles calmly as she grasps Mia's hand in hers. She takes a small sideways step away and uses the momentum to yank on Mia's arm so she bounces against Claire's side.

Mia laughs. "Bully."

Claire stares at the quiet street ahead as if nothing happened. Mia squeezes Claire's hand a little tighter and stays so close their shoulders are touching.

After they have walked in a cosy silence for some time, Mia grins. "Uh, I don't know Claire, don't get me wrong. This is all very pleasant, but doesn't this constitute a total PDA?"

Claire gives her a look. "Uh, Mia, I'm afraid you're wrong there." She speaks slowly, as if she's addressing a slightly dim-witted person. "Because do you see the P anywhere?" She gestures to the empty street around them. "See, Mia, without any P, there can't really be a D, can there now?"

"Right." Mia plays along and nods thoughtfully. "So really it's all A?"

Claire shrugs and halts on the dark footpath. She yanks at Mia's hand again so she stops alongside her. Because maybe Claire would like a little more A.

"So." Mia grins at her. She stands at arm's length and clutches Claire's hand. "All this A with no P or D is a whole kind of 'if a tree falls in the forest, can anyone hear it' type of thing?" She grins. "These are profound philosophical quandaries, Claire."

"Are they?" Claire gives her a withering look and pulls her closer. "Please tell geeky Mia to go away now. I'm not interested in geeky Mia right now."

"Wrong. You are totally interested in geeky Mia right now."

And she's completely right. Claire is interested in *any* Mia right now. Not that Claire is going to admit to that out loud. Instead she

drops Mia's hand, grabs a handful of hair on either side of her face, and steps in close. "I don't know, I think I'm going to hurt geeky Mia in a minute if she doesn't shut up."

Mia laughs and places her hands over Claire's. She leans in and grants her a quick, teasing kiss. "No you won't."

"Probably not," Claire agrees, mostly because she's too fixated on the whole wanting more of the kissing thing to keep up this parade of taunts. She lets go of Mia's hair, slides one of her hands around her neck, and pulls her against the wall of a brick building. Mia submits, moving with Claire until her face is only a few inches away. She's so close Claire can see the smatter of freckles on her nose, even in the half-darkness, and smell the honeyed scent of her hair.

Mia eases her arms around Claire's waist. "I'm really glad you came tonight."

"You might have mentioned that already." Claire grins at her shadowed face and runs her hands up and down the burnished lengths of Mia's upper arms.

"Well I'm saying it again." She leans in slowly and kisses her. "I'm really glad you came."

"Well, I'm not." Claire pouts and rests her head on the wall.

"Why not? You didn't have a good time?"

"I did. Sort of." Claire plays with the long silver pendant dangling from Mia's necklace. "It was fun, but it's also kind of annoying, wondering when I get to be alone with you—when I get to make out with you. And now I have to go home. Without you."

"Aw." Mia's eyes narrow with the tease.

Claire tugs lightly on the chain of the necklace. "Shut up."

"I know." Mia runs a finger lightly across her cheek. "It *is* annoying."

"So annoying."

"Well, if it makes you feel any better, in answer to your question, we get to make out now, FYI."

Claire gives her a sulky smile. "Good. Finally."

Mia smiles and kisses her again, slower this time. "Mmm." She hums lightly as she pulls back, takes a gentle hold of Claire's waist and leisurely slips her fingers under the hem of her top. Claire lets her eyes fall slightly closed and relishes the provocative glide of those fingers against the skin of her lower back. It feels incredible to have Mia be the one to instigate things between them again. Claire loves it when she's all forward and flirty. It's hot.

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Claire drops all her weight against the wall. Her bare shoulders scrape against the brick. She barely feels it though, so focused is she on the competing sensation as Mia skims those fingers around to rest them on the sensitive skin of her waist. She tips her head back as Mia leans in again and presses both her hips and her mouth to Claire at the same time. Claire feels an instant charge of desire and whips in a breath. She grabs hold of the belt loops of Mia's shorts and pulls her even nearer, fervently closing any distance between them as she responds to the slide of Mia's tongue against her own.

It is right when they're so deep in the kiss that there is no thinking, when there is only the concentrated feverish sensation of lips and breath, that the P part of PDA arrives. It's right when she's luxuriating in the delicious aftershock waves of those kisses, aftershocks that course through her whole body, that their covert little moment becomes that D they were just arguing about.

It first makes its presence known in the form of footsteps and voices. Initially they barely register, too distant and too unimportant when balanced against them finally having a moment together to act on their mutual craving to touch. Claire is too busy trying to shrink the gap between Mia and herself, so intoxicated with doing what she has wanted to do since she first saw Mia in the café today, that she only takes in the presence of the group of voices when they're close, when a leering, drunken male voice makes itself heard in the darkness.

"Ladies! Care for some company?"

Despite her instant irritation, Claire doesn't break the kiss. In fact, she doesn't even open her eyes. Instead she lifts one of her hands, middle finger raised, arm straight out in the direction of the voices. Meanwhile, she uses her other hand to clutch the back of Mia's neck and hold her in this kiss—a kiss she will not relinquish for this idiot or for anyone else right now. She has waited all day for this kiss.

"Guess not then."

"Leave them alone, idiot," a girl's voice says. "Come on."

Footsteps depart, and the voices drift away.

Mia, clearly curious about what made them leave, pulls back. When she sees what Claire is doing, she throws her head back and laughs delightedly. She grabs Claire's hand and holds it tightly in her own.

"Oh my feisty one." She kisses her again and pulls her away from the wall. "Come on. We better go before you hurt someone."

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BY EMILY O'BEIRNE

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