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Introduction

Beauty is a good thing. Beauty is fun, charming, alluring, mesmerizing and is just something to be proud of if you're naturally born with. Isn't? Aria King doesn't seem to think so. Aria *use* to think the beauty she was born with was something to boast about, but ever since Aria entered middle school, the bullies of Ratchet have gained up on Aria for different reasons. The main reason the bullies harass Aria is because of her beauty. Aria could understand if it was a few people here and there making life hard for her, but instead, she was being beat down by the majority of peers in class.

Out of everyone to betray her and her let her down, Aria never dreamed that her two childhood best friends would turn on her and destroy her along with everyone else. Ratchet's School Board Of Education and their faculty are aware of what the bullies are doing to Aria and claim they are doing everything in their power to make her feel safer at school. Well, if that is true and the adults are working so hard to resolve the on-going bullying issue, why does Aria entertain the idea of suicide so easily and find relief in cutting her wrists if everything is "safe" at school?

CHAPTER 1: YOUR LOVE IS GONE

I THINK... I THINK when it is all over, said and done, it all comes back in flashes you know? It is like a spiral of bitter memories. They all come rushing back—but he never does. I think after my boyfriend, Vulen Blanchard, stopped texting me, went silent and started ignoring me at school, part of me knew this was going to happen. It is not really anything he said or anything he did. It was... the feeling of betrayal that came along with what he did and lack of context he refused to supply for our break up. I often wonder sometimes when I am sitting alone by myself outside of the cafeteria at school if I should allow myself to feel that way about someone again or frankly, if I should.

I know our worlds once upon a time were one, fun, kind and freeing, but now they were polarized opposites, without joy or happiness to fill them. At least, that is what I have been telling myself since Vulen cut me out of his life and choose my best friend, Sage Valentine, to date. And I just keeping asking myself one question. Just one.

How can the devil be pulling me towards someone who was so perfect and so beautiful and made your heart melt every time he laughed or smiled at you?

Did Vulen think the same thing when he stood beside me? Was I his angel too? Maybe he thought that when he saw me for the first time in grade school and wanted to see where fate would take us? Or was it possible I was just a season to him all along? Someone he experienced for his pleasures before wanting to move on to cooler things and cooler people. Why did it seem that when bullying started and I fell apart and needed Vulen to help me the most, he took a step back and refused to love me through that season of *my* life? I will never know the answer to any of this, and it od pointless to even think about it. But can I just say, I love how he pretends like he did not do anything wrong and thinks what is currently happening between us is okay.

How did we go from being childhood best friends, courting in grade school, to middle school and one month shy of middle school graduation, we fall apart? How did my other best friend, who I also grew up with, take him so quickly without any regard to my feelings? How do they both live with themselves knowing how harshly I have been bullied over my beauty and abandon me in my darkest hours and have the audacity to let their mouths do what hands do in front of me at school? How can they cut me so easily and ignore how the other students treat me? Could it be they were in league with the bullies all along? If that is true, this would mean they were both jealous of me too and hated me for it.

I am starting wonder if the joke was on me all along and this pain I suffer almost constantly, this blood on my hands is just the result of my own war. Every day I wake up, I look at the photo of the three of us together when we were kids and my eyes soften every single time. But those days are gone, they are never coming back... *they* are never coming back. Waking up and going to school and trying to do enough to just get by is gradually becoming harder to do until one day during lunch period, I snapped in the cafeteria. Like usual, the bullies were harassing me, mocking me from their tables and saying hurtful things about me. I ignored them and tried to eat my food, but honestly? It was not going well.

Well, Vulen stood up from the table across from mine with Sage, my former best friend, and decided at that moment to announce the reason why he dumped me. In front of our peers and the kitchen staff. Apparently, Vulen was tired of being compared to “Miss Perfect” and seen inferior by his male friends and shockingly enough, his teachers and his parents. He admitted that when he first asked me out, he admitted I was the most beautiful girl he had met and that I was the ideal girlfriend for him, but the longer he was seen with me, the more he began to fade away in my shadow and he claimed the more popular I was becoming. Vulen insisted that faculty and his parents did not notice his hard work or acknowledge his accomplishments, they only pointed out his flaws and weaknesses and asked why he could not be more like me, his flawless and intelligent girlfriend.

