

Epilogue

One year later...

“We’re going to miss the train, Felicity.”

“It was your idea to get a taxi. We could’ve taken the tube.”

“Right, with *these* bags?”

“Just move. Come on!” I’m panting pathetically, my short legs making twice the work of his long strides. We attempt to force ourselves up the escalators, but the combination of oversized luggage and small children in front of us has us bottlenecked.

I sigh. We’re going to miss it. I can hear the train’s engines rumbling, people shouting. If I wasn’t so anxious, I’d scream at him.

“Stop freaking out,” he whispers into my ear softly, seizing the opportunity to wrap an arm around my waist and place his lips on my neck. I squirm as I always do and feel his lips curve into a smile. “We’re nearly there.”

“I don’t like being late. You should’ve woken me earlier.”

“But you looked so peaceful,” he argues, squeezing me into his firm torso. “And you needed your rest, didn’t you?” he teases. I stifle a snort.

Since our Highlands misadventure, the casual version of James has been full of surprises. For one, he loves dressing in dark clothes outside of work, with baggy joggers and big white trainers he somehow manages to keep clean in any weather. Then there’s the intimacy, the affection. Whenever we’re together he always has a hand on me, on my back, my butt, my arms and even in my hair sometimes.

It’s pretty cute, really. Okay, that’s a lie. I’m slightly obsessed. Not that he needs to know that, of course. It took some adapting to, but now, after a whole damn year (can you believe it?) I find myself seeking out his touch.

Once we reach the top of the escalators, James takes the luggage in one hand, and mine in the other, directing us towards the nearest train doors. It’s definitely not the correct carriage but the man on the platform shouting at everyone has us panicking.

We take a moment to catch our breath just as the train surges forward. Well, at least we made it onboard. James leans against a glass partition and checks his phone, frowning.

“Uh oh,” I say.

“Yup. Carriage J,” he says. “We’re currently in C.”

“Wonderful.”

He smirks. “Come on,” he says. I follow him through carriage after carriage, our bags crashing into the backs of arms and rogue elbows as we walk down the aisle. Turns out Michael had procured pretty decent hiking bags for us which has worked in our favour now we’re travelling again.

Oh, Michael.

I think of him often. As it were, you can’t actually abandon your stuff in a rural part of Scotland with limited supplies, a fifty-pound note and two hundred tampons. Fortunately, once we pushed forward with a case against him, he buckled, panicked, and decided to settle outside of court.

The result? Seventy-five thousand quid each and a fresh start for us both in Seaford. Fine, James has to commute three days each week into London for his shiny new job, but I have the luxury of working for myself now. Pretty great, huh? Apart from the crippling anxiety and long nights, that is, but I'm working on that. And that's exactly what this holiday is all about.

"Hey, who said you get the window seat?" James asks playfully. I've managed to collapse into our assigned seats, limbs akimbo, just in time to catch the last of the city flash by. Paris, here we come.

"Please tell me you're not one of *those* guys," I quip.

"Nah, you're alright, just this once," he says, giving me a peck on my cheek. I rummage through my bag and pull out my phone. A message from mum, *have the best time!! xx*, and a message from our contractor to say that the new windows will arrive early next week. Ah, yes, did I mention, we bought a house together? Seems insane to think of us as proper homeowners – how will we ever agree on a colour scheme? – but we've bought a dinky little bungalow not far from the beach that we're going to fix up. And by 'we', I mean the contractor.

"Ahem," James nudges his shoulder against mine. "Remember the rules?" I roll my eyes.

"I know, I know, no work once the holiday has officially commenced." I put my phone away and swivel to face him. He's so flipping handsome!

"Good girl," he purrs, and I elbow him in the side. He smirks and I feel it in my core. You'd think by now I'd be used to having him around, but the way I feel when his eyes meet mine, it's no less intense than it was before.

"Besides," James continues, "we're being adventurous. I, for one, want to climb a mountain."

"Right," I sigh. "Remind me, where are we doing that again?"

"The Alps."

"Huh, never heard of it." I smile, looking out the window as I let the excitement soak through me.

This is it! Our first *real* holiday together. Me and Gloatman, free to explore Europe like a pair of totally grownup normal people. In a totally normal grownup relationship. It should be illegal really. We have a vague route planned and some adorable B&B's booked, but most of it we're going to make up along the way. I suppose it's not too different to our original trip, although this time, notably, we're complicit, and we have phones and money.

"I nearly forgot," James says, digging something out of one of his pockets. "I brought a lucky charm." He holds up a fifty-pound note.

I narrow my eyes at him. "You do realise we can't spend that where we're going, right?"

He makes a face. "*Really?* The thought hadn't crossed my mind."

"I didn't peg you as the particularly sentimental type," I tease. James leans down to kiss me along my neck, paying me back in the best way he knows how. I press myself into the corner of my seat, but he doesn't let me off, using one of his hands to tickle me around my ribcage. I squeal, pushing him back. He relents, with a proud smile on his face.

"You're a piece of work," he says. "But so am I."

“That you are.”

James’ hand settles over my knee, squeezing. I bring mine down too, curling my fingers through his. “Felicity?”

“Mmm?”

“I sort of really love you,” he whispers, his gaze locking with mine. And there it is again, the butterflies in my stomach.

I use my spare hand to get my fingers in his hair, any excuse, pulling him towards me. Our lips press together. I can feel his smile against my own.

“I sort of really love you too, Gloatman.”