

Against their better judgment someone tries to squeeze through a tiny window.

Against their better judgment, Rowan pressed their shoulders against the frame of that tiny window. The stone scraped their arms, and the metal latch dug into their ribs, but they pushed harder anyway. Their inner voice screamed that this was a terrible idea, but the thought of being stuck in that dark cellar for another second made them careless. First came one arm, then a shoulder, then half of their head. The air outside smelled of damp grass and freedom, and it was intoxicating. “Almost,” Rowan muttered, twisting, contorting, willing their body to bend in ways it never had before. Of course, the inevitable happened. Their belt caught on the hinge. Their knees jammed against the sill. For a moment they were suspended, neither in nor out, like a worm halfway through an apple. “Brilliant plan, Rowan,” they groaned, their voice echoing off the stone walls behind them. Somewhere in the darkness of the cellar, the door’s hinges creaked. Footsteps. Too late to back out now.

A festive day at a warehouse.

The warehouse smelled faintly of cardboard, motor oil, and something sweet that nobody could identify. Strings of multicolored lights were draped haphazardly across the steel beams, and a half-inflated balloon floated lazily near the ceiling, bumping now and then against a hanging fan.

It was festive in the way only a warehouse could be festive: hard floors shining from a recent mop, pallets stacked like awkward towers, and

employees in high-vis vests trying to pretend that holiday cheer was part of their job description. Someone had dragged in a speaker, and an upbeat tune clashed horribly with the rhythmic beeping of forklifts in the background.

Jules, perched on a crate with a plastic cup of punch, raised an eyebrow at the scene. “Who decided this was a good idea?”

“Someone who thought twinkle lights make anything feel like Christmas,” said Sam, juggling a stack of inventory sheets and a half-eaten cookie.

A loud *bang* echoed from the other side of the warehouse — a box tower collapsing in a spectacularly dramatic way. Everyone jumped, then laughed. The chaos was contagious. Forklift drivers waved to the punchline, and someone set off a confetti cannon too close to the stockroom.

By noon, the warehouse wasn’t just a place of shipments and schedules. It was a battlefield of streamers, spilled punch, and oddly competitive gift exchanges, the kind of day where the smell of cardboard could almost be charming.

Someone pretends to be someone they're not.

He smiled at her across the crowded café, and for a moment, the world shrank to just the two of them. She had no idea he wasn’t who he said he was — that he’d spent the last three months pretending to be a travel writer when in reality he hadn’t left his hometown in years.

Still, the way she laughed at his jokes, the way her fingers brushed his when she reached for the sugar, made his chest ache with something he hadn’t expected: longing. Every fib felt heavier now, every lie a risk to the tiny spark that had ignited between them.

“I love that story about Paris,” she said, eyes wide with admiration. “You really make it feel like I’m there.”

He swallowed hard, a pang of guilt twisting with desire. “I... I’m glad you feel that way,” he said, forcing the words to sound casual.

When she leaned across the table and touched his hand, he felt it — the warmth, the certainty that he didn’t want to lose her, even if the truth might destroy everything. And for a fleeting second, he wondered if love was worth the risk, if honesty could ever come fast enough to keep them together.

Your protagonist and antagonist are stuck on a boat together.

Rain hammered the deck as Arin and Selvara glared at each other from opposite ends of the tiny boat. The storm tossed them like a toy in the hands of some angry god. Magic crackled in the air—Selvara’s fingers flickering with faint violet sparks, Arin’s sword humming with an unsteady light.

Neither spoke. Words would only give the other the satisfaction of knowing how trapped they both were. The river they had thought would be a shortcut now felt like a cage, winding between cliffs shrouded in mist.

“You know,” Selvara said finally, voice cutting through the wind, “if you drown, I’m coming with you.”

Arin smirked despite the cold biting through their cloak. “And if I survive, I’m taking everything you own for this fiasco.”

Lightning split the sky. For a heartbeat, they were just two humans clinging to a boat in the storm—enemies by choice, unwilling allies by circumstance. Then the waves hit again, and Arin realized something unsettling: if they didn't work together, they were both going to die. And that thought, more than Selvara's smirk or their bitter rivalry, was terrifying.