The more he complained about me to everyone, the more I was convinced I was not any of the things people were saying about me. What I saw and personally thought about myself was *clearly* not what Vulen, our peers, the faculty and his parents saw. In fact, everyone looked at me

though a different lens and based on their perception of me is literally how they viewed me and my intentions. Did Vulen not see the truth about me? The truth behind my body image insecurities and oh yes, my ever so growing low self-esteem that paralyzes my confidence in my looks daily? People who please others and appear innocent are rarely what they appear to be, but Vulen never saw that. He only saw himself and what other people put in his head.

I let my hurt and anger get the better of me and before I knew it, I stood up from my chair and did my best block out the shocked stares of everyone and fore myself not to react to the murmuring about me in the background. I stormed up to him and smacked him as hard as I could across the face and he used that one sole action from me to say to everyone watching that I was a bad person and letting my horns show.

Naturally, Sage came up and stepped between us. She told me to stop making a scene and offered me some advice. Sage said if I hoped to obtain love again to go die and go upstairs where my Lord was waiting for me because He was the only person who would be able to love such an ugly girl like myself. I did not take that retort from Sage well at all. She played a part in this, I know she did and I am convinced Sage was sneaking around with Vulen, convincing him to settle for her over me. The bullies cheered and applauded Sage for her cutting remark and added to the fire, doing their best to make me feel guilty for what happened to Vulen.

I lunged for Sage, intent to make her suffer for what she had said about me, but some students bolted from chairs and the tables and ganged up on me. They threw me down and began kicking me, spitting on me and pulling at my hair. Sage personally took a carton off spoiled milk a food tray and dumped it over my head, steeping me in the sour liquid. Vulen stepped back and let everyone beat me up and seemed pleased that this was the outcome of his speech. Just then the kitchen staff came out of the kitchen to my aid and so did the math teacher. Mr. Hall burst through the doors and came into cafeteria, raising his voice at the students guilty for the harassment.

With the kitchen staff's help, Mr. Hall broke the fight up and ordered everyone to either finish eating or to leave the cafeteria and to leave me alone. He spoke so fiercely that even I trembled at the seriousness resounding in his voice. At least some faculty at Ratchet cared that I

was bullied, but not nearly enough of them in my honest opinion. When my last class ended, I did not take the bus home. How could I? A majority of the bullies who hated me rode that bus. Sage and Vulen traveled on that bus too. I called my mother to come pick me up instead. I waited for her to pick me up with Mr. Hall, who insisted he be with me while I waited for mother.

Mother pulled into the school parking lot 20 minutes later and the moment she saw me, she put the car in park and stepped out. The look on her face spoke so many volumes. My battered appearance, to the stench of sour milk told her exactly how my day went.

“Aria, what happened?” Mother came over to me and gently grabbed me by the shoulders. “Who did this? I want names. Tell me and I will do something.”

I stared dumbly ahead at nothing and gently jerked my shoulders out of her caring hands. “What is the point mother?” I whispered, still staring blankly at nothing. “Suspension and calling their parents will not fix the problem. These people simply hate me and want me die. Maybe I should? If that would make them happy and make the pain go away...”

I was talking nonsense and at the same time, I was crying for help.

“Shh. Darling. No, that is not acceptable. That is what they want you to do.” Mother took me protectively into her arms and gave Mr. Hall a death glare. “You need to do better.”

Mr. Hall sighed and rolled his eyes, instantly turned off at mother’s demand.

“Mrs. King, we have spoken to their parents, we have put those responsible in detention time and time again. There is only so much we can do. I feel for Aria, I do, but you have to look at this practically. The majority of the student body hates her for whatever their petty reasons and I cannot control what they think of your daughter.”

“You have three sons and one daughter!” Mother hugged me tighter, almost desperately. “If this was happening to them, you would speak another tune, but no. It is *your* own children who are also guilty of bullying Aria! Did you forget how they almost made Aria end her life last

year?! Or do you cringe at the facts knowing that your children were responsible or that incident Mr. Hall?!”

Mr. Hall raised his voice in objection and dared to defend his children, saying that they did not know that their pranking would cause me to mentally push me to the point of suicide.

“They learned their lesson and my wife and I have kept a close eye on how they treat other students, not just Aria!”

“Is that so?!” Mother suddenly let me go, reached past me to open the car door and gently, but also hurriedly pushed me into the passenger seat. She shut the door then whirled around and let Mr. Hall have it. “Then how come I have caught them coming onto *my* property and trying to take photos of Aria naked?”

“What?!” Mr. Hall exclaimed. “When did this happen and why am I just now hearing about it?!”

They continued to banter and rage until finally mother called a truce and decided it was better to show Mr. Hall the evidence tomorrow about his children exploiting my privacy. He agreed and actually apologized for losing his temper. Mother got in the driver’s seat and took me home, but I refused to comment on my day, tell her who was responsible let alone admit that I had started the fight this time. Also... I did not want to bring up Sage and Vulen. They were my precious ones once and despite that they are my enemies now my heart still aches over them, over what we once had. The thought of angering them over this bullying situation and facing the consequences later when the adults were not looking was too much for me to bear.

CHAPTER 2: NUMB

THE FOLLOWING DAY I did not go to school. I was not allowed. Father was furious and at some point during the day when I was lazily lounging around downstairs on the couch, I overheard my parents talking about moving me to another school in Ocrum City, I think was the name of the where my new school would be. I am not sure, I was tuning in and out periodically as time past, totally oblivious to what was being said around me. Eventually I decided to get up, go shower and get dressed. I told my parents I was going to the local diner downtown for dinner. They did not stop me and allowed this, knowing that I needed to clear my head and some time alone to myself.

I entered the cozy two story diner by myself and saw two of my actual friends already there sitting at a booth in the back near the square window.

“Hey Aria. How are you? Missed you at school today.” Lance asked, offering me a kind smile.

I sighed, not even sure if I wanted to get into how I was feeling. “Terrible. I am not okay, but that is nothing new. I have not been okay for two years, but you all know this.” I slide into the booth and raised my gaze slightly to get a better look at Lance and Tank. “Have you already ordered your food?”

“No. But we’re about to get the chef’s special!” Tank, a jolly Ogre with an endless pit for a stomach and a solid rock body that even makes me even blush in envy, gave me an optimistic thumbs up. “Get whatever you want girly. We got you. Don’t we Lance?”

Lance nodded, already approving of paying for me meal.

“Oh. I brought money. It is fine, I can pay.”

“No.” They stated firmly, giving me a serious look. “We are paying and that’s that.”

I held up my hands in gentle surrender and could not help but grin. “Okay, okay. You win. You can pay for my meal.”

After we ordered and were waiting for our food at the table, guess who comes through the door with two bullies I detest? Yep. That is right. Sage and Vulen. I saw Vulen staring at me with a mix of hatred and a touch of longing while Sage had her head turned in the other direction. Could it be, that he missed me? As petty as this was on my part, I wanted to capture that conflicted expression on his face so I took out my phone and took a picture of him just for a personal keepsake. After I took this picture, one of the bullies who saw me take the shot, turns to Sage and whispered what I just did in her ear. Well Sage comes over to the table, puts her hand next to my empty plate and says to me,

“You know. I thought you were cute because you knew when to admit defeat, until you took a picture of *my* boyfriend like a fan girl.”

I glanced up at her with narrowed eyes and arched an eyebrow. Umm... what? I do not know what just happened or why she felt the need to tell me that. Tank heard her say this and got a little upset at her comment. Tank decided to say,

“Well, the camera doesn’t capture your ugly, that’s for sure. You suck and I don’t see why everyone wants to suddenly treat you like you’re more pretty than Aria. Aria has so much more class than you Sage and no matter who you get under you, Aria will always be Vulen’s first kiss and his first everything else! Why so many people want to take pictures of your face is beyond me.”

Ooo. Ahhh. Okay. That was a huge trigger for Sage. She scoffed and turned daggers on Tank and is like,

“I don’t know who you think you’re talking to, but you best take that back.” She waved a hand and tossed her long, purple hair over a shoulder. “Pfft. Whatever. Last time I checked no

one even asks to take photos of you, much less model agencies contacting you for future opportunities. What's your name anyway? I suppose Loser is good enough though, right?"

Lance does not open his mouth and dare defend Tank because he is secretly in love with her and has had sexual intentions toward Sage for a long time—so *of course* he is not going to reprimand her. Tank was the closest to the end of the booth so he just stood up. Tank got in Sage's face and was like,

“What? You've been attending Ratchet since grade school and you still don't know my name?! Oh, that's just sad on your part Sage Valentine. At least I have respect from my friends, friends who know me for who I am. I can't stand spoiled brats like you. People either fear you, or want you. It's so stupid!”

Vulen quietly removed himself and went to go stand idly by the music box machine and pretended to be invested in finding a song to play while leaving Sage to fend for herself. Sage glared and narrowed her eyes at Tank, silently challenging him to say something else... he did and that sparked an instant verbal war. It was getting really loud. Sage was getting loud, Tank was getting loud then Sage was getting louder, Tank was getting louder and at this point the two bullies are recording their argument and customers and all staff of the diner all had the same expressions on their faces. The, “What is even happening right now?”

And out of the bathroom comes Ross Taylor, the tall moody Gargoyle that only liked to wear black formal suits and black shades. He also just happens to be Ratchet's principle. Yes. You heard right. My principle came out of the bathroom, just thrust open the door and caught Sage slandering me and Tank. I am not sure when she decided to switch gears and punish me for Tank's crime, but hey, that is just how things work in my favor lately. Principle Taylor took a moment to listen to the argument then he went off. When Principal Taylor rages, it can be scary and he proceeded to correct Tank and Sage on the spot, in front me, the customers and the staff of the diner.

I bit back the urge to burst out laughing and pound my fists on the table in excitement. This whole time I have been trying to think of way to get Sage busted for something as payback for what happened the other day at school and the answer was a diner, a skater, Sage herself and

Principal Taylor in one place. At random, the owner of the diner came out from the office and kindly asked that everyone put their differences away and shut it down. When an elderly bald Human man asks you to shut stuff down, what do you do? You shut it down. When it became evident Tank and Sage were not going to kill each other, the manger dared to say,

“I think you all should just group hug and call it good. If you can do this well, I will give you free meals.”

I glanced over and waited to see Tank and Sage hug when Principal Taylor glanced down and pointed at me, as if he suspected I started the riot. Actually no. I was literally just trying to order food, but he did not seem to think I was innocent. I had to stand up and join the group hug. Tank hugged Sage from the left and I... I sighed and hugged her from the right. But you know it kind of felt good to hug her. Somehow, somehow, the three of us were able to laugh softly at ourselves and feel awkward about being stared at, but we did our best to not let it get to us. We blocked out our audience and turned inward and gave each other a full group up.

That night, even though it would not last, Sage and I put aside our differences and agreed to be civil and kind to each other while we ate in the diner. Vulen eventually rejoined his girlfriend, but not before secretly giving me another look of desire with his eyes. It was evident he did have regrets about what he said in cafeteria and what he did to me, but I cannot be with him now. He is with Sage and despite everything she was doing to me, I refused to sneak around her back and see Vulen, even though deep down I too, yearned for his touch and to have him back as my equal.

After that night, I knew Sage would return to hating me and you know what? That is exactly what she did. When I returned to school, she was right back to being mean and Vulen? Vulen no longer glanced in my direction. He ignored my existence and like Sage and the bullies, he spoke ill of me, like it was the most normal thing for him to do. I wish everyone at this wretched school would realize that I was never miss perfect to start with. I wish the ones who are guilty of bullying me would realize that I never wanted to use my beauty as a means to make them feel less beautiful.

School ended and I rode the bus home, but made sure to sit up front near the driver so I could avoid the bullies as well as Sage and Vulen's bitter glaring. By the time I got home, I was so numb. I quietly walked into the house, past my parents who were sitting at the dining table and without saying a word to either, wearily climbed the steps that would take me to my bedroom. Once I was safely out of my parent's reach, I proceeded into the bathroom and opened a fresh razor pack. What came next, is something I have done before in the past. I popped the blade out of its socket and held it between my thumb and index finger, taking a moment to think about my life and all recent events up until now.

All of this pain I carry, all of the bitterness swelled up inside me is because Griffin made me beautiful and smart. What I say. What good is this Elven beauty and intellect if all it does is divide and drive those I love away? I moved the razor blade to my right wrist, no longer thinking no longer feeling.

“If I cannot live with this beauty, then I will destroy it, even if it means removing myself from the picture.”

That was the last thing I said before I drove the razor blade into my skin and made a deep, bloody, gash. As twisted as it sounds, creating imperfection on such pale, creamy flawless skin gave me a sense of satisfaction and if I am going to be completely honest... relief.